

WSWS/SEP international conference:

Resolutions condemn war in Iraq, Australian intervention in Solomons

14 July 2003

The World Socialist Web Site and Socialist Equality Party held an international conference entitled “Political Lessons of the War on Iraq: the way forward for the international working class” on July 5-6 in Sydney, Australia. On July 9, the WSWS published a summary account of the conference [See: World Socialist Web Site holds conference on the political lessons of the war on Iraq] and, on July 10-11, the opening report by Nick Beams, member of the WSWS International Editorial Board and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia [See The political economy of American militarism Part 1, Part 2]

Today we are posting the first two of six resolutions unanimously adopted by the conference delegates. In the coming days we will publish the remaining resolutions.

Conference Resolution: End the US-led occupation of Iraq!

This conference unequivocally condemns the US-led invasion of Iraq as a criminal act of aggression. The illegal occupation of Iraq by the US, Britain and Australia is rapidly evolving into a classic colonial-style war of repression against a civilian population. Growing popular resistance to the US presence is being met with the use of overwhelming force, including house-to-house searches, mass arrests and murderous reprisals. The real motivation in launching the war was not to liberate the Iraqi people but to colonise the country and seize control of its oil and resources, as part of a broader strategy of reorganising the globe to fulfil the geo-political and financial interests of corporate America.

The brutal conduct of the war flowed directly from its objectives. The assault opened with a massive “shock and awe” bombardment meant to psychologically shatter the Iraqi regime within days and allow the US-led forces to march into Baghdad to the cheers of welcoming crowds. But when US troops met with resistance, the Pentagon’s strategy rapidly shifted to open terror. Cruise missiles, depleted uranium shells and cluster bombs, guided by hi-tech surveillance systems, were rained down on Iraqi soldiers in antiquated tanks, lightly-armed irregulars in pick-up trucks and innocent civilians. The US destroyed vital infrastructure, including telecommunications, electricity and water supplies, and bombed civilian areas, such as the Baghdad markets, that had no conceivable military value. This was a one-sided slaughter comparable to the Nazi blitzkrieg against the Polish cavalry at the outset of World War II or the colonial massacres of the nineteenth century.

Two months ago President Bush declared on the decks of the USS Abraham Lincoln that “major combat operations” were at an end. But the fighting continues. A groundswell of anti-US protests and armed attacks underscores the widespread hostility among ordinary Iraqis to the US occupation, exposing the absurdity of US claims that opposition is limited to “Hussein loyalists”. Washington is engaged in a war against the Iraqi people and is reviving the methods of Vietnam to terrorise the entire population.

All the pretexts offered by Bush, Blair and Howard for invading Iraq, in

the face of unprecedented global antiwar protests, have been exposed as fabrications and outright lies. The formal casus belli—Iraq’s failure to comply with UN resolutions on weapons of mass destruction—has been revealed as a colossal fraud. The thousands of US specialists scouring the country have failed to find any nuclear, chemical, biological weapons or banned ballistic missiles, or evidence of any ongoing research and development programs. Likewise, nothing whatsoever has been found to demonstrate a link between Hussein’s secular Baathist regime in Baghdad and the Islamic fundamentalists of the Al Qaeda network.

Washington’s latest justification—that the invasion removed a hated dictatorship—is just as cynical. Like Suharto in Indonesia and Pinochet in Chile, the US had a direct hand in helping the Baathists and Hussein to power. Several of the graves being unearthed in Iraq are those of leftwing political opponents butchered in the 1960s by Baathist thugs on the basis of lists supplied by the CIA. In the 1980s, Washington backed the Hussein regime in its war against Iran and was complicit in its use of chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers and Kurdish civilians. The US also bears responsibility for the Shiites and Kurds slaughtered after the 1990-91 Gulf War, when Bush’s father encouraged an uprising, then left the insurgents to their fate when their activities threatened to destabilise the region.

The Bush administration is not bringing democracy to Iraq. Paul Bremer III, Washington’s proconsul in Baghdad, heads a regime with unbridled, autocratic powers. He has imposed draconian censorship measures making it a crime to oppose the US occupation in speech or print punishable by jail and hefty fines. When it became clear that candidates opposed to the US military presence were likely to win, Bremer arbitrarily suspended all elections, including local polls. Even the hand-picked Iraqi exiles who were groomed in advance of the war to act as a puppet administration have been effectively sidelined.

Much of the country—its economy, infrastructure and cultural heritage—lies in ruins. The Pentagon consciously permitted widespread looting as an extension of its war aims: to reduce the pre-war state administrative structures, services and industry to rubble in the preparation for wholesale privatisation and the economic plunder of the country by US-based corporations. Tanks and troops were assigned to guard two buildings crucial to US plans—the Oil and Interior Ministries—while Baghdad’s museums, libraries, hospitals, schools, government offices, banks and businesses were left completely unprotected.

The US occupation of Iraq is becoming a quagmire. Washington is pressuring other countries to commit troops to assist in the suppression of growing Iraqi resistance. Inevitably, as the Bush Administration’s lies are exposed and the death toll mounts, the soldiers who have been ordered into Iraq to kill or be killed will begin to ask: why are we here? The vast majority of young men and women who have been thrown into Iraq are also victims of the Bush administration’s war drive. Their lives are being

sacrificed to serve the interests of the ruling elites, not the working people of the US, Britain or Australia.

