

WSWS/SEP international conference:

Resolutions on the international unity and political independence of the working class

15 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]

The first two conference resolutions—“End the US-led occupation of Iraq!” and “Australian troops out of Iraq and the Solomon Islands!”—were published on July 14. Today we are posting the third and fourth of six resolutions unanimously adopted by the conference delegates. The final resolutions will be published later this week.

This conference reaffirms the profound historical significance of the global antiwar demonstrations that took place on February 14-16, 2003. More than 10 million people took to the streets in cities, towns and villages on every continent in an act of international solidarity against war that marked a turning point in world history.

This massive outpouring of humanity exceeded in size and scope anything that had gone before. It developed largely outside the framework of the old political parties and organisations. The demonstrations expressed, not only the deep-going opposition of masses of people to the invasion of Iraq and hostility to the US, British and Australian governments, but a growing sense on the part of ordinary people of being part of a unified global struggle. At the most fundamental level they represented the birth of a new international movement against imperialism.

While the mass mobilisations have temporarily subsided, their objective significance remains. The most vital issue confronting the millions who felt compelled to participate is the fact that protest alone has proven incapable of halting the drive to war. They face the necessity of adopting a new political perspective and advancing the struggle against imperialism to a new and higher level.

Behind this unprecedented development lies profound objective processes. The global integration of capitalist production over the past 25 years, spearheaded by transnational corporations, has strengthened the objective unity of the international working class. It has rendered obsolete all national programs, based on protected and state-regulated markets and appeals to capitalist governments for reforms. At the same time, it has intensified exploitation and social inequality, confronting working people from the advanced countries to the “Third World” with increasingly uniform conditions. In this way, the foundation has been laid for the global coordination of great social struggles that will increasingly assume an anti-capitalist character. More and more, the working class will define itself in international, rather than national, terms.

Just as the first era of global integration at the end of the nineteenth century gave rise to bitter conflicts between the major imperialist powers, culminating in three decades of war, Depression and fascism between 1914 and 1945, so the further development of globalised production has unleashed a renewed and ferocious struggle for markets, natural resources and sources of cheap labor. Once again, the fundamental contradictions of capitalism—between world economy and the nation-state system, and between socialised production and the private appropriation of wealth—have exploded to the surface, threatening humanity with catastrophe.

This conference reaffirms that the only genuine mass base for the struggle against imperialism and war is the international working class and that this struggle requires a conscious international orientation and perspective.

This conference opposes all attempts to divide workers on national, ethnic, racial, sexual or religious grounds. The purpose of such identity politics is to undermine and weaken the unity of the working class by falsely elevating secondary, and ultimately politically insignificant, characteristics above objective class interests. Socialist internationalism, on the contrary, corresponds to the most progressive and revolutionary historical tendencies and embodies the strivings of workers of all countries to unify their struggles on the basis of a common world perspective for peace, social equality and justice.

The global mobilisations against the Iraq war are a harbinger

of what is to come. They signify that the next great upsurge of the working class, propelled by mass opposition to war, deepening social inequality and escalating attacks on democratic rights, will rapidly assume an international form.

This conference recognises that the central task at hand is to overcome the crisis of perspective within this emerging movement, encourage the development of its political class consciousness and assist it in understanding the essential link between the struggle against imperialist war and the fight for international socialism.

The war against Iraq has exposed the worthlessness of all the claims that imperialist violence can be stopped through the auspices of institutions, parties and organisations that are based on the defence of the profit system. Imperialist war arises out of the contradictions of the capitalist system. That is why the struggle against it is bound up with establishing the political independence of the working class—the only social force capable of abolishing capitalism and rebuilding society on a progressive basis.

The Iraq war has destroyed the myth that the United Nations is a lever for international cooperation, a defender of weaker nations against the powerful and a force for world peace. The failure of US troops to find any weapons of mass destruction has demonstrated that the decade-long UN embargo against Iraq was based on a lie. The UN Security Council unanimously reaffirmed that fraud in November 2002 by passing resolution 1441, mandating a weapons inspection regime of unparalleled scope. Having handed Washington the pretext for war, the UN only balked at giving a final seal of approval.

But as soon as Baghdad had fallen to US forces, the UN fell into line. The Security Council approved an indefinite US colonial-style occupation of Iraq and the pumping and sale of Iraqi oil. The 14-0 vote has confirmed that the UN serves as a clearinghouse for the intrigues and conflicts of the major powers. France, Germany and Russia opposed the US invasion not on principle, but because their imperialist interests in the Middle East and elsewhere were threatened. When the military outcome became clear, they accepted the US conquest as a fait accompli and rapidly accommodated themselves to Washington's demands.

The invasion of Iraq has exposed the political perfidy of the Labor and Social Democratic parties, the trade unions and the bourgeois nationalist movements in the backward countries. All have been revealed as either open supporters or apologists of imperialist war. None of them exposed or opposed the imperialist war aims of the US and Britain.

In Australia, the Labor Party and the unions, along with the Greens and Democrats, all endorsed UN resolution 1441 and the UN weapons inspection regime. Labor supported Australian participation in a US invasion of Iraq—as long as it had the formal backing of the Security Council. None of the opposition parties voiced any principled opposition to imperialist war per se or to the colonial occupation of Iraq.

Now that Howard has secured the backing of Washington for Australia's own neo-colonial ambitions in the Pacific, the parliamentary parties have quickly closed ranks. The Labor Party has voiced its support for the Howard government's "cooperative intervention" in the Solomon Islands, while the only objection offered by the Greens and Democrats is that involvement in the Iraq war prevented Canberra from intervening in the Solomons sooner!

Labor, the Greens, the Democrats and the entire fraternity of protest organisations set the precedent for the Solomons intervention by demanding in 1999 that the Howard government send Australian troops to East Timor. All of them bear responsibility for the social disaster now confronting the East Timorese.

The invasion of Iraq has exposed the inability of political protest by itself to prevent imperialist war. The struggle against war cannot be based on a perspective of pressuring bourgeois governments or institutions such as the UN. Only by building a movement among the broad masses of working people imbued with an international socialist strategy can imperialist war be effectively opposed.

This conference pledges to fight for the political independence of the working class. This can be established only through the building of a party aimed at abolishing the economic foundations of the capitalist system—private ownership of the means of production and production for profit. It must be a party that opposes the monopolisation of society's wealth by an elite and advances a program for the democratic control of economic life by the working people and the achievement of social equality—that is, a socialist program.

This conference calls for a complete break with the Labor Party and all parties that stand with one or both feet in the camp of capitalism. We undertake the task of building the Socialist Equality Party as the mass political party of the working class, which, on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program, will fight for power.



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