Socialist Equality Party US presidential candidate: “A vote for Kerry is a vote for war”

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The following is a statement by Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Bill Van Auken in response to the column by Democratic presidential candidate Senator John Kerry, “A Strategy for Iraq,” which appeared in the April 13 issue of the Washington Post.

If elected, Democratic presidential candidate Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts will continue and intensify the criminal aggression against Iraq and work to suppress the growing anti-war sentiment among the American people.

A vote for Kerry will be a vote for war. That is the unmistakable message delivered by Kerry himself in a statement appearing in the editorial pages of the *Washington Post* on Tuesday entitled, “A Strategy for Iraq.” His own words put paid to the false claims that the policies of the Bush administration can be reversed through the election of a Democrat.

“No matter who is elected president in November,” Kerry pledged, “we will persevere” in the subjugation and occupation of Iraq.

Writing at a point when the American government is dripping in the blood of ordinary Iraqis, having unleashed savage attacks on densely populated urban areas, and masses of Iraqis—both Sunni and Shiite—have demonstrated their hatred for the US colonial occupation and their willingness to give their lives to end it, Kerry’s declaration of unqualified support for the US aggression places him and his party unmistakably in the ranks of war criminals and their accomplices.

“While we may have differed on how we went to war, Americans of all political persuasions are united in our determination to succeed,” writes Kerry. “The extremists attacking our forces should know they will not succeed in dividing America, or in sapping American resolve, or in forcing the premature withdrawal of US troops.”

How many lies can be crammed into a single paragraph? Kerry’s description of the American people is a vile slander, and he knows it. Americans are not “united in our determination” to prosecute a colonial war aimed at seizing Iraq’s oil wealth.

There are masses of people in this country who have no sympathy whatsoever with the government’s policies and are revolted by the slaughter of Iraqi men, women and children, as well as the pointless sacrifice of young American soldiers’ lives.

Millions have demonstrated in the streets opposing this war, and recent polls have shown nearly half of the population supporting the withdrawal now of American soldiers occupying that country.

While Kerry now reduces disagreements over “how we went to war” to an irrelevancy, that was not what he was saying when he ran in the Democratic primaries. Then he denounced the Bush administration for “misleading the American people,” asserted that he would not have gone to war, and even claimed that he himself was fooled when he voted to authorize a US invasion—all in an attempt to deceive a Democratic electorate that was overwhelmingly anti-war.

As Kerry well knows, the candidate who espoused the pro-war views he now advances—Connecticut senator and Democratic vice presidential candidate in 2000 Joseph Lieberman—rarely got more than 10 percent of the vote, and generally far less. His campaign collapsed above all because he was defending a war policy that the vast majority of Democratic voters strongly oppose. Nothing could more clearly expose the nomination process as a means of hoodwinking the American people than the contrast between Kerry’s anti-war posturing during the primaries and his unvarnished pro-war policy today.

Kerry’s dismissal of Iraqi resistance to US occupation as the work of “extremists” is another contemptible lie. Coming in the midst of the continuing bloodbath in Fallujah, Baghdad and other cities, Kerry’s use of the word constitutes a clear endorsement of mass killing.

The Democratic candidate declares that if US generals ask for more troops, “we should deploy them.” He adds: “We owe it to our soldiers and Marines to use absolutely every tool we can muster to help them succeed in their mission

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without exposing them to unnecessary risk."

What does he have in mind? The US military is already killing Iraqis with F-16 fighter jets, Apache helicopters, Abrams tanks, missiles and cluster bombs. Is he suggesting that the tools of Vietnam—B-52s, carpet bombing and napalm—be brought to bear against Iraqi cities?

Kerry's choice of the *Post*, the semi-official organ of the Washington establishment, to issue his pledge of support for the Iraq war is no accident. When he emerged as the front-runner in the Democratic primaries, it was this newspaper that led the drumbeat within the media demanding that Kerry eschew any connection to the mass anti-war sentiment that he had sought to tap into with a combination of demagogy and claims that he was the only "electable" candidate.

In a February 15 editorial, the *Post* declared: "Mr. Kerry should clarify what he believes should be the objectives of the US mission in Iraq going forward—and what military and aid commitments he is prepared to make... If he is to offer a credible alternative to Mr. Bush, he must explain how he would manage the real and dangerous challenges the United States now faces in Iraq."

Kerry has obliged. He has gone all the way, disassociating himself as forcefully as he can from all those who oppose this war. His statement unequivocally brands anti-war sentiment as politically illegitimate.

He is not speaking to those whose votes he sought in the primaries. They count for nothing. Rather, the Democratic candidate is addressing himself directly to the ruling elite, for whom withdrawal from Iraq is not an option. They are determined to crush the resistance of the Iraqi people in order to secure US control of the oil wealth of the Middle East and further their goal of global hegemony. A defeat for US imperialism in Iraq would have catastrophic implications for their geo-strategic and profit interests worldwide.

The main thrust of the Democratic candidate's message is that the Bush administration is too incompetent and the president himself too stupid to be entrusted with such an important task. He, on the other hand, is prepared to get the job done, no matter what the cost in both Iraqi and American lives.

Kerry's statement is a damning indictment of all those liberal and "left" groups and publications that have insisted that "anybody but Bush" is the only "realistic" political strategy in the 2004 election. Their railing against anyone who dares to split the "anti-Bush vote" and their dismissal of any attempt at a serious, class-based critique of the Democrats as "sectarian" and "doctrinaire" stands exposed as an unprincipled and cowardly adaptation to the imperialist war cabal in Washington.

Those like the *Nation* magazine and radical guru Noam Chomsky, who are supporting Kerry, and Ralph Nader, who has tailored his "independent" candidacy to accommodate the Democratic campaign, provide a vital political service to the US political establishment and its war policy. They must fully accept responsibility for the consequences of their support for the Democratic Party and their opposition to the development of a political movement of working people independent of the two-party system. They cannot claim after November that they did not know what they were getting into.

Kerry's statement constitutes a serious warning. Every effort will be made by both parties to politically disenfranchise the vast numbers of people in the US who oppose the war in Iraq. A bipartisan ban will be in place against any attempt to question the occupation of Iraq in the context of the coming election. Those who persist in demanding the withdrawal of American troops will increasingly be labeled by both parties as accomplices of the Iraqi "extremists" and "terrorists" opposing the US seizure of their country.

Nothing could more clearly demonstrate that the struggle against war can be advanced only through a decisive break with the Democrats and the two-party system. It requires the building of a new mass political movement of working people that fights for a socialist alternative to the policies of militarism and social reaction shared by both Democrats and Republicans.

The Socialist Equality Party and its candidates are intervening in the 2004 election to help create the political conditions for the emergence of such a movement. We will tirelessly raise the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, and for holding accountable all those who conspired to launch this war of aggression.

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