

New York Times discovers the opposition to war in Iraq

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In a January 20 editorial entitled “A Stirring in the Nation,” the *New York Times* issued a belated and hypocritical welcome to the mass movement that has emerged against the Bush administration’s drive to war against Iraq.

In this mealy-mouthed piece, the *Times* adopts the posture of a knowing and tolerant authority, dispensing its blessings on the January 18 demonstrations that mobilized hundreds of thousands in Washington, San Francisco and cities throughout the country. The newspaper declares the protests a legitimate part of a “nascent debate” that supposedly involves the Bush administration and the American people. It asserts that the legions of people who marched in sub-freezing temperatures in the US capital did so to raise “nuanced questions in the name of patriotism about the premises, cost and aftermath of the war the president is contemplating.”

This description grotesquely distorts the present state of political relations in the US, as well as the spirit animating those who are demonstrating against war. It also serves to cover up the role of the newspaper itself.

Anyone who paid the slightest attention to the protests in Washington, San Francisco and elsewhere knows full well that the predominant sentiment was not “nuanced” differences with the Bush administration, but rather passionate opposition to an unprovoked war that the demonstrators consider a criminal enterprise.

One of the most popular slogans in the rallies—“No War for Oil”—reflected the widespread and growing sense that behind the official talk of weapons of mass destruction and UN resolutions lies a drive to seize Iraq’s rich petroleum holdings, pointing to the imperialistic character of the coming war. But the *Times* editors discreetly omit any mention of oil in connection with either the war preparations of the Bush

administration or the mass opposition they have provoked.

The editorial goes on to praise Bush and his aides for having “welcomed the demonstrations as a healthy manifestation of American democracy at work.” This is a bit rich, even for the sycophants of the *Times* editorial board, whose specialty is attributing moral considerations and democratic principles to the predatory policies of the Bush administration.

Hundreds of thousands took to the streets to protest the policies of an administration that came to power by nullifying the popular vote and has used that power to prepare an illegal war, abrogate fundamental democratic rights and transfer vast amounts of wealth from the working people—the vast majority—to the financial elite. Far from a sign of “American democracy’s” health, the protests are an indication of the profound political and social polarization that has developed under the rule of a corrupt plutocracy.

The editorial manages to evade the most essential question: how to account for what is acknowledged as “the largest antiwar rally at the Capitol since the Vietnam era” under conditions of overwhelming support for war by the politicians of both major parties as well as the mass media, including the *Times* itself?

From the outset, the *Times*, the erstwhile mouthpiece of establishment liberalism, has accepted uncritically the pretexts for war advanced by the Bush administration. Its chief foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman has gone so far as to publish proposals for how best to provoke an invasion and apologies for the US seizure of Iraq’s oil wealth.

Until now the *Times* has done its best to conceal mass opposition to a new war in the Persian Gulf. When tens of thousands demonstrated in Washington and San Francisco last October, the newspaper failed to even

publish a news report on the protests.

Mass public opinion in the US is forming independently of and in opposition to the entire structure of official politics and the establishment media. This phenomenon is a reflection of the social chasm that exists between the broad mass of working people and the ruling elite.

The effective disenfranchisement of the vast majority of the American people by the two-party system and the failure of the mass media to provide even a pale reflection of existing popular sentiment are symptoms of a profound crisis that is leading inevitably to political upheavals. These struggles can find a way forward only through the building of an independent political movement of the working class based on a socialist program and fighting for social equality.

This is what the publishers of the *Times* fear, and what lies behind their hypocritical “embrace” of the anti-war protests.



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