

Reject Blair's colonial adventure—Withdraw British troops from Iraq now!

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The written response by Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair to the deepening crisis in Iraq reads like a mixture of arrogance and ignorance. But it is a mistake to attribute this to a failure on his part to understand what is unfolding in Iraq. Rather his April 11 opinion piece in *The Observer* is raw propaganda. His aim is not only to justify his support for Washington's criminal war against Iraq, but to lay the basis for still more violent repression of the uprising of the Iraqi people against the colonial domination of their country.

Naturally Blair cannot speak openly and truthfully about the situation in Iraq—a heroic resistance movement in the face of the superior military power of the US allies. Even the official figures released by the US army indicate the scale of the bloody massacre being perpetrated under the orders of Washington and London. The US acknowledges the loss of 70 coalition troops since April 1, but accepts that the occupation forces have killed over ten times that number. Hospitals and aid agencies in Fallujah paint a worse picture of atrocities, with reports of 600 dead in that city alone and 1,200 injured.

For Blair's purposes, however, this one-sided slaughter must be portrayed as a "historic struggle" for democracy that "we must never abandon."

No one can read Blair without balking at the depth of his cynicism, not least because he fired off his apocalyptic warning whilst holidaying in Bermuda.

Blair not only claims to be fighting for the creation of "a sovereign state, governed democratically by the Iraqi people" and to "secure the oil wealth of the country for its people." He also insists that the fate of the entire world hangs on the success of the brutal suppression now taking place.

He warns, "Were we to fail, which we will not, it is more than 'the power of America' that would be defeated. The hope of freedom and religious tolerance in Iraq would be snuffed out. Dictators would rejoice; fanatics and terrorists would be triumphant. Every nascent strand of moderate Arab opinion, knowing full well that the future should not belong to fundamentalist religion, would be set back in bitter disappointment."

Blair is only correct in that the subjugation of the Iraqi masses will strengthen pro-imperialist regimes throughout the Middle East. But fear of the destabilisation of the Middle East is not the main thrust of his propaganda. He concentrates on dangers closer to home—raising the fear of the population that a defeat for the US

and Britain in Iraq will strengthen the hands of "fanatics" and terrorists—"young men prepared to conduct terrorist attacks however and whenever they can" who are responsible for "thousands of victims the world over."

This too is a lie. Everyone by now must understand that it the unprovoked and illegal war waged by the US and its allies against Iraq that is the greatest single reason driving disaffected elements to carry out terrorist outrages, precisely because it has come to symbolise the imperialist subjugation of the oppressed masses of the world.

Blair is forced to acknowledge this, but pretends that such anti-imperialist sentiment is mere rhetoric and propaganda employed by the Islamists. "Of course they use Iraq. It is vital to them. As each attack brings about American attempts to restore order, so they then characterise it as American brutality. As each piece of chaos menaces the very path toward peace and democracy along which most Iraqis want to travel, they use it to try to make the coalition lose heart, and bring about the retreat that is the fanatics' victory."

What is at stake according to Blair, therefore, is "far more than defeat" for America or Britain. It is the "defeat [of] civilisation and democracy everywhere."

What is the purpose of such arrant nonsense? To intimidate the rising voices of protest against the crimes being perpetrated by London and Washington in Iraq and all those who believe there should be an immediate withdrawal of British, US and allied troops.

Blair repeats his earlier calumny against the majority of the public who are opposed to the war and the occupation of Iraq in portraying them as appeasers.

He declares, "The truth is, faced with this struggle, on which our own fate hangs, a significant part of Western opinion is sitting back, if not half-hoping we fail, certainly replete with schadenfreude at the difficulty we find."

To justify the violent repression of the insurgents, Blair portrays them as a group of malcontents in no way representative of the majority of Iraqis, who we are told welcome the occupation of their country and the apparent benefits accruing from the generous and entirely altruistic actions of the occupiers.

In the face of daily reports of escalating resistance and widespread popular hostility to the occupation, Blair merely asserts: "This is not a 'civil war.' Much of Iraq is unaffected and most Iraqis reject it. The insurgents are former Saddam

sympathisers, angry that their status as 'boss' has been removed, terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda and, most recently, followers of the Shia cleric Muqtada-al-Sadr.

"The latter is not in any shape or form representative of majority Shia opinion. He is a fundamentalist, an extremist, an advocate of violence."

