The fight against war: an open letter to students from the World Socialist Web Site

The WSWS Editorial Board
4 March 2003

The following statement is being distributed at student antiwar protests planned for March 5 in the United States and internationally. The National Youth and Student Peace Coalition (NYSPC) has called the protests under the slogan "Books not Bombs" to protest the Bush administration's war drive against Iraq and its attacks on education and democratic rights.

NYSPC is a coalition of student groups at high schools and colleges across the US. According to the organizers, students at scores of campuses in the US plan to participate, including at New York University, University of Michigan, Northwestern University, University of Chicago, Stanford University, Berkeley and many others. NYSPC reports that students in Canada, Britain, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy and Spain and other countries also plan to join the action. Events will include teach-ins, marches, mock ballots on the war and other activities.

The WSWS/SEP statement is available in PDF format. We urge students to download our statement *and distribute it at their schools and campuses. The* World Socialist Web Site *will carry comprehensive reports on the March 5 actions.*

With the onset of war in Iraq only days away, many thousands of young people will participate in antiwar rallies and teach-ins at colleges and high schools across the United States and internationally on March 5.

The closer the onslaught approaches, the more naked the predatory character of the war. Bush spokesmen churn out lie after lie in an attempt to terrorize the people and shift public opinion. The first lie is the claim that the US has not yet decided on war. US officials and TV newsmen throw out phrases like "if it comes to war," knowing full well that the decision to invade Iraq was made long ago, and a vast attack force stands ready to unleash colossal fire-power on a nearly defenseless nation.

The second lie is the claim that the decision for war or peace is "up to Saddam Hussein." Washington responded to Iraq's acquiescence in the destruction of its Samoud II missiles by declaring that Iraqi disarmament was no longer enough to avert war. The White House revived its call for "regime change," a demand that has no support in any United Nations resolution on Iraq.

There is nothing Saddam Hussein can do to prevent the US from invading. Declamations about weapons of mass destruction, UN resolutions, "liberating" the Iraqi people are nothing but propaganda aimed at manipulating and deceiving public opinion.

The imperialist and colonialist character of the war is reflected in the sordid methods being employed by Washington to coerce its "allies" and the UN as a whole into sanctioning its attack on Iraq. The Bush administration uses a combination of threats, ultimatums and bribes to impose its will on the world.

Underscoring Washington's gangster methods, the British newspaper *Guardian* revealed that the US National Security Agency is bugging the phones and spying on UN delegations, so as to facilitate the "negotiating" process.

Lies and thuggery—such is the modus operandi of the Bush administration. This government, which came to power on the basis of a stolen election, is the political embodiment of the most predatory and criminal layers of the American ruling elite, precisely those elements that amassed colossal wealth by means of corporate fraud and swindling. Bush's gangster methods at home are now being employed on a global scale.

The coming attack on Iraq is only the first shot in a worldwide eruption of American militarism, which threatens all humanity with catastrophe.

The youth bear the full brunt of this crisis. An entire generation is to be sacrificed to the drive of American imperialism for world domination. First are the many who will be used as cannon fodder for this war and the innumerable wars being planned for the future. Second are the millions more who will be denied any opportunity for a decent education and a secure job or career.

It is correct and necessary for youth and students to protest and resist. They have always played a critical role in progressive and revolutionary social movements, and will do so again. But protest in and of itself will not suffice. The most crucial issue is political clarity. It is necessary to develop a program and strategy to transform the antiwar protests into a mass movement, based on the working class, against the capitalist system itself.

The American government does not speak for the American people, but rather for a financial oligarchy. The war drive and

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the assault on education, jobs and democratic rights are two sides of the same political process. They are the foreign and domestic agendas of the same ruling elite.

The domination of this oligarchy is the product of deep contradictions within the profit system itself. First and foremost is the massive growth of social inequality—the chasm that separates the vast majority of the population from those who monopolize the social wealth and control both political parties. It is the acute economic and social crisis of American capitalism that has generated the frenzy for war within the ruling elite. Those in power hope that somehow war will provide a way out in the face of problems and contradictions for which they have no solution.

What are the motivations for war? The American ruling elite aims to seize control of Iraq's vast oil supplies as a first step in its broader agenda of world hegemony. At the same time, it seeks to distract the American public from the social crisis at home while attacking democratic rights and laying the basis for authoritarian forms of rule.

The war will have enormous consequences for the American population. It is expected to cost upwards of $100 billion—nearly four times what the federal government spends on education. And this is only the first installment. As the government shifts more and more money towards the construction of a garrison state, there will be even more drastic inroads into the educational system and all previous social gains made by the working people.

The public education system is in shambles, and quality primary and secondary education is increasingly a preserve of the sons and daughters of the rich. The Bush administration has rejected giving any aid to financially insolvent state governments, which means more tuition increases and further cuts in education budgets.

Tuition for university students has increased more than 100 percent over the past decade, while financial aid for working class students has dried up. This is translating into enormous debt burdens for those youth who are able to attend college. The average full-time student graduating from a four-year program in 1999-2000 had a debt load of $16,000 from federal loans alone, in addition to private loans and credit card debt.

The regimentation and militarization of society fall hardest on the youth. The educational system, rather than encouraging intellectual development, demands political conformity. There has been a growing number of attacks on freedom of expression in schools, including suspensions of students for distributing antiwar literature.

Students who have come out to protest this week have a responsibility to take a hard look at contemporary society and draw the necessary conclusions. If anything is to be learned from the tragedies of the last century, it is that protesting injustice is not enough. A deep-going political strategy is required.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party propose the following principles as a basis for a movement against imperialism and war:

1. The genuinely mass base for the struggle against imperialism and war is the American and international working class.

2. The great potential strength of the working class can be realized only if it is mobilized independently of and in opposition to the parties of big business. The working class must build its own political party and fight for power.

In the United States, this means ending the political subordination of working people to the Democratic Party, which represents merely another faction of the same corporate oligarchy. Without the support of the Democratic Party, the Bush administration would not be able to carry out the war or its frontal attack on democratic rights and social programs within the United States. The Democratic Party bears full responsibility for the enormous crime that is about to be carried out.

3. The struggle against war can be waged systematically and effectively only to the extent that it is directed against the socioeconomic system that produces war—that is, against capitalism and for socialism.

4. The fight against war requires the international unity of the working class. The working class is an international class, whose interests span regional, ethnic, racial, linguistic or any other boundaries. It is not possible to conduct an international struggle against imperialism and war by subordinating the movement to this or that bourgeois government that has temporarily come into conflict with the United States, or to the United Nations, which itself is an instrument of the imperialist powers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party are organizing a conference based on these principles for March 29-30. The conference, entitled "Socialism and the Struggle Against War: the Strategy and Program of a New International Working Class Movement," will be held at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor. We encourage all students and youth who want to build a mass movement against imperialism and war to register for this conference.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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