

After the Iraq war

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The war against Iraq represents a turning point in international politics. The US has made it unmistakably clear that it is no longer prepared to recognise international institutions or universally accepted laws. Instead, it is determined to rely on military strength to further its interests. Other countries are left with a choice: either side with the US and receive a few crumbs; or be ignored, punished...or bombed. "Either you are with us or against us," as President Bush himself put it.

Iraq, as the US government has spelled out, is just the first step. The ultimate aim of the White House is the reorganisation of the entire region and the establishment of a new world order. What is the content of this world order? The submission of the entire planet to the needs of American big business through the most naked forms of robbery and capitalist exploitation. The plundering and destruction of thousands of years of Iraqi culture side by side with the careful protection of oil wells and the oil ministry as a prelude to their privatisation—that is "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in a nutshell.

Avoiding terms used by another world conqueror—such as "master race" and "lebensraum"—Bush has carried out his campaign in the name of "freedom" and "democracy". But what exactly does he mean by these terms?

"Freedom" means the right to property and unlimited self-enrichment. Its embodiment is the figure of Ahmed Chalabi, a crook convicted for embezzlement and favoured by the Pentagon to head the new Iraqi government. "Democracy" means that the Iraqi people—at gunpoint—are given the choice of supporting a government imposed by Washington or facing starvation. As one satirist noted recently, the despotic oil sheiks of the Gulf have lost their fear of democracy after witnessing the way in which it is practised by George W. Bush.

The responsibility for this policy rests with a right-wing clique in the White House who stole the presidency after already demonstrating their contempt for democratic

rights by trying to overthrow an elected president with a trumped-up sex scandal. This policy has been supported, however, by the entire American elite. With the exception of a few dissenting voices, the leadership of the Democratic Party has expressed its support for Bush's politics. This demonstrates that a more profound logic is at work.

America occupies a place on the world stage today that bears comparison to the position of Germany within the European system of one hundred years ago. Germany—the most advanced and dynamic capitalist power in Europe—was only able to develop further by bursting apart the old continent's tightly meshed system of nation states. Twice it attempted the violent reorganisation of Europe, and on both occasions it failed miserably. Europe was bled white in the process, and America emerged from the two wars as the undisputed hegemonic world power. Today, America is attempting the violent reorganisation of the world.

The framework of international rules and institutions no longer serves Washington's drive to exert its hegemony. The internal tensions wracking the US economy and society are impelling American capitalism to seek unrestricted access to all the world's resources. The US cannot allow a sovereign government anywhere on the globe to make decisions that have repercussions for America itself. The global economy is incompatible with self determination by individual nations. Nor can America tolerate any potential rival. Control of the oilfields of the Middle East will enable it to put Europe and Asia on rations.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has encouraged American imperialism to drop any remaining inhibitions. It is no longer compelled to contemplate the risk of a self-destructive nuclear war.

The course undertaken by the American government will inevitably lead to catastrophe. The predatory clique holding the reins of power of a nation embracing no more

than 5 percent of the world's population cannot dictate terms to the remaining 95 percent forever.

The brutal assault on Iraq is a foretaste of what is to come. There are few historic parallels for a war fought on the basis of such unequal weapons. Primitively equipped Iraqi conscript soldiers and civilians were literally massacred by American high-tech weaponry. In the US itself, basic democratic rights are being systematically dismantled in the "war against terror". Already horrendous levels of economic inequality will increase even more as the costs of the war are placed on the backs of working people.

Europe has demonstrated its complete inability to oppose this train of events. Under American pressure, the much vaunted common foreign policy of the European Union collapsed like a house of cards. The US has deliberately used its influence to split the European continent. Even those governments that rejected the war restricted their resistance to verbal and diplomatic gestures. The decision by the German SPD-Green Party government to open German airspace for the war and allow the free use of US bases on German territory was of far greater practical significance than its rejection of a United Nations resolution in favour of the invasion.

After the US military success, declarations of loyalty to the American government are pouring in. "Don't send wrong signals to Washington"—goes the maxim. Both Paris and Berlin are trying hard to reconcile themselves with the White House and acknowledge the new set of relations established by the war.

A new tone prevails in the press as well. The stomach heaves when Wolfgang Koydl in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* jubilantly describes the American neo-conservatives as "visionaries who have taken up the task of assembling the framework of a new order for a world spinning out of control" and when he counterposes them to the Europeans who are "intent on hanging onto their old dreams". Or when Jan Ross, in a contribution for *Die Zeit*, contrasts "US audacity" with the "European culture of law" which, he says, has "something malevolently unproductive about it—the pleasure at coming up with obstacles on the part of someone lacking any drive"* The philosopher Nietzsche is once again back in mode.

The inability of European governments to provide any serious alternative to the threat arising from America is rooted in their own social programmes. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's "Agenda 2010"—aimed at introducing American conditions in Germany—has brought it into confrontation with broad layers of the population. The

same applies to the social policies of the French Chirac-Raffarin government, which have provoked a series of strikes and protests. The conflict between these governments and their own people drives them into the camp of the strongest imperialist power.

In 1940, when France was defeated by Germany, the majority of the ruling class decided in favour of a Vichy France, seeking a position as junior partner to the victorious Great Power. After the Iraq war, we confront the danger of a sort of Vichy Europe, which plays the role of junior partner to American militarism. The internal relations of such a Europe would be no better than those of Vichy France. It would be dominated by the most powerful economic and financial interests and characterised by the dismantling of social services, the introduction of cheap labour, militarism and the suppression of democratic rights. It is no accident that it was the most right-wing governments in Europe—in particular those of the former Eastern bloc, which all rest on a decidedly narrow social base—that were the first to line up behind the American flag.

There was virtually no popular support in Europe for the war against Iraq. Millions took to the streets to express their opposition. But the outcome of this war confronts these same millions with tasks that cannot be resolved by a movement limited to the issue of peace. The struggle against war must be bound up with the fight for a different society. The only possibility of uniting Europe in a progressive and harmonious fashion and to make it a counter-pole to American imperialism is a unification from below. The alternative to the fractured Europe of the big banks and corporations is the United Socialist States of Europe.

Such a perspective would find a positive response in America itself. The American people regard the right-wing clique in the White House with a mixture of mistrust and rejection. Only an independent and international movement of the working class can put a halt to a rampant American militarism.

* *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3-4 May 2003, "America's Visions" and *Die Zeit*, 16 April 2003, "Morals under arms"



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