

An international socialist strategy to oppose militarism and war

Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
19 November 2003

The following statement is being distributed by the Socialist Equality Party (Britain) at demonstrations taking place in London to protest the state visit of President George W. Bush. The statement has also been posted as a PDF file. We urge our readers and supporters to download and distribute it as widely as possible.

Tens of thousands will march and rally in London to protest the state visit of President George W. Bush and the US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq. Millions of pounds have been spent to shield Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair from the outrage felt by millions towards the illegal attack on Iraq and the ongoing subjugation of that country and its people.

The democratic rights of working people are being trampled on to preserve British capitalism's mercenary relations with US imperialism. Not content with pouring thousands of police and hundreds of armed US security agents onto the streets, the authorities have sealed off large parts of the capital and invoked draconian powers of stop and search.

That Bush and Blair are reduced to skulking about in the shadows, appearing only at carefully stage-managed events, speaks volumes about the state of political relations in Britain. Such is the level of hatred felt towards Bush that he will not even take the customary open carriage ride down the Mall or address Parliament, for fear of being heckled by some MPs.

The Blair government can countenance such a deeply unpopular visit only because it is contemptuous of the political wishes of the broad mass of the population. There is more than a hint of *déjà vu* in these events. During the preparations for the attack on Iraq, Blair attempted to lend a veneer of "morality" to Bush's illegal war—issuing one document after another filled with lies about Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction. The aim was to deceive and manipulate public opinion and conceal the real war aims, centred on the seizure of Iraq's oil resources.

Today, all the pretexts for war have been exposed as lies. The US and British occupation has been revealed as nothing

but a renewal of imperialist colonialism and has met with growing resistance within Iraq and popular opposition internationally. Once again, Blair steps forward to defend the indefensible.

Through the pomp and ceremony of a state visit, Blair hopes to distract attention from the bloody quagmire that has been created in the Middle East and the increasing hostility felt towards his government and that of Bush by working people in Britain and the US.

The war in Iraq has proven to be a watershed in relations between the Labour government and the British working class. It has confirmed that New Labour is concerned solely with advancing the interests of the financial oligarchy and demonstrating its readiness to foist deeply unpopular policies on an unwilling electorate.

When Blair responded to the February 15 international antiwar demonstrations by insisting he would not bow to popular sentiment, he was expressing more than his attitude to an attack on Iraq. He was making clear that his government has no respect for democratic accountability and that the only opinions that count are those of Rupert Murdoch and other corporate moguls.

That a government can continue to pursue reactionary policies in the teeth of mass popular opposition demonstrates the extent to which the traditional forms and methods of democracy have been vitiated. Labour's open transformation into another right-wing big business party has not only left millions of working people disenfranchised, it has facilitated an historically unprecedented undermining of the social position of the working class. The gap between the rich and poor has never been as great, yet the working class has to this point found no means of countering the political monopoly enjoyed by big business.

All the official parties share Labour's right-wing economic agenda, just as they supplied Blair with ample parliamentary support for his war policy. Even his few parliamentary critics—a handful of Labour lefts and Liberal Democrats—fell into line as soon as the first shot was fired.

The contortions of London's "independent" Mayor Ken

Livingstone in response to Bush's visit confirm the worthlessness of Blair's official opposition. Livingstone is organising various antiwar stunts at the same time as he negotiates terms for his readmittance into the Labour Party, in order to save Blair from further electoral defeats.

Many now recognise that a political break with Labour and the construction of a new party to represent the social interests and democratic aspirations of working people is urgently required. But this begs the question as to what type of party is needed, and on what political program it must be founded.

Expelled Labour MP George Galloway and others in the Stop the War coalition led by the Socialist Workers Party argue that a new party should be a political extension of the antiwar movement. The strength of that movement, they argue, is that it was able to unite people of disparate opinions—liberals, Greens, Labourites, socialists and even Tories—on the single issue of opposition to war. Differences within the leadership of the Stop the War coalition centre on how limited the perspective of a new party must be so as not to alienate any section of the antiwar movement. Some argue that a new party should be akin to the old reformist Labour Party, while Galloway insists that even this would be too radical a step, as it would exclude Muslims and even Tories who believe in democracy.

Both sides of this debate advance a perspective that politically disarms the working class. Despite the global outpouring of opposition to war against Iraq, those in its leadership worked to subordinate the movement to pacifist appeals to the United Nations and the major European powers. Bitter experience, paid for in the blood of thousands of Iraqi men, women and children and a growing death toll amongst US, British and allied soldiers, has confirmed that it is impossible to oppose one imperialist power by lending support to another.

The UN's endorsement of the occupation of Iraq, with the full support of France, Germany and Russia, has shown that the ruling elite of every country will seek an accommodation with US imperialism rather than risk setting into motion a social movement that would ultimately threaten their own class interests.

A new party cannot be formed on the basis of the lowest common political denominator. In a society riven by class contradictions and menaced by militarism, it is not enough to profess opposition to war. To truly represent the interests of the disenfranchised masses, a new party must present a solution to all the social and democratic problems confronting working people—from militarism and war to economic insecurity, the lack of housing, health care and education, and the assault on democratic rights. It must stand on fundamental principles that constitute the basis for a

genuinely democratic and socialist programme:

* For the international unity of the working class.

Imperialist war is rooted in the capitalist profit system and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states, which at times of crisis sets into motion a violent struggle of each against all. The struggle against war must therefore be based on the struggle to unify the working class of all nations, races and religions against the common enemy—the capitalist profit system.

Against Bush, Blair, Schroeder, Chirac, et al, we call for the unity of the British, American, European and international working class.

* For social equality.

The same corporate interests that dictate the policy of imperialist conquest abroad direct the attacks on workers' living standards at home. This can be combatted only by building a political movement aimed at abolishing the economic foundations of the capitalist system—private ownership of the means of production and production for profit—and ending the monopolisation of society's wealth by an elite through the democratic control of economic life by the working people.

* For the political independence of the working class.

There must be a complete break with Labour and all those parties that stand with one or both feet in the camp of capitalism. All perspectives anchored in mere protest or pressure on bourgeois governments and institutions must be rejected. A new party must be built that seeks to mobilise the working class as an independent force fighting to take political power and establish a workers' government.

This is the perspective advanced by the Socialist Equality Party in Britain and our co-thinkers internationally. Through the daily analysis provided on the *World Socialist Web Site* we seek to educate a new layer of workers, youth and intellectuals that can advance the struggle for a new international socialist party. We urge all those committed to the struggle against imperialist war to contact the WSWS and attend our public meeting on Sunday November 30, at the University of London Union, Malet Street. This public meeting will examine the history and perspectives of our world movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact