

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

"The turn to authoritarian methods is a symptom of the failure of American capitalism"

23 April 2003

Below we are publishing the remarks of Lawrence Porter to the conference held by the WSWs 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."

Porter, a member of the WSWs Editorial Board, introduced the fourth of six resolutions discussed and adopted by the conference: "Oppose the attacks on democratic rights!"

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"]

On April 22 the WSWs published the remarks of Patrick Martin and Ulrich Rippert, who introduced the first and second conference resolutions, respectively [See "Contradictions and lies in the US case for war against Iraq", "Internationalism stands at the center of the history of the working class"]

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 challenges that we face are of such a great nature, they require great ideas. Great changes take place when great ideas merge with a historical movement. This is what we are talking about today.

The ideas of socialism were placed on a scientific foundation by Karl Marx. At one point socialist ideas generated enormous support among the working class masses. Those ideas were betrayed above all by a bureaucracy that arose following the Russian Revolution. Without a study and understanding of these historical experiences we cannot prepare the working class for the struggles it faces in the coming period. That is why the political questions we are discussing today are so significant. Spontaneous struggles by the masses are on the agenda. The issue is: In what direction will they go?

The previous speaker referred to the book, *What is to Be Done?* Lenin said that the working class, particularly its leadership embodied in the revolutionary party, must acquire the highest level of political consciousness. This requires an understanding of history, philosophy and economics. The working class must develop a leadership based on this scientific foundation.

I come from a working class background and that is how I developed.

Concerning the resolution on democratic rights, I would like to go through some of its most important sections:

"The Bush administration has launched the most sustained attack on democratic rights in modern American history. Using the pretext provided by the September 11 terrorist attacks, it has systematically constructed, through the USA Patriot Act, the Homeland Security bill and other reactionary

measures, the framework for a police state.

“An essential component of the so-called ‘war on terror’ has proven to be a war against the US Constitution. The Bush government, with the complicity of the Democrats in Congress and the support of the American media, has massively increased its powers of domestic spying, search and seizure and arrest and imprisonment without trial.

“For millions of immigrants, habeas corpus—the guarantee that no individual can be imprisoned indefinitely without charges—no longer applies. In the wake of September 11, the US government, asserting the right to hold foreign nationals and American citizens incommunicado whom it deems to be threats to national security, rounded up more than one thousand Middle Eastern and Central Asian immigrants without trial on suspicion of terrorism. None has been charged with a terror-related crime and most have been summarily deported.”

I had the opportunity to follow and report on the trial of Rabih Haddad, a Muslim cleric from Ann Arbor who was arrested, detained and held incommunicado following September 11. Despite the fact that he opposed the terrorist actions of September 11, and publicly stated so long before he was arrested, he has been used as an example by the Bush administration in its so-called war against terrorism.

It is not only immigrants who have been targeted by this administration. US citizens are also being held incommunicado and without the right to counsel, including Jose Padillio and Yaser Esam Hamdi.

The US government has treated the Geneva Conventions with contempt. It is estimated that the US government is illegally holding some 600 foreign nationals as detainees in Guantanamo Bay. It is complicit in the torture of prisoners captured in Afghanistan, resulting in some cases in their deaths.

The USA Patriot Act allows the government to conduct spying, bugging and other unconstitutional measures against American citizens, with the unstated aim of using these methods against its political opponents.

The Bush administration, however, feels that this bill does not go far enough. It is presently working on a new bill, which civil libertarians have called the Patriot Act II, that goes much further in attacking democratic rights. The new bill will increase the powers of the secret court that operates under the provisions of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

The library surveillance section of the existing Patriot Act allows the government to subpoena the records of all public libraries and requires librarians to turn over the records of all patrons. A provision of the proposed Patriot Act II allows the government to take away the citizenship of an American whom the government alleges to be a supporter of an

organization it deems to be “terrorist.”

Under this provision it doesn’t matter if a person donates to a foreign charity without knowing that the charity has been classified by the government as “terrorist”-related. The donor can be charged with supporting a terrorist organization and have his citizenship rights taken away.

There is another provision calling for the expanded use of the death penalty. A summary explanation of this section of the bill, published by the American Civil Liberties Union, says the following: “The bill dramatically expands the death penalty, creating fifteen separate new death penalty crimes including a conviction as a ‘domestic terrorist.’ Under the law, if an anti-war protestor broke the law during a demonstration and someone died as a result, the protestor could be subjected to the death penalty and the protest organizers with domestic terrorism (Section 411).”

The government is carrying out these measures because its policies are unpopular and it is aware they will generate widespread opposition. The fact that the government must turn to authoritarian methods is itself a symptom of the failure of American capitalism.

I would like to conclude by reading the last few paragraphs of the resolution:

“This conference condemns the attacks on immigrants and demands the release of all those interned after September 11. It calls for the dropping of charges against Sami Amin Al-Arian.

“This conference further condemns the passage of the Patriot Act and the creation of the Homeland Security Department.

“This conference demands that the US respect the Geneva Conventions and grant its prisoners of war all legal rights.

“This conference calls for a genuinely independent inquiry into the events of September 11.

“This conference further calls for an international campaign in defense of immigrants and democratic rights.”

I urge all delegates to vote in support of this resolution.



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