Support the Iraqi resistance. Australian troops out of Iraq.

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The Socialist Equality Party in Australia calls on all working people, students and professional people to demonstrate against the criminal blood-letting being conducted against the Iraqi people by the US-led occupying forces and to demand the immediate withdrawal of all Australian forces from Iraq.

The working class must come to the defence of the Iraqi masses, whose legitimate uprising against colonial oppression is being met with homicidal massacres across central and southern Iraq. The courageous and heroic house-to-house resistance being offered by the Iraqi people in Fallujah and other cities, against the world's largest and most technologically-sophisticated military force, has already shattered the myth of American invincibility.

In retaliation, a crime of monstrous proportions is being carried out: residential areas and even mosques are being bombed, homes and crowded streets strafed, and thousands of Iraqi men, women and children killed or maimed.

Those responsible are nothing but mass murderers and war criminals. This includes not just the Bush and Blair governments, but their allies in the Australian political establishment. Anyone who seeks to justify this barbaric slaughter in the name of delivering "freedom" and "democracy" to the Iraqi people, is beyond the pale.

This is a popular rebellion by the poorest and most oppressed layers of Iraqi society. Amid growing reports of solidarity between the Sunni uprising in central Iraq and the Shiite insurrection in Baghdad and the south, the underlying class basis of this movement has come to the fore. "This is an army of the dispossessed," observed Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group. "It's a class thing, not just an ethnic and religious divide."

The uprising is directed against an occupying army sent to take over Iraq, impose US rule and install a Quisling government to implement the plundering interests of the American corporate elite—above all to grab control of the Iraqi oilfields. The nation-wide revolt is a staggering blow to the Bush administration and its plans to establish unchallenged US military and economic hegemony over the entire Middle East and Central Asia.

That is why, acting on orders from the White House and Pentagon, US commanders have openly declared their intention to drown the rebellion in blood. In a typically macabre statement, Lieutenant-General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of the coalition ground forces, vowed to conduct "deliberate, precise and robust combat operations to separate, isolate and destroy the enemy wherever we find him on the battlefield."

The participation by the Howard government in the war on Iraq—an unprovoked act of aggression against a defenceless country carried out on the basis of lies and concoctions—has become one of the darkest chapters in Australian history, ranking alongside the dispossession of the Aboriginal people and the decade-long involvement in the Vietnam War.

From the outset, Howard and his government have been the principal international cheerleaders of the Bush administration and its doctrine of pre-emptive war. They have unflaggingly promoted every fabrication cooked up in Washington to justify the war on Iraq, from "weapons of mass destruction" to claims that crowds would fete the invading troops as "liberators."

In the face of massive public opposition, expressed in antiwar marches involving close to a million people, and behind the back of parliament, Howard secretly committed SAS and other key personnel to the invasion some nine months before it took place.

Now, in direct response to the Iraqi uprising, the government has reaffirmed its unconditional backing for the US occupation. Whatever the cost to the Iraqi people, Howard is intent on shoring up the Bush administration and the US-Australia alliance in a quid pro quo aimed at furthering Australia's own neo-colonial interests in the South Pacific region. Not only are millions of ordinary Australians responding with horror and revulsion to the ongoing slaughter, but warnings are emerging from within the Liberal Party establishment itself that the alliance will lead to an historic debacle.

Malcolm Fraser, a former prime minister who was army and defence minister during the Vietnam War, has made pointed comparisons to that bloody conflict. "It's not just the Shiites that came out in force, or one section of the Shiites, it's not just the Sunnis, it's not just the loyalists to Saddam Hussein, it's Iraqis who want America out," Fraser observed. "And if that feeling grows, the more Iraqis that get killed, the more people will want America out."

Former Liberal Party president John Valder has gone further, saying there is a case for the American, British and Australian leaders to face a war crimes tribunal. "They were party to what has turned out to be an open act of aggression against a third party that was in no way a threat to them. Their reasons for going in have proven to be absolutely baseless."

