

SEP public meeting in Sydney

The fight against imperialist war: the socialist perspective

Nick Beams
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On April 13, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Australia convened a public meeting entitled “The fight against imperialist war: the socialist perspective” at the University of Technology in Sydney to discuss the political lessons of the US-led invasion of Iraq. SEP national secretary Nick Beams, a member of the World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board, delivered the main report to the well-attended meeting that was followed by an extensive question-and-answer session. His address is published below.

It is not even four weeks since the US and its allies, Britain and Australia, launched their war on Iraq. But in that short period of time world history has irrevocably changed course.

The fundamental issue which confronts the mass of ordinary humanity, including the people of the United States, struggling to improve their lives, to secure their futures and exercise their basic democratic and political rights, is this: What is to be done about the volcanic eruption of American imperialism? A new historical era has begun and its outcome will determine the fate of humanity for decades to come.

This is not some kind of “left-wing” assertion. It is obvious to any politically literate person. As a comment published in Britain’s *Observer* newspaper on April 6 characterised it, success in Iraq means that those who have control of US foreign policy are being confirmed in power. “Sooner rather than later, they will carry forward their program of pre-emptive attack on ‘potentially hostile’ regimes and strike at another country. If this happens, we enter a century of violence and unpredictable counter-violence” [Neal Ascherson, “A fearful war to remember”, the *Observer*].

For the writer of this comment, the problem is the so-called neo-conservatives, or “neocons”, that run the Bush administration, in particular through their control of the Pentagon. But the eruption of imperialist war cannot be ascribed to a conspiracy by a group of individuals. This is the “bad Hitler” method of examining history. We should recall that Hitler was placed in power by the dominant sections of the German ruling classes because his program met the deep-seated historical problems they confronted. In the same way, the policies of the Bush regime are the outcome of fundamental contradictions within American capitalism.

The onslaught against Iraq is not simply the result of decisions taken by a neo-conservative cabal. Rather, their elevation is a graphic expression of a growing cancer in the American body politic. The Bush administration, with enormous power concentrated in the hands of the executive, functions as a kind of imperium—the Congress having handed over war-making powers and the Democrats abandoning any pretence that they function as an opposition.

Having been funded by the most powerful corporations, the regime operates in the closest connection with them, especially those associated

with the outright fraud, looting and financial swindles of the past decade. There is nothing accidental about the close relationship between Bush and Enron, or between Cheney and Haliburton as it moves to make quick profits from the “reconstruction” of Iraq.

This regime, which claims it wishes to bring democracy to Iraq and the Middle East, is associated with deepening attacks on democratic rights at home through the Patriot Act and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. The violent attack on protestors in Oakland is a warning of what is to come.

Bush’s central economic and social program is the transfer of wealth from the broad mass of the population to the ruling elites. Today, the annual income of the richest 14,000 families in the US is greater than the annual income of the poorest 20 million families. Such historically unprecedented polarisation of wealth is simply not compatible with democratic forms of rule.

The task of ensuring “public support” is given to the mass media, which serves to pollute the social atmosphere and delude the mass of the population. As we explained in the resolution of the WSWWS international conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan on March 29-30: “Not since Joseph Goebbels served as Hitler’s propaganda minister has there been such an orchestration of the media. It would take a Goebbels to dub this war of colonial aggression ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom,’ and TV networks and newspapers worthy of the Nazi-dominated German press to go along with it.”

It has been said many times, but bears repeating, that the value of every crisis is that it reveals the real trends of development. After this war, there can be no return to the status quo ante-bellum. In the past weeks and months, culminating in the conquest of Iraq, all the norms and conventions governing international relations have been swept aside. They cannot be put back together. Not since the march of Hitler’s armies in Europe have we seen imperialist violence on such a scale.

