

WSWS international conference: Resolutions on war and the US social crisis, development of the World Socialist Web Site

4 April 2003

The World Socialist Web Site and Socialist Equality Party held an international conference on March 29-30 in Ann Arbor, Michigan titled "Socialism and the Struggle against Imperialism and War: The Strategy and Program of a New International Working Class Movement". On April 1 the WSWS published a summary account of the conference [See "World Socialist Web Site holds international conference on socialism and the struggle against war"] and the opening report by David North, chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the US. [See "Into the maelstrom: the crisis of American imperialism and the war against Iraq"]

On April 2 we posted the first two of six resolutions unanimously adopted by the conference delegates [See "WSWS international conference: Resolutions condemn war in Iraq, call for international unity of working class"] and April 3 we posted the third and fourth resolutions. [See "WSWS international conference: Resolutions call for political independence of working class, oppose attacks on democratic rights"] Today we are posting the final two resolutions.

Conference resolution: War and the social crisis in the United States

There is no impenetrable barrier separating Washington's domestic and foreign policies. The turn to unbridled militarism by the Bush administration is a manifestation of the deep-going internal crisis of American society, which finds its most acute expression in levels of social inequality not seen since the 1920s. This is not simply an American but an international phenomenon, exacerbating social tensions and intensifying the drive by the ruling classes of every country towards repression at home and imperialist war abroad.

Militarism serves two critical functions: first, conquest and plunder can provide, at least in the short term, additional resources that can ameliorate economic problems; second, war provides a means for directing internal social pressures outward.

But these short-term "benefits" cannot cure the economic and social diseases that afflict America. Even if the United States achieves a swift military victory in Iraq, the social and economic crisis of America will continue to fester and intensify. None of its institutions—economic, social and political—is equipped to respond in any positive manner to the general crisis of US society.

The war itself represents a devastating failure of American democracy. A small cabal of political conspirators, working with a hidden agenda and having come to power on the basis of fraud, has taken the American people into a war that they neither understand nor want. None of the mechanisms of bourgeois democracy—the traditional system of checks and balances, an opposition party, trade

unions, a critical media—functions any longer to restrain the ambitions and actions of the ruling clique.

The decay of American democracy is rooted in the immense and growing social gulf between a wealthy and grasping financial oligarchy and the vast majority of the population. The last three decades have seen a colossal social polarization between a small and fabulously wealthy elite at the top, and the working people, the vast majority, whose living standards have declined steadily. In today's America, the annual income of the richest 14,000 families is greater than the annual income of the poorest 20,000,000 families.

While virtually eliminating taxation on multimillion-dollar incomes and inherited wealth, the Bush administration is allowing the social infrastructure of America to collapse. Of the 50 states in the Union, a majority is on the verge of bankruptcy. The essential systems of social welfare are breaking down. The school systems are a shambles. The health-care system is starved of funds and services are being cut back drastically. Entire industries face collapse. Within less than a year, much of the American airline industry will no longer exist. The massive diversion of resources to fund tax cuts for the wealthiest section of the population threatens national insolvency.

The Bush administration is the political embodiment of those layers of the US ruling elite that came to the fore during the speculative financial bubble of the last two decades, and particularly the 1990s. They made their personal fortunes on the basis of fraud, theft and illegal activities and at the direct expense of millions of working people who have lost their jobs, benefits and working conditions through corporate restructuring and downsizing.

These same methods have been carried into both foreign and domestic policy. Nothing can be allowed to stand in the way of the accumulation of wealth by this tiny elite. The military subjugation of countries abroad dovetails with a domestic agenda of dismantling jobs, social services, living standards and democratic rights.

This conference insists that the struggle against militarism is inseparably bound up with the defense of democratic rights and the social position of working people. It must be based on opposition to the monopoly of wealth by a tiny and unaccountable elite, which is utterly incompatible with the maintenance of a democratic society. At the very center of the struggle against war must be the fight for genuine social equality, directed at eliminating the vast social inequities and guaranteeing the needs of working people for jobs, a living wage, a secure retirement, decent education, health care and housing.

This conference calls for the democratic redistribution of wealth and income through the establishment of a genuinely progressive tax

policy and the reallocation of the resources produced by the labor of working people to meet their social needs.

This conference calls for the conversion of the entire arms industry into publicly owned institutions, for the production of socially useful goods. It likewise calls for the nationalization of the giant corporations, including the oil, gas and energy-generating conglomerates, and their subordination to the democratic control of the working class.

