

Greetings to the WSWS/SEP conference by Keith Jones of the Canadian SEP

"The working class in Canada must define itself as part of the international working class"

26 April 2003

Below we are publishing the greetings brought by Keith Jones to the conference held by the World Socialist Web Site and the SEP in Ann Arbor, Michigan March 29-30, 2003 entitled "Socialism and the Struggle Against Imperialism and War: the Strategy and Program of a New International Working Class Movement."

Jones is a member of the International Editorial Board of the WSWS and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Canada. He was among the international delegates who participated in the conference.

On April 1 the WSWS published a summary account of the conference ["World Socialist Web Site holds international conference on socialism and the struggle against war"] as well as the opening report given by David North, chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board and national secretary of the SEP in the US ["Into the maelstrom: the crisis of American imperialism and the war against Iraq"].

The texts of the six resolutions unanimously adopted by the conference were published April 2 through April 4 ["Resolutions condemn war in Iraq, call for international unity of working class", "Resolutions call for political independence of working class, oppose attacks on democratic rights", "Resolutions on war and the US social crisis, development of the World Socialist Web Site"]

We have also published in recent days the remarks of delegates who introduced the resolutions and the greetings brought by other leading international members of the WSWS Editorial Board and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

On behalf of the members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party of Canada I bring warmest revolutionary greetings to this conference. The unprovoked and illegal US war against Iraq marks a decisive turning point in world politics. We are witnessing a veritable explosion of US imperialism. In the final analysis, this explosion is born of the contradiction between the development of a globally integrated economy and the division of the world into rival nation states whose ruling cliques own and control the socially produced and operated means of production.

For most of the twentieth century, and particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, the United States acted as the anchor of world capitalism. It used its vast financial and military resources to try to create and sustain an international economic and geopolitical order that would regulate the conflicts between the

imperialist powers—conflicts that in the first half of the twentieth century had led to two world wars and placed the very existence of capitalism in doubt.

Yet today the United States is repudiating and breaking up this multinational framework and asserting its ambitions to reorder the world. The invasion of Iraq is being carried out in open violation of the very conventions and legal framework that the United States previously claimed to uphold. Moreover, the ambitions of US imperialism go far beyond the borders of Iraq. Publicly Bush and leading members of his administration have spoken about the conquest of Iraq as the first step in reorganizing the Middle East. Privately they muse about the stranglehold which dominance over the region's oil reserves will give them over their imperialist rivals in Europe and Japan.

The ambitions of the US ruling class were frankly outlined last fall in the Bush administration's National Security Policy, wherein it was declared that the US seeks permanent world hegemony. The aim of its foreign, military and geopolitical strategy is to prevent the emergence of any power or group of powers that could in any way threaten or cut across the basic interests of the United States. Not surprisingly, the adoption of this policy has been associated with changes in the nuclear doctrine of the United States that reduce the threshold under which the US military could deploy its nuclear arsenal.

In the run-up to this war, the United States not only issued ultimatums against Iraq, but against its traditional allies at the United Nations and in NATO. Any illusion that Bush's post-September 11 pronouncement that you are either "with us or against us" was mere rhetoric should now be dispelled. Indeed, Bush's gangster-style dictum is now the first principle of US foreign policy. And the implications of this go far beyond international geopolitics. In the business press grave concerns are already being voiced about the impact of US unilateralism on the World Trade Organization and the very framework of international commerce.

Clearly, we are witnessing a fundamental change in world politics. Yet, as the opening report demonstrated—and this is at the very root of our analysis—this change is historically rooted and conditioned. For limitations of time I'm not going to expand on that analysis. But I would like to point out one important parallel.

In destabilizing and de-legitimizing the multilateral institutions and geopolitical framework through with the US asserted and defended its interests in the postwar period, the US ruling class is extending to the world stage the attitude that it adopted towards the traditional institutions and framework of bourgeois politics in the previous decade. In the campaign to unseat the Clinton administration, an administration which, in terms of social policy, was arguably to the right of that of Ronald Reagan, the US elite and the capitalist press systematically destabilized and de-legitimized the institutions that have historically upheld its rule. This found its culmination in the Supreme Court-sanctioned theft of the 2000 election.

