

Down with US imperialism

Stop the war against Iraq!

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Below we are posting the statement issued by the Workers League, the forerunner of the US Socialist Equality Party, on January 18, 1991, shortly after the United States and its allies began the bombing of Iraq. This article and others analyzing the Persian Gulf War can be found in Desert Slaughter: The Imperialist War against Iraq, a collection of statements by the Workers League, written between 1990 and 1991, and available from Mehring Books at <http://www.wsws.org/shop/bookshop.html>.

The preface to Desert Slaughter is available on the World Socialist Web Site at: <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/feb1998/dspref.shtml>. Also available is the Resolution of the Workers League Special National Congress "Workers Must Oppose the Gulf War," <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/feb1998/worker.shtml>, which was adopted unanimously by the party on 2 September 1990. Also available is the 8 March 1991 article "There is No Peace" which can be found at <http://www.wsws.org/news/1998/feb1998/peace.shtml>.

The bloody US onslaught against Iraq is an act of imperialist barbarism. The full arsenal of Pentagon weaponry—cruise missiles, Stealth fighters, B-52s and other bombers—has been unleashed against the population of an economically underdeveloped country.

January 16, 1991 is a day which will live in infamy. In the first hours of the sneak attack, American, British, French, Saudi and Kuwaiti planes dropped more than 20,000 tons of bombs on Iraqi targets—an explosive force greater than the atomic bombs which destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The carpet-bombing of Baghdad and other cities will undoubtedly be followed by an invasion of Iraq by US troops and tanks, in a military slaughter in which tens of thousands, is not hundreds of thousands, will be killed. Wall Street reacted euphorically to the onset of the imperialist bloodbath, with the New York Stock Exchange soaring a hundred points in the first hours of trading Thursday. This is the true meaning of the "kinder, gentler" American capitalism which Bush promised when he took office!

Workers, youth and students, this war is not your war! This is a war launched by the capitalist class to defend the profits of the giant oil companies and banks, to seize control of the Persian Gulf for US imperialism, to terrorize and murder your class brothers, the working people of Iraq and the other countries of the Middle East. Hundreds of thousands of workers—Arab, Jewish and American—may die because of the criminal war begun by American imperialism.

Your enemy is not the Iraqi people! It is big business and the Bush administration, not Iraq and Saddam Hussein, who have destroyed your jobs, living conditions and trade unions. The independent strength of the working class must be mobilized to demand: Hands off Iraq! Stop the bombing! Withdraw all US troops from the Persian Gulf!

The imperialist assault on Iraq has been accompanied by an

unprecedented barrage of media propaganda within the United States, backed by total military censorship in the war zone, presenting the American military forces as invincible. The media presentation of the war has been as carefully planned in advance as the targeting of cruise missiles and Stealth bombers. The correspondents, reporters and TV announcers are all well-paid and highly trained defenders of US imperialism whose jobs are just as important to the "war effort" as those of pilots and generals.

Workers, don't be swayed by the lies of the capitalist media! Beyond the undoubted fact that the US-led imperialist coalition is raining death and destruction on the Iraqi people, no one should believe anything in the accounts of the war provided by US daily newspapers and television networks. The purpose of these reports is to intimidate all political opposition to the gulf war and create the impression that it is futile to resist American imperialism.

This blatant media manipulation is not a sign of strength, but of desperate weakness. Whatever the outcome of the first days of battle, the course of world events will not be determined by the high-tech gadgetry of the US war machine, but by the struggle of class forces on an international scale and within the United States. The opposition of the Arab, American and all other sections of the international working class to the imperialist onslaught on Iraq will grow enormously. The economic and social crisis of American capitalism deepens by the hour. US imperialism has a rendezvous with disaster.

Both US imperialism and its allies in Europe and the Middle East are terrified of the massive political opposition to the gulf war among working people and youth. Only hours after the bombs began to fall, the Mitterrand government in France banned a planned mass demonstration against the war.

The war against Iraq is a turning point in history. It marks the beginning of a new imperialist redivision of the world. It means the opening of a new period of ever-escalating wars aimed at carving up the world among the major imperialist powers. Ultimately, unless stopped by the revolutionary struggle of the working class and the overthrow of capitalism on a world scale, these wars will culminate in a third imperialist world war, waged with nuclear weapons.

Already the contours of the next war can be glimpsed in the conflicts between the major imperialist powers over how to conduct the struggle against Iraq. The *Wall Street Journal*, in a front-page article Thursday, demanded a quick victory over Iraq, and warned that if Bush was unsuccessful, "it could prompt bystanders Germany and Japan, already economic titans, to seek to compete with the US in political terms as well."

Every reason which Bush gave for the war against Iraq, in his television speech Wednesday night, is a fraud. The real reasons are to seize control of the oil resources of the Persian Gulf; to strengthen the world position of

American capitalism against its foreign rivals, above all, Japan and Germany; to give the oppressed masses of the economically backward countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America an object lesson in the military power and ferocity of US imperialism; to intimidate and terrorize the working class in the United States itself.

From the beginning of the gulf crisis, Bush has proclaimed the US military intervention is aimed at establishing a “new world order.” He repeated this phrase—pioneered by Adolf Hitler—in his Wednesday night speech. There is nothing new about the order Bush seeks to impose: it is the reassertion of colonial domination by a handful of major imperialist powers over the vast majority of humanity.