It is highly noteworthy that these criticisms are far stronger than anything emanating from the parliamentary arena—above all from

the Labor party and its new leader Mark Latham. That is why Howard has been able to ride them out, dismissing references to war crimes out of hand and declaring that his government will not "cut and run" from Iraq, but stay "while there's a job to be done." It has to be clearly understood: "finishing the job," means the complete crushing of the resistance of the Iraqi people as a whole. To find historical parallels, one must go back to the Nazi occupation of Poland, the Italian fascist annexation of Abyssinia and the Japanese conquests of Korea and Manchuria.

With the collapse of all his previous lies, Howard has sought a new justification for continuing the deployment of Australian troops in Iraq. Having collaborated with Bush and Blair in the systematic bombardment and destruction of Iraqi cities and towns, he has insisted, with breathtaking hypocrisy, that Australian forces must remain in the country in order to help the Iraqi people rebuild it. In an article published by the *Wall Street Journal* on March 26, Howard argued that Australian troops were "helping to secure essential services for the people of Iraq."

In point of fact, the primary reason for the continued presence of the 280 Australian soldiers in Iraq, and 600 in neighbouring areas, is to provide international political legitimacy for the illegal US occupation. Facing a catastrophic quagmire, the Bush administration is desperate to prevent any withdrawals by Spain, Poland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and other "coalition partners" whose governments are under mounting popular pressure to pull out.

On the ground, the tasks assigned to the Australian contingent have nothing to do with assisting the Iraqi people. Its brief is to provide logistical and practical support to the US forces. Air traffic controllers are ensuring the operation of Baghdad airport, which is crucial for the movement of troops, military hardware and business traffic, while other forces are helping train the police and security agents of a future Iraqi stooge regime or patrolling the sea and air lanes around the Persian Gulf.

The rest are guarding the Australian embassy, primarily for the benefit of visiting businessmen, who are already reaping the rewards of Canberra's participation in the invasion. Major Australian corporations have so far picked up contracts worth more than $1 billion from the Coalition Provisional Authority. Some 70 local firms are in the running for further deals worth $24 billion, particularly in agribusiness, infrastructure, consultancies and private security work. Last month, Australia's monopoly wheat exporter was handed a contract to supply 460,000 tonnes of wheat.

Visiting his Australian media empire this week, Rupert Murdoch, whose newspapers and television networks in Australia and around the world have played a key role in promoting the criminal conquest of Iraq, propagating every sham pretext dished out by Bush administration officials, praised Howard for remaining "absolutely firm." "This country's got no alternative, it must stand with America," he declared.

Since tentatively suggesting, two weeks ago, that a Labor government would try to withdraw troops by Christmas, Labor leader Mark Latham has been at pains to emphasise his ongoing support for the US war aims.

In response to the Iraqi uprising and US retaliation, he has insisted that Australian forces must remain in Iraq, for at least the next several months, in order to fulfil Australia's "obligations as an occupying power". His pretext is that sovereignty must first be transferred to the "Iraqi people"—in other words, a puppet government made up of US-backed stooges that will sanction the indefinite continuation of the US military presence and the exploitation of the country's oil wealth by US, British and other foreign corporations. Latham's positions simply underscore Labor's complicity in all the dirty crimes of the Howard government.

At the same time, Latham has reaffirmed his commitment to the US alliance by criticizing Howard for pulling out of Afghanistan, which also remains under US occupation. The Labor leader has declared Afghanistan to be the frontline of the "war on terrorism"—a euphemism for the ever-escalating use of pre-emptive military strikes to establish the global hegemony of US imperialism.

The working class in Australia and internationally cannot allow the crimes of the Howard government and its patrons in Washington to continue. The Socialist Equality Party calls for rallies to be organised to demonstrate against the atrocities being committed in Iraq by the US and other occupation forces and to declare the solidarity of ordinary Australians with the Iraq people, who have the fundamental right to determine their own political destiny.

The demand must be raised for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Australian, American and foreign forces from Iraq and for all those responsible for planning, organising and propagandising in favour of the war—including Howard and Murdoch—to be tried and punished as war criminals.

Above all, the development of a genuine and viable anti-war movement necessitates a complete break from the Labor party and the entire official political establishment. It requires an entirely new strategy—the independent political mobilization of working people in Australia, the United States, Iraq and internationally against imperialism on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

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