

WSWS/SEP international conference:

Resolutions on the war, social crisis and assault on democratic rights and the development of the World Socialist Web Site

16 July 2003

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 four conference resolutions—"End the US-led occupation of Iraq!", "Australian troops out of Iraq and the Solomon Islands!", "For the international unity of the working class", "For the Political Independence of the Working Class"—were published on July 14 and 15. Today we are posting the final resolutions unanimously adopted by the conference delegates.

Hand in hand with the turn to war, the governments in the United States, Britain and Australia have launched a sustained attack on democratic rights and the social position of the working people. Just as the norms and institutions of multilateralism, national sovereignty and international law have been repudiated, so democratic, civil and constitutional rights are being undermined.

Underlying both foreign and domestic policy is a deepening economic crisis, mounting social polarisation and the drive to claw back all the social reforms of the post-World War II period. Behind the assault on basic rights stands a ruling elite that has no answers but state repression to growing public disaffection and opposition to its policies.

The lies daily promulgated by Bush, and eagerly regurgitated by Howard, to mount a case for invading Iraq served a definite social function. They were essential to conceal from ordinary people the class interests that underlay the drive to war. None of these governments can tell the truth to their citizens: such is the chasm between the interests of the ruling elites and the needs and aspirations of the people.

In the US, social inequality has reached staggering proportions. The annual income of the richest 14,000 families exceeds the total for the poorest 20 million families. But this is

only the most advanced expression of a universal process.

In Australia, an unparalleled gulf exists between a small wealthy elite and the vast mass of working people, whose living standards have declined steadily over the past two decades. The richest 20 percent of households own more than half the total household wealth. Their average worth is more than 40 times higher than the poorest 20 percent. For the first time since 1945, an entire generation of young people is suffering a sharp reversal—people aged 25-34 experienced an average wealth decline of 39 percent between 1993 and 2002.

Social conditions are deteriorating rapidly. After years of slashing and privatising essential social services, governments—both federal and state—are presiding over the breakdown of public health, education, housing and welfare. Massive job destruction, contracting out and casualisation have increasingly rendered secure employment a thing of the past, while the jobless are being stripped of welfare entitlements and forced into low-paid work. The GST, followed by tax cuts favouring the highest income earners, has systematically redistributed social wealth from the working class to the rich.

It is increasingly impossible to implement aggressive militarism and the ongoing assault on social programs by democratic means. Hence the introduction of an arsenal of measures directed against social unrest and political dissent—all on the flimsy pretext of combatting terrorism. Even before the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US, the Australian government had begun implementing long-held plans for authoritarian forms of rule. Unprecedented legislation was passed during 2000 authorising the government to call out the military to quell civil unrest.

The ASIO Terrorism Act, pushed through parliament on June 26, 2003, for the first time in Australian history provides the police and intelligence agencies with the power to detain, strip-search and interrogate anyone without charge and hold him or her incommunicado, possibly indefinitely. Heavily-armed ASIO raids, conducted in immigrant working class suburbs over the past two years, are a warning of how these new powers

will be exercised.

These measures are not far removed from the Bush administration's ripping up of constitutional rights in order to detain US citizens as alleged "enemy combatants" and haul them before closed-door military tribunals. The Howard government has backed the White House in indefinitely incarcerating two Australian citizens, David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, along with more than 650 other prisoners, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in defiance of the Geneva Conventions and international law.

As the lack of warnings of the Bali bombings demonstrates, the intelligence and security agencies do not exist to safeguard the lives of working people. One of their main functions is to terrorise and intimidate the public, especially political opponents of the ruling establishment.

Refugees and immigrants have been among the first victims of the war on democratic rights. Under Labor, refugees were locked way in remote concentration camps, violating their right to asylum under international law. The Howard government has taken this barbaric policy to a new level by dispatching naval warships to attack and repel refugee boats or transport their traumatised passengers to isolated Pacific islands. As a direct result of the new "border protection" policy, more than 350 people drowned in October 2001, after the sinking of the SIEV X refugee boat.

At the centre of the struggle against militarism and state repression must be the fight for genuine social equality, guaranteeing the needs of all for jobs, a living wage, secure retirement, decent education, health care and housing.

This conference calls for the complete democratic reorganisation of economic and social life, to redistribute wealth and income through a genuinely progressive taxation system and social ownership of key industries.

Starting with the entire military industry, the oil companies and the banks, the giant corporations must be converted into public institutions, subordinated to the democratic control of the working people.

This conference calls for an international campaign in defence of immigrants and democratic rights and

* Condemns the passage of the ASIO Terrorism Act, the military call-out legislation and anti-refugee laws.

* Calls for a halt to the ASIO raids and for the immediate release of David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib.

* Demands the release of all refugees—men, women and children—from detention, with full civil and political rights.

The mass circulation of the Bush administration's lies about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction and the manipulation of public opinion would not have been possible without the criminal role played by the mass media. While the media campaign indisputably reached its highest point in the United States, it was replicated throughout the world by the corporate-controlled media, conservative and liberal alike.

In the lead-up to and during the US-led invasion, the *World*

Socialist Web Site became a vital daily source of information and analysis for a wide international readership, systematically exposing the media and government lies and explaining the fundamental political and economic agenda behind the war.

Through statements circulated in leaflets published in a dozen languages, and distributed by its readers, the WSWS intervened in the global antiwar demonstrations, providing an international socialist perspective to demonstrators in different parts of the world.

The incisive political analyses presented by the WSWS and its commitment to historical truth have won to the site a substantial new global readership.

The *World Socialist Web Site* was launched in February 1998 by the International Committee of the Fourth International, not only to provide an alternative analysis of contemporary political events, but to acquaint an international audience with socialist ideas and the rich history and culture of the Marxist movement.

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 is the generally low level of class consciousness and historical knowledge.

The WSWS must play a leading role in reviving a genuine socialist culture and overcoming the crisis of perspective that prevails in the international working class as a result of the damage done to its consciousness by Stalinism, social democracy and all forms of national opportunism. The WSWS seeks to foster a critical attitude to every aspect of bourgeois society and opposition to all forms of exploitation and injustice, while promoting a deep-going commitment to social equality and international solidarity.

This conference pledges to support and develop the WSWS and fight for the broadest expansion of its readership. It further undertakes to encourage the development of new writers, researchers and contributors and to broaden the scope of WSWS articles, analyses and coverage on a wide variety of subjects and themes.

The conference recognises that the WSWS will play a vital role in the development of a new international revolutionary upsurge. The WSWS is creating the framework for a new international revolutionary party capable of leading the coming struggles.



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