

The war in Afghanistan and the crisis of political rule in America

Part 4

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Below we are publishing the fourth and concluding part of a lecture given January 18, 2002 by Barry Grey, a member of the International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site. The lecture was delivered at an international school held in Sydney by the Socialist Equality Party of Australia. The first part was posted on March 8, the second part on March 9, and the third part on March 12.

The Bush administration is a concentrated expression of the mortal crisis—economic, social and political—of American capitalism. Its main features—political and ideological reaction, hostility toward democratic rights, chauvinism and militarism, criminality and parasitism—bespeak a ruling elite that is thrashing about in the face of a multitude of contradictions that it can neither comprehend nor resolve. It can only react by plunging mankind into the horrors of nuclear war and fascist barbarism.

The crisis of the American political system cannot, however, be understood as simply a national phenomenon. It is a concentrated expression of an international crisis. To a greater or lesser extent, every bourgeois government on the planet evinces the same retrograde tendencies. One of the most salient features of recent events is the alacrity with which capitalist governments on every continent have followed Washington's lead in laying siege to democratic principles and traditions. Over the past several months, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Australia—to name a few of the industrialized countries—have all passed laws or enacted measures undermining civil liberties and expanding the police powers of the state.

The speed and ease with which governments—whether social democratic or conservative—have dispensed with

long-standing democratic safeguards, and the lack of any significant opposition from nominally liberal or “left” representatives of the political establishment and intelligentsia, testify to the profound erosion of bourgeois democratic institutions on a world scale. Underlying the collapse of bourgeois democracy is another phenomenon of contemporary capitalism—the unprecedented growth of social inequality.

In all of these countries, the social divide between classes has widened dramatically and the intermediate layers that served as buffers between the two main classes have atrophied. Along with the polarization of society has come, inevitably, the breakdown of bourgeois democratic methods of rule. The traditional parties have withered as they lurched to the right and alienated themselves from the broad social layers that formerly constituted their popular base of support. More and more bourgeois governments around the world assume the form of Bonapartist regimes, resting ever more directly and openly on the police and military.

Nor is open criminality unique to the US government. One need only look at two of Bush's closest international allies—the Sharon regime in Israel and the Berlusconi government in Italy—to see the emergence of a more general trend.

Social inequality, the attack on democracy, the growth of inter-imperialist conflicts, the eruption of militarism—these features of contemporary capitalism all point to the buildup of a crisis of historic dimensions. In many respects world politics resemble the malignant conditions that preceded the eruption of World War I.

As the foremost Marxists of that era—above all Lenin,

Luxemburg and Trotsky—were able to recognize, the outbreak of imperialist war between the great powers signified not simply a human catastrophe, but also the maturation of the objective conditions for world socialist revolution.

As Trotsky so eloquently and presciently explained in 1915, the imperialist war signified the collision between world economy and the intolerably narrow confines of the nation-state system to which capitalism was wedded. Lenin, in his monumental work of 1916 on *Imperialism*, demonstrated theoretically that the imperialist war signified, in objective historical terms, the arrival of an epoch of wars and revolutions. On this basis he made the political, theoretical and organizational preparations for revolution in Russia, which he saw as a link in the chain of world socialist revolution. Both, in somewhat different ways, traced the collapse of the Second International and its betrayal of the working class to the objective conditions of imperialist capitalism and the crisis of the capitalist system on a world scale.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was the practical vindication of this grand and profound historical perspective. It was, notwithstanding the ultimately tragic fate of the Soviet Union, the historical antipode to capitalist barbarism, and the beacon for future generations.

Today, when the modern-day Mensheviks see nothing but triumphant reaction, as did their predecessors nearly 90 years ago, we see the emergence once again of the objective conditions for the rebirth of the socialist working class movement, and a new offensive by the international working class. Certainly the growth in the readership and influence of the *World Socialist Web Site* is an objective vindication of the correctness of this perspective. We are convinced that the WSWS will play the crucial role in assembling and politically educating the leadership of a new revolutionary international movement of the working class.

Concluded



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