

WSWS holds New York meeting on the US drive to war

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World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board Chairman David North accused the Bush administration of using the issue of “weapons of mass destruction” to launch a war against Iraq that has far-reaching implications globally as well as for social relations within the United States itself.

Speaking at a well-attended public meeting in New York City December 15, North noted the growing anxiety felt by millions as war seems increasingly inevitable. “The war is unfolding before our eyes like the proverbial slow-motion train wreck,” he said.

“The ranting of the US government and the mindless propaganda of the media are aimed not so much at convincing as at stupefying the public. None of the arguments advanced by the Bush administration can withstand critical scrutiny. The main pretext for the war—that Iraq poses an immense and imminent threat to the national security of the United States—is a gigantic and obvious fraud. The Bush administration insists that war is necessary to destroy Iraq’s ‘weapons of mass destruction.’ But it is unable to produce any evidence whatsoever that such weapons exist.

“No country in history has been subjected to such massive and intrusive surveillance as Iraq. It has been stripped of most of the prerogatives of national sovereignty. For more than a decade much of its territory has been subjected to repeated bombing by the United States and Britain. American satellites transmit daily to military and intelligence agencies thousands of computer-enhanced images of any square foot of Iraq that is deemed suspect from a security point of view. Now there are scores of ‘weapons inspectors’ roaming around the country, equipped with the most sensitive devices. Nothing has been found.”

North noted, however, that the Bush administration has declared the failure to discover Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction “to be proof that such weapons exist.”

“Its latest demand is that Iraqi scientists be removed from Iraq for questioning,” he said. “This unprecedented demand, which UN inspections director Hans Blix described as abduction, is intended by the United States to provoke a confrontation with Iraq. If Iraq refuses to hand over any individual demanded by the United States, it will be declared in ‘material breach’ of the Security Council resolution. And if Iraq accedes to this demand, as it has to every other, the United States has rigged the process to provide a pretext for a military assault. Iraqi scientists ‘who lie or refuse to talk,’ to use the words of the *Washington Post*, will be sent back to Iraq—presumably to be killed by a suspicious Saddam Hussein. On the other hand, those who tell the US what it wants to hear will be handsomely rewarded. In other words, the United States will extort information from helpless individuals by making them an offer they can’t refuse.”

North cited a cynical editorial in the December 8 edition of *Washington Post* which argued that the inspectors were not in Iraq to act as “detectives” searching for weapons. Such a task, the paper said, would be futile in “a hostile territory the size of California.”

This argument—that it is impossible to find weapons—has been developed as it has become obvious that Iraq does not have the kind of weapons programs that Washington has claimed for the past five years, said North. “Now, if this is really the case—that inspectors cannot be expected to find anything—why, then, did the United States make such an immense to-do about the withdrawal of the weapons inspectors in December of 1998?” he asked.

“At the time, the United States insisted that the Iraqi regime was attempting to obstruct the detection process employed by the weapons inspectors. The withdrawal of inspectors was followed by a massive four-day bombing campaign against Iraq. Since then, American jets have bombed sites in the so-called “no-fly” zones hundreds of times.

Moreover, for the last five years, the United States has insisted, ad nauseam, that inspectors must be at liberty to search the presidential palaces as likely hidden weapons storage and production sites. But now that all these sites and every other square inch of Iraq is open to unfettered inspection, it has become all too clear that nothing of importance is to be found. And so, the Bush administration and its accomplices in the media, without missing a beat, proclaim that inspectors cannot be expected ‘to locate easily hidden materials in a hostile territory the size of California’.

“Why, permit us to ask, is it impossible to effectively uncover and monitor WMD facilities in Iraq—‘the size of California’? The entire premise of major weapons treaties between the United States and the Soviet Union—which was nearly 50 times the size of Iraq—was that advanced technologies made possible sophisticated detection and monitoring of the adversary’s weapons production capabilities and operations. In the late 1980s, the media effusively hailed Ronald Reagan’s invocation of a Russian motto—‘trust but verify’—when he signed one of the last mutual disarmament programs with the USSR. The claim that the Soviets would be able to manufacture nuclear devices that would successfully evade the official detection processes was dismissed in the establishment media as a paranoid fantasy of the extreme right. Now such a fantasy is invoked as a justification for war.”

North further quoted the *Post* editorial, which warned that the cost of a war against Iraq “may well be very great,” but that Bush could not fail to follow through on his threats after putting “the full prestige of his government behind the assertion that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction.”

“In other words, the Bush administration cannot call off its drive for war because that would entail a politically devastating loss of face,” North said. “There must be a war because it is a political necessity.”

Why is the US on the verge of launching its fourth major war in little more than a decade—and its second in less than one year, North asked?

“Putting aside for a moment the fraudulent character of the ‘weapons of mass destruction’ campaign, this sort of banal media propaganda provides no serious basis for analyzing a sociopolitical phenomenon as profound as war,” he said. “If the history of the twentieth century proves anything, it is that the last place one should bother looking to investigate the causes of

war is in the official statements of the governments that initiated hostilities.

“In considering the causes of war, it is necessary to examine broader international geopolitical interests that motivate the foreign policy of the United States. It is incontestably true that securing unrestricted access to petroleum and natural gas is a paramount and critical strategic aim of the United States. The last three decades has witnessed an unrelenting buildup of American military forces in the Persian Gulf region.

“The collapse of the USSR placed in question the future of the untapped petroleum and natural gas reserves of the Caspian region. Given the finite supply of this critical natural resource, the United States views its domination of oil-producing regions as critical to both the functioning of its domestic economy and to its ability to dominate the capitalist system on a world scale. The strategists of US imperialism are convinced that domination of oil supplies will give the American ruling elite a massive competitive advantage over all present and future rivals.”