Against these violent men stands the US-appointed Iraqi judiciary and provisional government. This becomes the occasion for a swipe at "how appallingly one-sided some of the Western reporting has become," when such brave men are portrayed as an "American stooge."

"There you have it," he concludes. "On the one side, outside terrorists, an extremist who has created his own militia, and remnants of a brutal dictatorship which murdered hundreds of thousands of its own people and enslaved the rest. On the other side, people of immense courage and humanity who dare to believe that basic human rights and liberty are not alien to Arab and Middle Eastern culture, but are their salvation."

Finally Blair insists that the only thing preventing the Iraqi people standing up to the insurgents is a fear that the West will not do what is necessary to win: "They read the Western papers and hear its media. And they ask, as the terrorists do: have we the stomach to see it through?"

"I believe we do. And the rest of the world must hope that we do."

For this reason, the real enemy is at home, "the appeasers."

He asks, "When they call on us to bring the troops home, do they seriously think that this would slake the thirst of these extremists, to say nothing of what it would do to the Iraqis?"

"Or if we scorned our American allies and told them to go and fight on their own, that somehow we would be spared? If we withdraw from Iraq, they will tell us to withdraw from Afghanistan and, after that, to withdraw from the Middle East completely and, after that, who knows? But one thing is for sure: they have faith in our weakness just as they have faith in their own religious fanaticism. And the weaker we are, the more they will come after us."

It is not hard to refute Blair's more ridiculous contentions. After all we live in an age where even with the existence of a largely compliant media, one has access to a wealth of reportage on events in Iraq. Moreover, no one but the wilfully naive would believe Blair's attempts to portray the Bush administration—the most right wing in US history, which came to power by stealing an election and which has extensive connections to the oil giants and other corporate interests presently engaged in seizing control of Iraq's assets—as a bastion of altruism and democracy. As for Blair himself, we have become accustomed to his attempts to occupy the moral high ground while ignoring the democratic will of the electorate in pursuance of his warmongering and pro-big business agenda.

Of more importance is to recognise the grave warning implicit in Blair's defence of the indefensible.

The prime minister is once again making clear that he will ignore all appeals for a troop withdrawal from Iraq and for the assertion of the right of the Iraqi people to determine their own destiny. His

is a government that acts solely in the interests of an international corporate elite—a super-rich oligarchy whose mercenary interests are the driving force for the renewed colonial subjugation of the world's peoples in order to steal its most precious resources.

Across the entire spectrum of official politics, there is no one who genuinely offers a principled opposition to Blair. The Labour Party itself has been refashioned as the preferred political instrument of the ruling class, because of its readiness to slash corporate taxes and impose cuts in social and welfare provisions that even previous Conservative governments had shied away from. The handful of ostensible "lefts" within the party offer only a feeble protest at Blair's worst excesses, but always maintain their loyalty and oppose any mobilisation of the working class against the government and its big business backers.

The Conservative opposition has supported the war against Iraq from day one and has fully endorsed Britain's role as an occupying power. Party leader Michael Howard's only criticism of Blair is that he should insist on Britain receiving a greater share of the spoils in Iraq in return for backing Washington. For their part the Liberal Democrats have abandoned all pretense of opposition now that Iraq has been conquered, calling merely for military repression to be "proportionate."

Without a decisive and politically independent intervention on the part of working people, the bloodshed in Iraq will not only continue but will worsen.

Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon has not ruled out the despatch of yet more British troops to supplement the existing force of around 10,000 troops. And Blair is due in Washington on Friday April 16, where he will no doubt be asked by Bush to stump up additional forces.

The two war criminals will do everything in their power to crush opposition to their occupation—whether in Iraq itself or at home. In reality it is they who cannot afford a defeat in Iraq. They know that there is overwhelming popular hostility both to their war and their regressive social and economic policies. Hanging over their discussions will be the spectre of the downfall of Jose Maria Aznar in Spain as a direct result of the overwhelming hostility to the war and its terrible consequences such as the Madrid bombings. That is why Blair lumps together the fight against the "advocates of violence" in Iraq, the terrorists and all those in Britain who oppose war and colonial subjugation.

Working people must reject all such attempts at political intimidation and take up the demand for the immediate withdrawal of British, US and coalition troops. No confidence can be placed in the Labour "lefts", the Liberal Democrats or the trade union leaders to take up such a struggle. We call on all those who agree with this demand to organise campaigns and demonstrations independently in your communities and workplaces and to contact the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*, so that we can publicise and coordinate such actions.



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