Socialist Equality Party public meeting

Robert Kerrey and the bloody legacy of the Vietnam War

Thursday, September 13, 7 p.m. The Cooper Union School of Engineering Building, Room 605E 51 Astor Place (between Third and Fourth Aves.) New York City

29 August 2001

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Should a war criminal be allowed to remain the head of a major American university? That is what is involved in the case of the recently selected president of the New School University in New York City, Robert Kerrey. After concealing the truth for 32 years, Kerrey acknowledged earlier this year that he committed atrocities during the Vietnam War.

After revelations about his role became public, the former Democratic Senator and presidential aspirant admitted that he led a squadron of Navy Seals commandos in a 1969 attack on a Vietnamese village in which he and six soldiers under his command killed 21 women, children and elderly men. The raid was one of the hundreds of such massacres conducted under Operation Phoenix, the CIA-run program that involved the torture of hundreds of thousands and the assassination of 20,000 people.

Following these revelations, the New School's board of trustees gave Kerrey its "unqualified support." In response, the graduate student union, some faculty members and others at the university called for Kerrey's removal, a demand the Socialist Equality Party fully supports. In the ensuing summer months, however, Kerrey has received the open or tacit support of the media and official liberal circles in New York, which have all but dropped any mention of the controversy.

Kerrey's continued tenure as president of the New School—a university long identified with opposition to militarism and political persecution—is an affront to students, faculty members and working people throughout New York and the rest of the country. Would those who claim Kerrey's crimes are irrelevant because they took place 30 years ago say the same thing if a former Nazi killer or Chilean death squad leader was put in the same position?

Kerrey has defended his actions on the grounds that the US was engaged in a war for democracy. This is a lie.

The war in Vietnam was waged to defend the economic and geo-strategic interests of the corporate and political elite in America. After the Vietnamese people defeated the US-backed French colonialists, the US stepped in to maintain foreign domination of the small and underdeveloped country.

The war—which killed three million Vietnamese and laid waste to much of the country—exposed before the whole world the violence and brutality of American capitalism and provoked mass protests in the US and internationally. It is forever identified with such terms as napalm, My Lai, "search and destroy," Agent

Orange, body counts and "destroying a village to save it."

What has the Kerrey case revealed? The entire political establishment, with the cooperation of the media and the vast majority of academia, is trying to falsify history and rehabilitate one of the most brutal imperialist wars in history. They are relying on a general lack of knowledge about the war, particularly among the younger generation, to declare it an "honorable" struggle, and in that way create the conditions to manipulate public opinion in advance of future wars in the Middle East, Latin America and elsewhere.

It is critical to lay bare the truth about the Vietnam War, and establish the political significance of the efforts to defend Kerrey and sweep this bloody chapter in US and world history under the rug. A full and honest appraisal of the US role in Vietnam is an indispensable part of developing a political struggle against militarism, inequality and the capitalist system that breeds these evils. We urge students, faculty members and workers in New York to attend our public meeting to discuss these vital questions.

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