North pointed to the far-reaching implications of the US drive to use its overwhelming military power to establish a position of global hegemony. “Whatever the immediate consequences of a war against Iraq, it must set into motion a process of deepening antagonism between the United States and a vast array of present and future competitors,” he said. “Within the framework of the capitalist nation-state system, the logic of this process of inter-state and imperialist antagonisms leads, unless halted by the intervention of the international working class, to ever bloodier and potentially world-annihilating wars.

“There is a vast disparity between the all-encompassing global ambitions of the United States and the actual economic resources at its disposal. This is a contradiction to which one finds scant reference in the press. However, the increasing reliance of the United States upon its military power to achieve global hegemony occurs under conditions of—or, one might say, arises from—protracted and unstoppable economic decline.

“Examined historically, it is evident that the objective position of the United States in world economy is far weaker than it was 57 years ago, at the end of the Second World War. The United States possessed at that time, vis-à-vis potential capitalist rivals, overwhelming military superiority. But its military strength was less important than its dominant economic position in world capitalism. Approximately 75 percent of the capitalist world’s productive capacity was located within the borders of the US.

“The situation today, notwithstanding its military power, is vastly different; and this fear of being overtaken by rivals—in Europe, China and Japan—finds expression in the frantic and frenetic policies of the United States. Its activities resemble those of the most dangerous of all types—the old man in a hurry. The Bush administration seeks to counteract through the use of military power the consequences of economic decline.”

North stressed that the most decisive factor underlying the drive to war was the growing crisis of the domestic economy and the immense class tensions building up within American society.

“The bursting of the Wall Street bubble has given the lie to the self-glorifying claims that the 1990s witnessed a colossal resurgence in the productive potential of American capitalism,” he said. “It is now clear that the last decade witnessed an extraordinary squandering of financial assets: trillions of dollars were poured into speculative enterprises that were at best unproductive, but in most cases utterly wasteful. The attempt to create the mirage of value through speculative activities independent of the production process had a profound effect on the character of American capitalism and the social physiognomy of its ruling elite.

“Corporate activity assumed an increasingly criminal character. The daily activities of the ruling elite, concentrated ever more frantically on its self-enrichment, assumed the form of an increasingly brazen plundering of social assets. The staggering degree of self-enrichment finds its mirror reflection in the stagnation and deterioration of the social position of

broad masses of the working population. By the turn of the new century, the United States had become the most socially unequal of all advanced capitalist countries. One figure sums up the extreme social polarization that exists within the United States: the annual income of the country’s 13,000 richest families is greater than the combined annual income of the country’s 20 million poorest families.

“The vast increase and concentration of wealth in an extremely small percentage of the population has produced a society that can best be described as an oligarchy. The activities of the political establishment, wholly subservient to the oligarchy, are concentrated entirely on the defense of the wealth and privileges of the elite. The massive attack on democratic rights undertaken by the Bush administration is only superficially a response to the events of September 11, 2001. It is, more fundamentally, the outcome of the social polarization of the United States.”

The speaker pointed to the New York City transit workers’ contract dispute, with government threats of fining and jailing workers and editorials in the local media suggesting that the moderately reformist leader of the transit union should be imprisoned or even killed. Such an event, he said, “reveals the state of class war that is boiling beneath the surface of everyday life.”

North stressed the importance of basing the struggle against war on a program that seeks to mobilize the working class against the economic source of war—capitalism. An anti-war policy must address itself first and foremost to the social interests of the broad masses of working people, he said.

This, he said, was the key lesson of the period of the mass protest movement against the war in Vietnam. Those in the leadership of this movement remained aloof from the concerns of the working class, while workers themselves refused in ever-larger numbers to sacrifice for the war effort.

While the militant struggles of the workers were objectively opposed to the war drive, North stressed that this struggle must become consciously opposed to imperialism itself. “The problems of mankind cannot be solved on the basis of militant trade unionism,” he said.

North stressed the importance of the political developments to come in 2003, noting that the coming year will mark the 100th anniversary of the 1903 congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which established Bolshevism as a political tendency. This development, he said, was prepared politically by Lenin’s famous pamphlet *What is to be Done?*

The essential content of that work, he said, was not an organizational manual for the building of the revolutionary party of the working class, but rather a conception that “the revolutionary party was the medium for the introduction of socialist consciousness into the working class.”

This, he added, was the essential role played by the *World Socialist Web Site* since its founding five years ago.

“Our task is the rebuilding of the socialist consciousness of the working class, which suffered such terrible blows in the twentieth century from both capitalist reaction and Stalinism,” said the speaker, stressing that the most critical task of the coming year will be the organization of the enormous worldwide support for the *World Socialist Web Site* into a mass political movement under the leadership of the Socialist Equality Party.

Among those attending the meeting were workers, students and professionals who had read the web site for years but had never before come to a public event organized by the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party. Two workers drove from Maine to hear the lecture, while others came from New Jersey, the Hudson Valley and other areas outside the city. The majority learned of the lecture from a notice posted on the site or through an email notification sent to all WSWS subscribers.

“I’ve been reading the site since the Clinton impeachment,” said one of the workers who attended from Maine. “We’ve been downloading the material, printing it and distributing it at demonstrations and rallies in

different parts of the state.”

A student from New Jersey said he had been emailed by a friend in Thailand asking him to attend the meeting so he could tell him about it afterwards.

There was a very strong response to the lecture, which was followed by a lively period of discussion, with a large number of questions on topics ranging from the significance of the latest developments in the US military buildup against Iraq to the issue of racial politics and the problems of the development of political consciousness in the American working class.

A number of those present expressed interest in joining the SEP. A collection towards a fund for the development of the *World Socialist Web Site* raised over \$1,800 in cash and more than \$3,000 in pledges, while those attending purchased nearly \$200 in literature.



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