Marxists have frequently noted that an essential factor in the development of a revolutionary situation is that the ruling class can no longer rule in the old way. Today, we confront a situation where the US ruling class—the most powerful bourgeoisie—finds itself intolerably constrained, both at home and abroad, by the very political order through which it sustained its rule in previous decades.

I would like to discuss briefly the attitude of the Canadian government to the war. Much has been made of the rift that the US war drive has caused among the governments of Europe. Certainly this is a significant development. But it is no less significant that the United States failed in its attempts to persuade, bribe or bully its two NAFTA allies, Mexico and Canada, its closest economic partners, to formally support the invasion of Iraq.

Canada's Liberal government balked at joining the US's "coalition of the willing" for two reasons: First and foremost, because of the massive antiwar sentiment, the enormous unpopularity of the war. Recent weeks have seen some of the largest demonstrations in the history of Canada, including probably the largest demonstration ever, when 250,000 people took to the streets of Montreal on February 15.

A second reason is that the Liberal government fears the incendiary impact of the US's policy of regime change, preemptive wars, etc., on world politics, including on the Canadian elite's traditional attempts to try to offset US economic and political power through multilateral institutions.

To say that the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien is opposing this war would be a gross overstatement. Canadian Armed Forces personnel are serving in the Gulf region, including on three Canadian warships that are escorting United States and British aircraft carriers and battleships in the Persian Gulf. And there are Canadian officers embedded, as part of various exchange programs, in US, British and Australian units that are invading Iraq.

Chrétien told Parliament that the war is unjustified, but he has also said there is no point in discussing its legality, thus making a mockery of the Canadian government's traditional claim to support the development of a system of international law. Chrétien says he opposes regime change, but his government supported an opposition motion—a motion advanced by the right wing Canadian Alliance, a fervent supporter of the war—calling for Saddam Hussein and the leaders of Iraq to be placed before an international war crimes tribunal. The Canadian government's non-participation in the war is tactical and half-hearted.

Yet it has riled Washington. It is no exaggeration to say that the Bush administration is engaged in a campaign to destabilize the Chrétien government. This reached its height last week when the US ambassador, Paul Cellucci, speaking before an audience of the most senior figures of Canadian big business, denounced the Canadian government's stand on the war, saying Americans were "disappointed" and "upset."

After declaring that Canada's stance would mean strains in Canada-US relations, Cellucci advanced the idea that "security trumps the economy," essentially threatening to disrupt border traffic in order to put pressure on the Canadian government. This was immediately seized on by sections of the Canadian ruling class to demand a change in course—to demand that Canada integrate even more closely into Fortress America, so as to ensure that the Canadian bourgeoisie gets its share of the spoils from this and future US wars.

Chrétien speaks for sections of capital who fear the loss of room for the Canadian bourgeoisie to assert its own predatory interests if the old multilateral order collapses and Canada is forced even more tightly into the US orbit. A second no less important consideration is the incendiary impact that hitching Canada to US militarism risks having on class relations at home.

The two sides of this debate are but rival wings of the Canadian bourgeoisie. Whilst Chrétien has been savagely attacked by a growing constituency within the Canadian ruling class, his government is, in fact, the most right-wing in terms of socioeconomic policy since the Great Depression.

Workers in Canada—French, English and immigrant—must reject the attempts of the social democrats and trade union bureaucrats to divide them from their class brothers and sisters in the US on the grounds that the reactionary Canadian nation-state represents a buffer or even a progressive and pacific alternative to US imperialism. The working class in Canada must act and define itself as part of the international working class.

Key to this political reorientation is the work of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Through its analysis, the WSWS embodies the fight for the international unity of the working class, an international unity that must be animated by an understanding of the great lessons of the struggles of the working class in all corners of the globe in the last century.



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