The supporters of the war, and those who seek to justify it retrospectively, point to the cheering crowds that greeted US forces in some sections of Baghdad. But now it turns out that the incident in which Saddam Hussein’s statue was torn down—hailed as the equivalent of the fall of the Bastille, VE Day or the bringing down of the Berlin Wall—was a completely manufactured event.

In any case, it should be recalled that cheering crowds greeted the march of German forces into Austria in the *Anschluss* of 1938. Even in World War II, the Nazi forces were welcomed in parts of the Ukraine by people who, at that point, saw them as a means of ending the oppression suffered under Stalin. But that did not alter the character of the German military operations.

Indeed, the US and its allies, including Australia, are now guilty of the same crime for which the Nazi leaders were charged and convicted at

Nuremberg—the planning and execution of a war of aggression. They are guilty of perpetrating the most horrific war crimes—the slaughter of thousands of civilians and the massacre of tens of thousands of soldiers. This is “liberation” by mass murder.

Those who entertained the hope that the removal of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship would improve their situation are very rapidly discovering, like so many before them, that they cannot realise their goals of freedom from oppression through the actions of one or other imperialist power. This is because these powers have their own agenda, which does not include the aspirations of the masses.

One thing has been clearly established: the purpose of this war was not to search for and destroy “weapons of mass destruction”. Even before the war was launched, this claim had been exposed, along with the forged documents and falsifications on which it was based.

In dealing with this issue, let me simply refer to a recent article by a well-known rightwing American commentator, Robert Novak.

“The real reason for attacking the Iraqi regime,” he wrote, “has always been disconnected from its public rationale. On the day after the US launched the military strike that quickly liberated Afghanistan from the Taliban, my column identified Iraq as the second target in President Bush’s war against terrorism. I did not write one word about weapons of mass destruction because not one such word was mentioned to me in many interviews with Bush policymakers” [“Where are the WMD?”, *townhall.com*, April 7, 2003].

Novak, who has many connections with the Bush regime, makes clear that all the talk of “weapons of mass destruction” was for public consumption and, if possible, to win formal UN support for the war.

In the weeks leading up the invasion, as the “weapons of mass destruction” propaganda began to wear thin, the Bush administration tried a new tack: the war was being undertaken to liberate the Iraqi people and bring democracy.

These claims are also fast being exposed. In the first place, democracy cannot be imposed by military force from above. This is because genuine democracy can only arise through a struggle from below, by the mass of ordinary people. That is the last thing the US and its allies want to see—that is why they supported the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein over such a long period.

Secondly, genuine democracy is in contradiction to US perspectives for the region. Let us take the issue of Israel. According to US Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman, the first act he wants undertaken by a new Iraqi government is recognition of the state of Israel. Moreover, genuine democracy would see control of the oil resources in the hands of the Iraqi people but US policy is to privatise ownership of oil, weaken the OPEC cartel and breakdown state control of oil resources across the Middle East.

As Australian Strategic Policy Institute Hugh White explained in a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, what the US wants is a new strongman for a US-friendly Iraq, perhaps modelled on the regime of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. In other words, the much-vaunted democracy will turn out to be a repressive regime differing only from that of Saddam Hussein by the fact that it supports, rather than opposes, the US agenda.

Washington’s aims are not simply confined to the immediate securing of the oil resources of Iraq—important as that objective is. The US has a wider perspective—nothing less than the re-organisation of the Middle East, and indeed the entire world, under its hegemony. Anyone who was under the illusion that it was just a matter of regime change in Iraq has been given a rude awakening in recent days with the latest warnings to Syria and Iran.

As the US launched its war, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld warned that any movement of military supplies into Iraq across the Syrian border would be considered a “hostile act” and declared that any militias entering Iraq from Iran would be attacked. In a speech to the American

Israel Public Affairs Committee, US Secretary of State Colin Powell reinforced the point, declaring that Syria “faces a critical choice” and that Iran had to halt its efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction, as well as ending “support for terrorists including groups violently opposed to Israel.”

These remarks were not made off the cuff, but reflect the policy of the Bush regime. According to John Bolton, the Under Secretary of State for arms control and international security, the US will place an “extremely high priority” on halting a secret nuclear weapons program in Iran once the war on Iraq is over.

“In the aftermath of Iraq,” he said, “dealing with the Iranian nuclear weapons program will be of equal importance as dealing with the North Korean nuclear weapons program.” Bolton said Syria, Iran and Libya were seeking to obtain weapons of mass destruction. While he hoped that the attack on Iraq would dissuade them he added: “I don’t think any of us are naïve enough to think the example of Iraq alone will be sufficient.”

The policy of “regime change” throughout the Middle East has been years in the making. In July 1996 prominent members of the Bush regime, including Under Secretary of Defence Douglas Feith and David Wurmser, now senior assistant to John Bolton, and key foreign policy adviser Richard Perle, prepared a policy paper for the incoming Netanyahu government in Israel in which they called for a “clean break” from the policies of the past. The “land for peace” perspective had to go.

“Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing and even rolling back Syria,” the report said. “This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq—an important Israeli objective in its own right—as a means of foiling Syria’s regional ambitions.” Or as Perle, put it recently, after Iraq, the attitude of the US to every other regime in the region is: “you’re next”.

Outside of the Middle East, the most immediate target is North Korea. According to special advisor to UN secretary general Kofi Annan, Maurice Strong, who visited that country recently, there is now a real prospect of war. “I think war is unnecessary, it’s unthinkable and unfortunately it’s entirely possible,” he said.

The new policy is visible to anyone not totally blinded by mass media images and propaganda. According to the veteran American historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr, the Cold War doctrine of containment and deterrence has been replaced by the Bush doctrine of preventive war. “The president has adopted a policy of ‘anticipatory self-defence’ that is alarmingly similar to the policy that imperial Japan employed at Pearl Harbor” [*St. Petersburg Times*, April 6, 2003].

We are confronted with the question: Where is US imperialism heading?

Former CIA director James Woolsey, until recently touted as the information minister in the new regime to be established in Iraq, has made clear that the war on Iraq is just the beginning. After the Cold War, or World War III, as he calls it, the US is now engaged in World War IV, which could last for decades. “As we move toward a new Middle East, over the years and, I think over the decades to come ... we will make a lot of people very nervous,” he said in a speech earlier this month.

These remarks, made to a meeting of college students in Los Angeles organised by an organisation called “Americans for Victory Over Terrorism”—a group headed by Reagan’s education secretary William Bennett—were drawn from a longer speech delivered by Woolsey on November 16, 2002. In that speech Woolsey declared that the US was engaged in a war against the Islamist Shia that rule in Iran, the “fascist” Ba’ath parties of Iraq and Syria and the Islamist Sunni. He concluded as follows:

“I would say this, both to the terrorists and to the pathological predators such as Saddam Hussein and to the autocrats as well, the barbarics, the Saudi royal family. They have to realise that now for the fourth time in 100 years, we’ve been awakened and this country is on the march. We

didn't choose this fight, but we're in it. And being on the march, there's only one way we're going to be able to win it. It's the way we won World War I fighting for Wilson's 14 points. The way we won World War II fighting for Churchill's and Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter and the way we won World War III fighting for the noble ideas ... best expressed by President Reagan, but also very importantly at the beginning by President Truman, that this was not a war of us against them. It was not a war of countries. It was a war of freedom against tyranny.

"This will take time. It will be difficult. But I think we need to say to both the terrorists and the dictators and also to the autocrats who from time to time are friendly with us, that we know, we understand we are going to make you nervous. We want you to be nervous. We want you to realise now for the fourth time in 100 years, this country is on the march and we are on the side of those whom you most fear—your own people."

Hearing such an outburst, and making the necessary allowances for translation, it's easy to imagine that one has been thrown back in time to listen to a speech by Hitler or some other Nazi, expounding on the world historical mission of Germany.