Washington's international gangsterism is not simply the product of the right-wing cabal in the White House. It stems from the irresolvable economic and social contradictions of American capitalism, which are reflected in the mountain of corporate debt, declining profit rates and the deepening gulf between rich and poor.

In carrying out the invasion of Iraq, Bush, Blair, Howard along with their underlings are all guilty of planning and executing an illegal war of aggression—the crime for which the Nazi leaders were tried at Nuremberg and executed. They have the blood of tens of thousands of Iraqi victims on their hands. All those responsible should be charged with war crimes and prosecuted before an international tribunal.

The Bush administration is already preparing new military adventures. This conference denounces the threats, provocations and military plans currently being made against Syria, Iran and North Korea. The US has no more justification for an unprovoked war of aggression on these economically backward countries than it had for attacking Iraq.

This conference calls on working people in Australia, throughout the region and internationally to demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the Middle East, to unreservedly defend the right of the Iraqi people to resist the colonial occupation of their country and determine their own future, and to demand billions of dollars in emergency aid be provided for the pressing economic and social needs of the Iraqi population.

Conference Resolution: Australian troops out of Iraq and the Solomon Islands!

This conference denounces the Howard government's ongoing participation in the US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq as an act of imperialist aggression. Australia, a second-rate power, has unequivocally tied itself to the coat-tails of the world's leading imperialist power in order to pursue its own neo-colonial ambitions, as well as to divert attention from acute social tensions at home.

It is no accident that the Howard government has been the most vociferous peddler of the Bush administration's lies and deception. Its motives for joining the war on Iraq had nothing to do with the fabricated claims of Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction" and links to Al Qaeda. It sent troops to lend credibility to Bush's threadbare "coalition of the willing" and strengthen the Australian-American military alliance as a quid pro quo for establishing its own sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

The decision to support the US-led assault was made undemocratically, in the face of mass antiwar demonstrations around Australia. Despite Howard's claims that no decision had been made, Australian SAS troops were in Iraq well before the invasion was launched. When Bush phoned Howard on March 18 to inform him that the full operation was about to commence, cabinet rubberstamped a commitment already made by Howard in Washington some nine months earlier. Parliament was convened later that morning and simply informed that the decision had been made.

Just three months later, the same anti-democratic methods are being used to intervene in the Solomon Islands, as the first stage of a new colonial-style policy throughout the South Pacific. Without even the pretence of a parliamentary debate, the Howard government, with the backing of all the opposition parliamentary parties—Labor, the Democrats and Greens—is sending 2,000 police and military personnel, backed by naval gunships, to assert control over the defenceless country.

Having earned the praise of the gangsters in the White House and bloated with a new-found sense of importance, Howard believes his government can reorganise the Pacific as the Bush administration is reorganising the globe. In its unprovoked aggression, flouting of democratic norms, repudiation of national sovereignty and disregard for

international law, the Solomons operation will replicate the Iraqi occupation, albeit on a smaller scale.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer made clear Australia's neo-colonial aspirations in his speech to the National Press Club in Canberra on June 25. Imitating his Washington mentors, he declared that Australia regarded national sovereignty as "not absolute," would assert its interests regardless of the United Nations and would assemble its own "coalitions of the willing" in the region.

Under the label of "cooperative intervention," Australia and New Zealand have bullied the Solomons government into formally requesting intervention and pressured other Pacific countries into joining the operation. Those participating, such as the governments in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji, fear that they could be the next targets.

Canberra's claim to be dispatching troops for the sake of "humanity" reeks with hypocrisy. Australia and New Zealand, which together dominate much of the South Pacific economically, and Britain, the former colonial power, bear the central responsibility for the poverty, social decay and communal conflicts confronting the Solomons people.

Having declared the Solomons a "failed state," Canberra intends to establish its control over the key levers of state power and monopolise the country's economic resources for Australian corporate interests. Its policies will exacerbate chronic unemployment, poverty and social tensions, fuelling resentment and resistance to Australian domination. Inevitably Australian police and soldiers will become mired in a war of repression against the Solomons population.

The Howard government is not only drawing on the example set by Washington in the Middle East. It is also exploiting the precedent provided by its armed intervention into East Timor, which likewise enjoyed the support of the opposition parties, as well as the various protest organisations. Under the guise of "humanitarianism" and establishing "independence" for the Timorese people, the government dispatched troops to secure its strategic interests in Timor and the Indonesian archipelago. Nearly four years later, the rotten fruits are plain to see. Australian troops remain on the streets, poverty and joblessness are endemic and the local ruling elite is totally dependent on the patronage of the Western powers. Through a combination of military strong-arming, economic blackmail and diplomatic intimidation, Australian interests have retained the lion's share of Timor Sea oil and gas.

This conference denounces the Howard government's embrace of militarism and colonialism, which will have disastrous consequences for the Australian people. Far from defending the population from the threat of terrorism, Canberra's policies will only expose it to new and more bloody catastrophes.

This conference insists that the people of the Solomon Islands and the Asia-Pacific region have every right to resist the Australian military forces. It is the duty of the working class in Australia, New Zealand and internationally to demand the immediate withdrawal of Australian and New Zealand troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, a halt to the impending takeover of the Solomons and an emergency program of humanitarian and economic aid for the people of the Solomon Islands, Timor and impoverished Pacific states.



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