

Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate

Bush and the Democrats are responsible for torture in Iraq

Bill Van Auken
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The following is a statement by Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Bill Van Auken in response to the recent revelations of torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners at the hands of the US military.

Photographs of naked and hooded Iraqi prisoners subjected to torture, abuse and humiliation at the hands of their American captors have provoked a wave of outrage and revulsion around the globe.

They are hellish images. A ghostly figure in a hood forced to stand on a box with electrodes attached to his fingers, told that if he falls he will be electrocuted. Another prisoner, his hands behind his hooded head is posed naked with a female soldier pointing at his genitals. Naked men forced to climb upon each other in a pyramid or simulate sex acts.

There are reportedly worse pictures yet to be published. Men savaged by guard dogs. A prisoner with electrodes attached to his testicles.

These are not unfamiliar scenes. They recall the brutality of the fascist bully boys of the 1930s, the torture chambers of US-backed Latin American dictatorships in the 1970s and the savagery of the French colonial war in Algeria or the US intervention in Vietnam.

The sadistic acts committed at the Abu Ghraib prison are not an aberration. They are the inevitable product of a criminal war launched on the basis of lies.

They are also symptomatic of the dehumanizing and demoralizing effect that the US occupation is having on a much wider layer of the American military, soldiers who find themselves trapped in a country that does not want them and who increasingly see every Iraqi as the enemy.

Bush's claim Friday that he was "disgusted" by these pictures is entirely hypocritical. Both the White House and the Pentagon have known of these abuses for months, but have sought to conceal them, rightly fearing that they

will only fuel antiwar sentiments among the American people as well as the hatred that is building up in Iraq and throughout the Arab world against the US occupation.

The attempt to pass off these crimes as the work of a half-dozen sick individuals will not wash. No doubt, those who enjoy such cruelty against fellow human beings are depraved. But soldiers have testified that this depravity was officially sanctioned. Physical abuse and humiliation of prisoners was standard operating procedure, a method encouraged by military and CIA interrogators to "break" them before they were subjected to the third degree.

Moreover, the state in which the pictures show the prisoners—naked and with bags over their heads—was not just staged for the cameras. Thousands have been kept in this degrading condition. Those familiar with the methods used at Abu Ghraib have recounted that Iraqis taken into custody by US forces are kept for days naked and without toilets, in unventilated, damp cells that measure 3 feet by 3 feet. This in itself is a form of torture.

Before declaring himself "disgusted" by the photographs from Abu Ghraib prison, Bush repeated his monotonous refrain that because of the US invasion, "there are no longer torture chambers or rape rooms" in Iraq. But, as we now know, there indeed are; they have merely reopened under new management.

Among the most disturbing revelations is that some of the brutal acts at Abu Ghraib were carried out at the behest of private contractors, mercenaries hired for their expertise in terrorizing their captives during interrogations. One of these mercenaries, according to the *Guardian* newspaper, was allowed to rape a teenage boy held at the prison. Because he was not subject to military discipline and no Iraqi law applies to US soldiers or civilians, he was not even charged with a crime.

Who are the Iraqis subjected to this sadistic abuse?

Thousands of them—ordinary workers, men and boys—have been dragged out of their homes for no other reason than being caught up in a military dragnet. They are held without charges, much less hearings. In many cases, their relatives are not even informed that they have been seized; they simply disappear.

In his statement Friday, Bush declared that the psychotic cruelty inflicted upon the Iraqi prisoners “does not reflect the nature of the American people.” True enough. It does, however, reflect the nature of this country’s ruling elite. It is the finished expression of a criminalized political establishment that has adopted methods of violence and terror to further the interests of the US financial oligarchy.

It is also a direct product of the reactionary politics and ideology propagated by the Bush administration and both major parties. The “war on terrorism,” supported by Democrats and Republicans, has been accompanied by a deliberate campaign to demonize Arabs and Muslims, casting them as “evil ones” and subhumans against whom any violence can be committed with impunity.

The message to US troops that they have a license to kill and torture has been communicated in a thousand different ways from the White House on down. When we call Bush a sadist, we mean it. This is a man who revels in killing and violence—from a safe distance—while claiming that he is doing “God’s will.”

The Democratic Party has adopted all the essential elements of this policy that now finds its revolting expression in the sadism at Abu Ghraib. Its presidential candidate John Kerry voted in the Senate to authorize this war and now insists that even more troops must be deployed to crush the resistance of the Iraqi people.

Thirty-three years ago, a young John Kerry was among those returning veterans who exposed and condemned the horrors that the US military was committing against the people of Vietnam, including the routine torture of prisoners. Today he shares responsibility for similar acts in Iraq.

In a speech on Iraq delivered Friday in Fulton, Missouri, Kerry would allow only that he was “troubled” by the photographs from the Iraqi prison, but insisted that “failure is not an option” and that “we do not have the choice just to pick up and leave.”

The “we” he speaks for is not the masses of American working people, who in ever-greater numbers insist that Washington do just that: withdraw the troops, stop the killing and leave the Iraqi people alone to determine their own destiny. The millions who oppose this war have been

politically disenfranchised. The two-party system has worked to prevent them from even expressing their opinion on the war when they vote in November.

Kerry speaks for the corporate “we”—the bankers, CEOs and multimillionaires who control both major parties and who see their profit interests bound up with the seizure of Iraq’s oil wealth and America’s assertion of world domination by means of naked force. His aim is to convince them that he can do a better job of defending their interests and prosecuting this war.

The revelations of torture and sexual abuse against Iraqi prisoners come on top of the massacre of thousands of civilians in Fallujah. They have further inflamed a population for whom the occupation means daily humiliation and terror. They are just one more assurance that the resistance will end only when the last American soldier is brought home from Iraq.

The Socialist Equality Party is campaigning to place myself and Jim Lawrence on the ballot for president and vice president in order to raise the demand for the immediate withdrawal of all US troops and for holding those who conspired to launch this war criminally responsible.

We are also running candidates for US Congress and other offices to take this program to the broadest audience and to present a socialist alternative to the policies of war, social reaction and attacks on democratic rights that are shared by both major parties.

Our campaign is founded on the firm conviction that ever-wider layers of American working people are disgusted by the crimes being carried out in their name and are searching for such an alternative.



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