The only value of Woolsey's speech is that it does direct attention to the historical development of United States imperialism, which is very much on the march. And it is only on the basis of an historical understanding that we can answer the question we posed at the outset: how does humanity now confront and deal with this eruption of imperialist violence?

The First World War, into which the US intervened in April 1917 and announced its arrival as a world power, was not a war for democracy or the 14 points of Woodrow Wilson. It was a war among the great capitalist powers for global domination.

The previous four decades had seen the greatest economic expansion in the history of mankind. But this expansion driven forward by the truly dynamic development of capitalism, gave rise to new historical problems.

The growth of trade and finance, the gathering and processing of raw materials and resources from all over the world, the establishment of vast networks of international transport and communications, and the replacement of the small owner-run enterprise with giant corporations employing thousands and tens of thousands of people—all of this signified that the productive forces had completely outgrown the framework of the national state in which they had previously been developed.

How was the world to be organised?

Each one of the great capitalist powers, driven by the profit requirements of the powerful industries and financial concerns that dominated economic life, sought to shape the world according to its own needs and interests. But these interests collided one with another and could not be harmonised. Consequently, the great powers were led inexorably into a deepening conflict with each other, the outcome of which was World War One.

The US at first stood aside from this conflict as it sought to profit from it. But eventually America too had to intervene militarily. Its goals were summed up with remarkable frankness by the former president Theodore Roosevelt in the autumn of 1917. The US, he insisted, did not go to war to "make democracy safe." Rather, he insisted, America had entered the war to make the world "safe for ourselves." "This is our war, America's war. If we do not win it we shall some day have to reckon with Germany single-handed. Therefore, for our own sake let us strike down Germany" [cited in Arno Mayer, *The Political Origins of the New Diplomacy*, pp. 344-345].

The attitude of the Marxist movement to the war was grounded on a scientific appreciation. It was, in the final analysis, the revolt of the productive forces against the nation-state system. "Imperialism," Trotsky explained, "represents the predatory capitalist expression of a progressive tendency in economic development—to construct a human economy on a world scale, freed from the cramping fetters of the nation and the state"

[cited in *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International*, pp. 369-370].

Imperialist war was the method by which capitalism tried to solve the problems to which it had produced. But it could find no progressive solution.

However, it had brought into being a new social force that could—the international working class. The working class, created on a global scale by the development of capitalism, was called on to advance the next stage in mankind's development through the international socialist revolution and the development of a planned socialist economy, that is, through the intelligent co-operation of the world's producers.

Arising from what we now refer as the globalisation of production, these two conflicting perspectives—either imperialist war for the division and redivision of the world, or the socialist revolution and the rational reorganisation of the world in accordance with the needs of humanity—have continued to define our epoch that began with the outbreak of World War I.

US imperialism intervened in World War I to ensure that it retained the upper hand against its rivals such as Germany. But it was soon confronted with a much bigger danger in the shape of the Russian Revolution, which represented the negation of the entire capitalist order.

As one American official remarked, the problem with the Bolsheviks was that they did not recognise either private property or the nation-state. The Bolsheviks were based on an entirely different world outlook. Consequently, the imperialist powers, with America playing a leading role, sent armed forces to try to overthrow the revolution and to frantically prevent its spread to Central Europe and Germany.

"America was one of the senior partners in a coalition resolved to contain or destroy the Bolshevik Revolution. To achieve this objective the Allies needed the military services of Finland, Poland, Rumania, and Germany, even at the price of allowing conservative and reactionary forces in these countries to benefit from this anti-Bolshevik campaign" [Mayer, p. 22].

In her diary, the British Fabian socialist Beatrice Webb pointed to the fears that gripped the rulers of Europe as they came together at the Paris peace conference of 1919. "Are we confronted with another Russia in Austria, possibly even in Germany—a Continent in rampant revolution ..." [Mayer, p. 9].