Conference resolution: The American media and the development of the *World Socialist Web Site*

The phrases “yellow journalism” and “gutter journalism”, associated with newspaper tycoons of an earlier epoch, are inadequate to describe the role played by the US mass media in the war in Iraq, and more generally in contemporary American life.

The scoundrels who control the print and television media seek on a daily basis to delude the people, debase political discourse and pollute the moral and social atmosphere.

Reflected in the ability of broadcasters and columnists to disseminate, with a straight face, the most absurd lies supplied by the Pentagon and the White House is not merely personal corruption, but, more fundamentally, the political disorientation and intellectual decay of the American ruling elite.

The US media has played a material role in preparing the unfolding disaster in Iraq. By prohibiting critical voices and propagating the myth of “national unity” against the devil incarnate, Saddam Hussein, journalists have assisted Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney & Co. in carrying out their aggression.

When more than 10 million people filled the streets of cities across the globe—in the largest single day of international political protest in history—US television barely covered the event.

The “embedding” of 500 American journalists in military units sums up the relations between the media and the Pentagon. This arrangement is aimed at assuring the military’s control over coverage and forcing journalists to identify fully with the war effort.

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.

The range of political commentary on the television networks runs the gamut from A to B: from the conservative to the fascistic. The same group of “talking heads” appears night after night, offering commentary that inevitably coincides with the interests of the corporate and political establishment.

The onset of war has seen the appearance of a new group of “experts” and “consultants,” a stream of retired generals and CIA officials, smugly predicting the annihilation of Iraqi soldiers and the devastation of the defenseless country.

The demonstration by thousands outside the Los Angeles headquarters of CNN, the cable news network, expressed the instinctive revulsion felt by millions for a media that has been transformed into a propaganda arm of the US government. It is entirely appropriate that outraged protesters should descend on CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC and the particularly odious Fox News, one of Rupert Murdoch’s assets.

The erstwhile liberal media has made its particular contribution to the war. The *Washington Post* has become an open drumbeater for aggression in the Middle East, predicting that throngs of joyful Iraqis would greet their “liberators”. The *New York Times* lent credence to

Bush’s lies and praised his “statesmanlike” approach. If the *Times* expresses hesitations today about the war, it is only out of concern that Bush’s management of the conflict may rebound against the long-term interests of American imperialism.

The present state of the media is the result of a decades-long process, bound up with the growth of social polarization in the US and the decay of American democracy. The hostility to opposition and criticism of government policy has grown in tandem with the concentration into the hands of a few conglomerates of television, radio and newspaper outlets.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, launched in February 1998 by the International Committee of the Fourth International, was founded to provide an international readership with a daily analysis and commentary on world events that is grounded on an international socialist perspective. Not only has the WSWWS provided a political alternative to the right-wing agendas of the various capitalist regimes, it has offered a serious appraisal of contemporary political, social and cultural developments.

In five years, in thousands of articles and in various languages, the WSWWS has consistently advanced a socialist and internationalist program. It has won a considerable global readership as the result of its principled approach. In the struggle to arouse and educate the population, the WSWWS makes an appeal to its readers’ intellect, sense of justice and fairness, concern for truth, and spirit of self-sacrifice and human solidarity.

Marxists understand that far-reaching social change comes about as the result of profound objective processes and an equally profound intellectual and cultural reorientation of masses of people. A significant obstacle that lies in the path of those entering into struggle against imperialist war and social inequality today is the generally low level of class consciousness and historical knowledge.

The WSWWS must play a leading role in rebuilding the extraordinary socialist political culture that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century and was so grievously damaged by Stalinism. Marxism, as viewed by its greatest proponents, was not merely a political program, but an intellectual current of unparalleled depth and breadth, which subjected every aspect of bourgeois society to criticism.

Much work remains to be done. The WSWWS needs new readers and new writers; it needs to explore new subjects and themes; it needs an ever more profound interaction between readers and writers. The widespread influence of the WSWWS will be an essential ingredient in a new international revolutionary upsurge.

This conference calls for ending the private monopoly of the means of information and communication by giant corporations, whose profit interests collide at every point with the presentation of honest information and progressive thought. We call for placing the mass media—television, radio and the big print media—under public ownership and the democratic control of the working people.

This conference further pledges to develop the *World Socialist Web Site* as a critical instrument of political, cultural and moral opposition to capitalism, and to extend its influence throughout the world.



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