

Report from the World Socialist Web Site /Socialist Equality Party conference: "Socialism and the Struggle Against Imperialism and War"

Contradictions and lies in the US case for war against Iraq

22 April 2003

Below we are publishing the remarks of Patrick Martin to the conference held by the WSWWS 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."

Martin, a member of the WSWWS Editorial Board, introduced the first of six resolutions discussed and adopted by the conference: "Stop the war with Iraq! US, Britain out of the Middle East!"

On April 1 the WSWWS 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 WSWWS 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"]

In the coming days we will publish the remarks made by the presenters of the remaining resolutions, as well as greetings brought by international delegates to the conference.

The Bush administration, in an attempt to rebut the claims of the international antiwar movement that this is a war for oil, has repeatedly declared that its goal, in relation to the oilfields of Iraq, is to make them the property of the Iraqi people and to insure that Iraq's oil serves the interests of Iraq's people. One could ask, why that isn't done in the United States itself, whose large oil resources are not used to benefit the American people?

Saudi Arabia, a principal ally of the United States in this war, has the largest oil reserves in the world. Saudi Arabia's oil resources are not owned by the Saudi people and are not used

for the benefit of the Saudi people. Saudi Arabia's oilfields are owned by the monarch, and the oil income of Saudi Arabia is the personal property of 6,000 descendants of King Ibn Saud.

Attempts to get the Saudi monarchy even to establish a budget for the country, so that the funds of the government can be distinguished from the private property of the monarch and his descendants, have been unsuccessful. All of the oil revenue paid by Aramco, the American consortium that actually operates the oilfields, does not go to Saudi Arabia as a state, let alone to the 20 million inhabitants. It goes to the personal bank accounts of the Saudi monarchy, which is still passing through the second generation, the sons of King Saud.

We've all heard the atrocity stories about Saddam Hussein, and no one is here to defend his regime or its practices. But let's look at the track record of the Saudi monarchy. King Ibn Saud came to power in a civil war on the Arabian peninsula in the early 1920s. According to a recent critical history of King Saud and his family, "By the time they had subdued the country, they had carried out 40,000 public executions and 350,000 amputations, respectively 1 and 7 percent of the estimated population of four million."

Seven percent of the total population, and a much higher percentage of adult men, suffering amputation under the regime of King Saud. The same conditions apply in all of the other Gulf sheikdoms. These are not nation-states in any sort of modern sense. These are the property of their tribal-based rulers. The oil resources of those countries go to benefit the rulers, not the people. Yet there is no attempt by the Bush administration—at least not yet—to suggest that all these regimes should be overthrown, because they are allowing their land to be used as air bases and naval bases for the attack on Iraq.

Then there is the final claim: that the Bush administration intends to rebuild Iraq for the benefit of the people. The scheme is to have the United Nations Security Council agree, either through a resolution or some other means, that the Oil for Food program, which was in place before the war, will now be used

essentially to pay America for conquering Iraq.

American companies are going to come in and rebuild certain portions of Iraq—the oilfields, the oil terminals, and so on, and the cost of that rebuilding will be debited from the oil revenues under what was formerly the Oil for Food program. They are also going to let out contracts for things like the rebuilding of schools and hospitals.

They promise the provision of health care to the entire population of Iraq, as well as the rebuilding of thousands of schools. Why haven't they been able to carry out such a program in the United States, or in any other country in the world?

The international dimension of the war is extremely important to understand, as is the impact of the international movement of protest. It is now clear that the decision of Turkey to veto a northern front is of enormous significance. The US has not been able to place a heavy armored division to come in from the north, and this is what has created a much more difficult situation in the south.

Secondly, one cannot underestimate the impact on the Iraqi people and the Iraqi soldiers of the knowledge that broad masses of people around the world support them, and that the American intervention is opposed by the vast majority of the people of the world. This is something very different for those of us who are of the generation that came of age during the Vietnam War. It took many years before Vietnam became a synonym for crimes being committed by the United States. This is already the case in relation to the war in Iraq.

One has to take very seriously the warning in the opening report that it would be a tragic mistake to underestimate the tenacity, ruthlessness and brutality with which the American ruling elite will pursue its interests. There has already been a series of commentaries in the right-wing media in the United States—the Fox TV, *New York Post*, *Wall Street Journal* axis—suggesting that the main problem in the American war effort is that it is far too restrained, far too concerned with avoiding civilian casualties, and that the time has come to take the gloves off. This is the MacArthur, LeMay, Goldwater “bomb them back to the Stone Age faction” of the US ruling elite. These are people who were held on the outside, who were not allowed to direct American foreign policy for 30 years, but who are now in control in the Pentagon and the White House.

There was an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* Friday along this line, saying that the allied war effort so far has been defined by US scruples over inflicting civilian casualties, scruples that should now be discarded. The editorial declares: “Our point here is that the first and largest American political goal is victory. Before the US can worry about rebuilding Iraq, it has to win militarily, and decisively so.”

It continues: “Iraqis, and the entire Middle East, will be impressed now only if they see that the US will wage this war with everything that is needed to prevail. If civilians die because they were placed in front of military targets, the moral

responsibility for their harm will rest with those who put them there.”

I would like you to go to any American city and see if you can separate so-called military targets from the surrounding civilian population. What would be a military target in Washington? How far is the Pentagon from civilian homes? It's across the freeway.

Those who are claiming that it is the deliberate policy of the Iraqi government to associate civilians with military targets are simply providing a rationale and an apology in advance for mass killings—and that is what is coming in this war if the American military remains stalemated.

At the same, there are definite historical limits. America is supreme in its military technology. But to conquer the world, it would have to supply that military technology to 5 or 10 million soldiers, not the few hundred thousand it presently has available. And to do that is beyond the capacity of the US economy.

One contrast illustrates the gulf that is opening up in American society. You are probably aware of Richard Perle. He is one of the leading war hawks, chairman of the Defense Policy Board. He resigned his chairmanship on Friday after a series of press reports that he stood to profit by as much as \$800,000 personally from his lobbying of the Pentagon in behalf of Global Crossing, a large telecommunications company that was involved in the series of corporate scandals of the past two years.

On the other side of the social divide in America is Private First Class Jessica Flynn. She is one of those now missing around Nasiriya. A long description has been published of how she was recruited into the military.

She lives in a small town in West Virginia called Palestine where the only factory has closed down. It's an ex-mining area. She signed up to go into the military at the age of 17. According to this profile, she had never in her life, before she joined the military, traveled the 90 miles from Palestine to Charleston, West Virginia, the state capital. She lived 30 miles from the nearest mall.

That is whom the military is targeting to join. They prey on the most vulnerable in American society, to turn them into cannon fodder in an imperialist war. Ultimately such conditions will produce a social explosion within this country.



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