The famous American sociologist Thorstein Veblen observed that while the drive to defeat Bolshevism "was not written in the text of the [Versailles] Treaty" it was nonetheless "the parchment upon which the text was written" [Mayer, p. 29].

The imperialist powers, together with the leaders of the trade unions and the so-called socialist and labour parties, succeeded in isolating the revolution. It was not overturned, but the isolation led to degeneration and the rise of a bureaucracy headed by Stalin. The perspective of internationalism, the struggle for world socialist revolution, was replaced with the program of socialism in one country.

While they may have contained the revolution, the capitalist powers could not open up new vistas for the development of mankind. On the contrary, after two decades of continuous unemployment, depression, fascism, civil war and military dictatorship, a second world war erupted.

The intervention of America into this war was not motivated by the defence of democracy or the struggle to defeat fascism. American imperialism could have co-existed with German fascism and Japanese militarism, save for one characteristic feature of these regimes. Their expansion was grounded on the development of closed economic regions and the US required an "open door" throughout the world in order to give room for the dynamic development of its productive forces.

Consequently, the US insisted that not only would Germany and Japan be defeated in the war but that Imperial Preference—the economic organisation based on the British Empire—had to go as well. The conclusion of World War II saw the emergence of the US as the

unchallenged and pre-eminent capitalist power. But in its rise to world dominance, it was still confronted by the Soviet Union.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, a struggle broke out in the American ruling class over the policy to be adopted. Was the US strategy to be based on containment or rollback—the outright overthrow of the USSR? There were many factors involved in determining the outcome of this conflict. In the aftermath of the war, the overthrow of the Soviet Union posed great risks. It had acquired military and political power because of its role in the overthrow of the Nazi regime. There was a swing to the left in the populations of Western Europe in the aftermath of the war, and the struggle against imperialist domination erupted in the colonies of the capitalist powers.

Nevertheless, it was by no means a settled question. In the Korean War, General MacArthur advocated a nuclear attack on China and, in the confrontation over Cuba, the US military was ready to launch a war.

However, to the extent that the post-war expansion of capitalism continued, the US overall pursued a policy of restraint. But from the middle of the 1970s, as the post-war boom came to an end and the US began to lose its absolute predominance over its rivals, a distinct change can be seen. By the end of the decade, the Carter administration was organising an intervention into Afghanistan with the express purpose of drawing the Soviet Union into a quagmire and weakening it.

The policy of détente was abandoned and, under the Reagan administration, an increasingly aggressive policy was pursued towards the Soviet Union. This new orientation was bound up with a shift in domestic policy. The policies of social welfare reformism, founded in the time of the New Deal of President Roosevelt, were scrapped and a global offensive launched against the American and international working class.

In the former colonial countries, the so-called Third World, the perspective of national development was undermined and these countries were forced, under the pressure of “structural adjustment” programs dictated by the International Monetary Fund, to integrate themselves into the framework of the global market.

At the end of the 1980s, the Stalinist bureaucracy determined that it could no longer maintain its position and that its only option was capitulation. It took the last step in the process begun in the 1920s, when it usurped power from the working class, and organised the restoration of capitalism.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, US imperialism faced new opportunities and new challenges. The opportunities lay in the fact that the Soviet Union, the chief obstacle that had prevented the US exercising global domination since 1917, was now gone. The challenge was to prevent the other major capitalist powers from exploiting this new situation and eclipsing the US.

These considerations were the basis of a statement drawn up at the beginning of 1992 on US strategy in the post-Cold War era. Entitled Defence Planning Guidance (DPG), it was drafted up by the then under secretary of defence for policy, Paul Wolfowitz, whose immediate boss was defence secretary, and now vice-president, Dick Cheney.

“Our first objective,” the document stated, “is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defence strategy and requires that we endeavour to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power. These regions include Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the former Soviet Union, and Southwest Asia.” It was necessary, the document continued, for the US to “maintain the mechanism for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global rule.”