Over the past 45 years, imperialism was compelled to dismantle the old colonial empires and permit a semblance of political independence in the oppressed countries. Now, emboldened by the capitulation and criminal collaboration of the Stalinist bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and China, American imperialism has begun a military onslaught which aims to reverse the course of the twentieth century and reimpose colonial slavery on billions of human beings.

The two great lies of the postwar period were that Stalinism represented socialism and that imperialism represented peace and democracy. The disintegration of the Stalinist regimes and the eruption of imperialist militarism on a scale unmatched since Hitler's time have exploded both these lies. Stalinism and imperialism now stand exposed before the world, as Bush and Gorbachev work hand in hand to slaughter the Iraqi masses and crush the peoples of the Baltic states.

The ferocity of the assault which is being unleashed against the Iraqi people was indicated in Bush's speech, when he repeated his claim that “this will not be another Vietnam,” and declared that US troops “will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back.”

In Vietnam, US imperialism used every weapon short of the nuclear bomb, in a decade-long campaign of mass murder and terror which left 2 million Vietnamese dead. The Vietnam War is remembered for napalm, Agent Orange, My Lai and “destroying the village in order to save it.”

But according to the war-crazed Bush, speaking on national television with a satisfied smirk on his face, the genocidal assault on the Vietnamese people was far too limited. This only means that in the no-holds-barred war which he has unleashed against Iraq, the goal of US imperialism is the complete subjugation of the Iraqi people.

Bush's actions were immediately applauded by the entire congressional leadership. As soon as the reports of US military success filled the airwaves, all the senators and congressmen who had claimed to oppose immediate military action against Iraq noisily proclaimed their loyalty to US imperialism and announced plans to pass new resolutions in support of Bush's actions, and possibly even a formal declaration of war. One erstwhile “antiwar” senator, John Glenn of Ohio, backed Bush's threats of maximum violence, declaring, “I glad to see us going in in real strength and not piecemealing things as we did in Vietnam.”

Bush's speech was a series of monstrous lies. The biggest and most obvious lie was the pretense that the war against Iraq was motivated by concern for the fate of “small and helpless” Kuwait. Bush himself presided over the invasion and continued occupation of “small and helpless” Panama, and his most important ally in the Persian Gulf is Soviet Stalinist leader Mikhail Gorbachev, now engaged in the brutal suppression of “small and helpless” Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Bush claimed that the United States was leading a 28-nation international coalition, mobilizing world opinion against Iraq. In reality, the US-led coalition is an unprecedented alliance of the world bourgeoisie, including the old colonial powers in the Middle East, Great Britain, France and Italy, and lesser imperialist powers like Australia. Joining them are the right-wing stooges of imperialism who rule in Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Pakistan. The jackal-like character of these regimes is shown by the example of Turkish President Turgut Ozal, who waited until after

the first reports on the US air strikes and then pushed through a declaration of war against Baghdad, in the hope of seizing Iraqi territory.

Bush claimed that all his efforts to resolve the crisis peacefully had failed. The truth is that US imperialism deliberately provoked the crisis, tacitly encouraging Iraq to press its demands in Kuwait, in order to provide a pretext to set into motion longstanding Pentagon plans to occupy the Persian Gulf. From August 2 on, the Bush administration's policy has been war, and it has deliberately torpedoed efforts to work out a diplomatic settlement, whether by the Arab bourgeois regimes or the rival imperialist powers in Western Europe.

Bush claimed, “Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq, but the liberation of Kuwait,” and he promised to bring US troops home as soon as possible. The truth is that US war aims have consistently escalated, from an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait to the dismantling of the Iraqi military forces, and now to open calls for the removal or murder of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. A US victory in the war with Iraq will mean the permanent occupation of the region by American forces and an effective partition of the country's territory.

The launching of war in the Middle East lays bare the counterrevolutionary role of all the bureaucracies which presently dominate the international workers movement. Never has the crisis of leadership in the working class been so starkly posed.

The gulf war would be impossible without the direct collaboration of the Stalinist bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and China, which supported Bush's dispatch of troops, ships and warplanes, assisted the blockade of Iraq, and joined in the final UN Security Council vote authorizing war. As US bombs rained down on Baghdad, Gorbachev issued a brief statement blaming the conflict on Iraq.

Social democracy is equally complicit in the mass murder of the Iraqi people. French President Mitterrand pushed a vote authorizing war through the French National Assembly only hours before the air strikes began, and other social democratic leaders, whether in office, like Hawke in Australia, or being held in reserve by the bourgeoisie, like Kinnock in Great Britain, gave their enthusiastic support to Bush.

Within the United States, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy has fervently supported every step in the US war buildup, from the initial deployment of US troops and the economic blockade to the actual launching of all-out war. Within hours of the first bombing raids, the AFL-CIO issued an official statement: “Whatever the differences over the best way to end Iraq's brutal occupation of Kuwait, these differences must now be put aside. The American labor movement stands in full support of our country and of the men and women in our armed forces and their courageous efforts to bring this conflict to an early and decisive conclusion.”

This statement should be branded into the consciousness of every American worker. Like the White House, the Pentagon maniacs and the Democratic and Republican politicians in Congress, the AFL-CIO bureaucrats have blood on their hands. They share political responsibility for one of the great crimes of the twentieth century.



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