However, it was not immediately possible in the early 1990s to pursue the aggressive strategy set out in the DPG document. A number of reports and articles have now documented the campaign by the so-called neo-conservatives, who came together in 1997 to form the Project for a New

American Century, to advance their program. In September 2000, they published a major report entitled “Rebuilding America’s Defences”. The basis of their perspective was the strategy outlined by Cheney in 1992 which, they said, “provided a blueprint for maintaining US pre-eminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests.”

The strategy developed by Wolfowitz, Cheney and their collaborators over the past decade for the global dominance of the US is now the central program of the Bush administration. This outcome, however, cannot be viewed simply as the consequence of a determined political campaign by these individuals. Their campaign itself was the expression of, and met up with, deep-seated changes within US capitalism and its position in the world economy.

Defining US objectives in the first Gulf War of 1990-91, President Bush said it would establish the basis for a “new world order.” The US, however, faced a very different situation from that which confronted it at the end of World War II when it had set out to remake the world.

At that time, the US was the world’s leading creditor nation, the pre-eminent source of capital, the holder of two thirds of the world’s gold stocks, and the home to some 50 percent of the world’s industrial production, enjoying a vastly superior productivity of labour. Forty years later, however, it presented a different picture. No longer the world’s major creditor, it was moving into debt, and in the course of the 1990s was to become the world’s biggest debtor. US firms that had dominated the world in the previous period were being challenged.

It is not the first time in history that a major power has sought to bolster its weakening economic position by a resort to military means. Moreover, the driving forces for a more aggressive foreign policy are not only to be found externally. There were powerful domestic factors at work as well.

The economic changes in US capitalism, above all the rise of financial parasitism, have resulted in changed class relations which have in turn created a certain social base, within the US itself, for the promotion of imperialist violence. Increasingly in the 1990s, vast wealth has been accumulated not through the development of new products or new manufacturing processes but via financial manipulation, share market transactions, mergers and takeovers, and, in the latter part of the 1990s, through outright fraud.

The rise of such methods is always an indication of an approaching crisis in the heart of the capitalist economy. It signifies that downward pressures are being exerted on the rate of profit and that, as Marx explained, individual sections of capital must increasingly resort to the “general promotion of swindling,” “frenzied ventures” and “new adventures” in order to try and maintain their individual profit rates above the falling social average.

Ultimately, of course, capital cannot overcome its problems through these methods. But the rise of financial speculation did lead to the creation of a “new rich,” drawn from middle class and professional layers. This upwardly mobile social stratum, although a relatively small section of the population, provides a certain social basis for imperialist policies. They are a segment of the population for whom “liberal” *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman—a man who has no problem with a “war for oil”—speaks.

The re-emergence of falling profit rates has had another social consequence. Capital has sought to arrest the decline in profits by clawing back the concessions it was forced to make in the past. This is the origin of the ongoing attack on wages, social conditions and the social infrastructure—affecting the lives of the vast majority of the population—that has marked the past two decades. In other words, the same processes, which have given rise to financial parasitism, have resulted in a deepening social polarisation.

The economic and social origins of militarism can now be clearly seen. Under conditions of deepening tensions at home, produced by the growth

of truly unprecedented social and economic inequality, the ruling elites resort to militarism as a means to find an external outlet for increased social pressures. At the same time, the employment of militarism to ensure the conquest of global markets and resources is a means to generate additional sources of profit.

But this increased aggressiveness of US imperialism leads to ever-greater conflict with its rivals. There is a profound significance to the fact that the post-war Atlantic alliance lies, as one US commentator put it, “in the rubble of Baghdad.” In the final analysis, this is because under conditions of falling profits, overcapacity in all sections of industry, low growth rates and a generally deflationary environment, the world market has become a battleground—a battleground in which economic weapons can, at a certain point, give way to military means.

The conflict between the US and the European powers over the launching of the war against Iraq, and now the dispute over post-war Iraq, is about the exploitation of the resources of that country. It’s not just about oil. What is at stake are telecommunications contracts, building contracts, transport contracts and so on. Now that the US has assumed control it is seeking to wipe out the debts owed to Russia by the former regime. And Condoleezza Rice has made clear that reconstruction contracts should go only to companies from countries that sacrificed “lives and blood” for the “liberation” of Iraq.

The post-war alliances and relations have irrevocably broken down. International relations increasingly assume the form of a struggle of each against all, in which alliances may be formed at one stage only to be broken at another, should the need arise. As in the period before World War I, it is impossible to predict the exact alignments. But one thing can be said with certainty: in all the world’s major capitals, the conclusion is being drawn that military forces must be built up.

Consider, for example, the comment by former French Prime Minister Laurent Fabius in the *Financial Times* of March 26 under the title “A stronger Europe for a better world.” France, Fabius insisted, wants a “new internationalism” based on multilateralism and compliance with international law. Unless this happens there can be no peace.

But how can these goals be realised? The war shows the need to “construct a united Europe and rapidly create a European defence force.” According to Fabius: “Europe was unable to make its voice heard in the US because it lacked a unified defence force.” Only with the development of such a force can the major European powers, France and Germany, draw to their side the countries of the former Soviet bloc.

In other words, according to Fabius, the international situation marked by the eruption of American militarism requires the re-arming of Europe. Other capitalist powers are drawing the same conclusion.

According to a report in the *Australian Financial Review* of April 7, pressure is building for Japan to reduce its military dependence on Washington. “And the push for Japan to acquire ‘offensive weapons for defensive purposes,’ such as Tomahawk cruise missiles and long range bombers is gathering momentum.”

Meanwhile a row has erupted in the last few days on the Indian sub-continent because of statements by Indian government ministers that American action against Iraq gives India the right to take pre-emptive action against Pakistan.

The twenty-first century is beginning like the twentieth with an arms race among the major capitalist powers as they seek to advance their interests on the global arena.

The significance of the conflicts among the major powers over Iraq is clear: they were not motivated by peace or concerns for the fate of the Iraqi people, but by what the US actions portend for the future. They all know that for the US, Iraq is not the end, but the beginning, and that at a certain point they could be forced to defend their own interests militarily. In other words, the seeds of a third world war have not only been planted, they have germinated and are starting to sprout.

This means that opposition to American imperialist violence cannot be based on support for one or other of the capitalist powers or a coalition of them. Chirac does not represent opposition to imperialist violence; he simply expresses it in another form.

There is only one social force that can resolve the crisis for mankind created by imperialist capitalism. That is the international working class. It must fight for its own independent program—the reorganisation of the world on the basis of a socialist perspective.

The first attempt to implement this program ended in failure, for which mankind paid a terrible price.

But history has now presented the problem anew. And at the same time, it has created the conditions for it to be resolved. The basis for the unification of the international working class has been created by the very processes, rooted in the globalisation of capitalist production, which have given rise to the resurgence of imperialism.

But history is a hard taskmaster and she has also bequeathed to us all the problems arising from the defeats and betrayals of the socialist revolution in the twentieth century. These problems are concentrated in the crisis of perspective, of consciousness, in the international working class.

The working people of the world have, as yet, no program on which to unify their struggles and take political power in their own hands.

The resolution of this problem is the key to the whole situation. It is to this task that the WSWS is dedicated. Is the task difficult? Extremely so. But there is no other way out. Either the socialist revolution or the relapse of mankind into the most terrible forms of barbarism—those are the alternatives.

The task of constructing a socialist leadership is extremely difficult. But the reconciliation of imperialist capitalism with democracy, peace and material prosperity for the mass of the world’s people is impossible.

Therefore we urge you to give the most urgent consideration to our program, to join the SEP and play your part in building the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution.



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