

The New York Times manufactures support for the Iraq war in aftermath of Mosul bombing

Rick Kelly
23 December 2004

In response to Tuesday's attack on a US base in Mosul, the *New York Times* published an extraordinary front-page article yesterday, entitled "Fighting is the only option, Americans say." The piece quoted a number of people who expressed their full support for the ongoing occupation, and presented their views as being representative of the US population as a whole.

While the article was presented as an objective characterization of the nation's mood following the deaths of the US soldiers, it amounted to nothing more than a crude propaganda piece, aimed at limiting any domestic political fallout from the bombing in northern Iraq. The intended effect is to create the impression that any demand for an end to the occupation is beyond the "mainstream" and illegitimate.

Published under the byline of Kirk Johnson, the article began by quoting a man named Dallas Spear, an oil and gas industry worker from Denver. "I would never have gone there from the beginning, but that's beside the point now," he declared. "We upset the apple cart and now there's pretty much no choice. We have to proceed."

"Mr. Spear's sentiment was echoed in interviews in shopping malls, offices, sidewalks and homes on a day when the news from Iraq was bleak," the *Times* continued. "With 14 American service members killed and dozens injured, it was apparently the worst one-day death toll for American forces since United States forces defeated Saddam Hussein's regime in spring 2003.

"Many people said they were dispirited or angry, but many expressed equal unhappiness about seeing a lack of options. Whether one supported or opposed the invasion has become irrelevant, many said—there is only the road ahead now, with few signs to guide the way."

This was all presented as a news article. In all likelihood, however, the material for the piece was gathered after the headline had been decided upon in advance. What was depicted as the typical viewpoint of ordinary people is, in

reality, a reflection of the pro-war agenda of the newspaper.

A number of questions could be addressed to the *Times'* public editor. Which "shopping malls, offices, sidewalks and homes" are being referred to? How and where were these people found, and on what basis was the decision made to present their views as being representative of the entire nation?

The *Times'* assertion that the average American has responded to the deaths of 24 people by saying "we must press forward" is nothing short of obscene. Two dozen families have lost a loved one only days before Christmas, and more than 60 people were badly wounded in the incident.

While most people reflected on the human suffering inflicted by the bombing, the *Times* hurriedly concocted a story backing the war. The suffering incurred by the US forces in Iraq is of absolutely no concern to the newspapers editors, or to the political establishment as a whole. The soldiers are merely expendable instruments used for the advancement of the US's geo-strategic interests.

The article quoted Air Force veteran Bob Mayo who repeated the Bush administration's claim that the increased violence in Iraq was an indication of the insurgents' desperation. "It tells me that they are worried that they are going to lose," he declared. "They are just trying to make it as painful as possible and they don't care how they do it."

The *Times* added that the veteran would not characterize the situation in Iraq as getting worse. "There is no worse in war. War is the worst thing that can happen." Traci Sillick, a financial advisor from Colorado, added that "the nation should protect the soldiers, give them a clear mission, and then help the Iraqi people as best it can."

Antiwar sentiments, however vague, were given short shrift. Mike Lepis, a small business owner from Oregon, stressed his support for the troops. Carolyn Jolly, a Army civilian employee Virginia, hoped to see the troops come home "as soon as possible" after the Iraqi elections. Mike

Hoffman, of Iraq Veterans Against the War, noted that attacks such as the one in Mosul would continue so long as the occupation is maintained.

No one was quoted making any reference to the wider political, legal and moral questions involved in the Iraq war, nor was any criticism of the Bush administration noted.

“[W]hile some said the attack reinforced their belief that the Bush administration had failed in its goals, others found it hard to place blame,” the article declared. “Stan Joynes, a real estate lawyer and developer in Richmond, Va., said the administration was not upfront about what would be required in Iraq. But maybe, he added, the administration did not know either. ‘We know now we weren’t getting the whole picture,’ he said. ‘I don’t think they knew the whole picture.’”

Every opinion poll demonstrates that, contrary to the *Times*’ assessment, there is massive antiwar sentiment throughout the country and widespread hostility to the Bush administration’s policies. The latest poll conducted for ABC News and the *Washington Post* found that 57 percent said they disapproved of the president’s handling of the situation in Iraq, and 56 percent described the war as not worth fighting. When asked if the US should withdraw from Iraq, “even if that means civil order is not restored there,” 39 percent said yes.

The *Times* noted that another poll recently reported 47 percent of those surveyed thought the situation in Iraq had gotten worse in the past 12 months, compared to just 20 percent who believed the situation had improved.

But the newspaper hinted at a potential solution for such damaging findings—the elimination of opinion surveys.

“Some people said that polls themselves were part of the problem,” the article claimed. “Charlie Eubanks, a cotton farmer and lawyer from the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, said he supported President Bush but had been lukewarm about going to war. Now, he said there was no choice but to fight on, and that reports on opinion polls were only ‘aiding and abetting’ the enemy by making opponents think the American will is weak. ‘We’ve got to hang in there and get it done,’ Mr. Eubanks said.”

These comments, reported without rebuttal by the *Times*, can only be understood to mean that the newspaper may support, in the interests of the war effort, the blanket censorship and suppression of any antiwar expression.

The editorial line of the “liberal” newspaper of record is broadly reflective of the more farsighted layers of the American ruling class. At the same time as it issued various criticisms of the Bush administration’s tactless diplomatic machinations prior to the invasion of Iraq, it amplified the Bush administration’s lies about alleged weapons of mass destruction, and declared the country a grave threat to the

security of the US.

The *Times* is again stepping forward at a critical juncture for the US’s fortunes in the Middle East. Coming less than two months after the destruction of Fallujah, which was heralded as a major blow against the resistance, the Mosul attack has demonstrated the fragility of the entire US operation, which now hangs in the balance.

The occupying forces confront a nationwide insurrection, with Iraqi fighters capable of striking anywhere with impunity. Enjoying broad support among the Iraqi people, the resistance has taken control of many sectors of Iraq’s major cities and provinces. The elections scheduled for January 30 are entirely bogus, and are widely recognized as such. Wide sections of the Iraqi population will view any government formed after the vote—if indeed it goes ahead as planned, which is by no means certain—as no more legitimate than Iyad Allawi’s stooge regime.

The *Times*’ editors are acutely aware that these developments threaten American imperialism with a catastrophic defeat.

Yesterday’s lead editorial, “Grim realities in Iraq,” noted the precariousness of the situation. “Some 21 months after the American invasion, United States military forces remain essentially alone in battling what seems to be a growing insurgency, with no clear prospect of decisive success any time in the foreseeable future.

“Washington has no significant international military partners besides Britain, and no Iraqi military support it can count on. The election that once looked as if it might produce a government with nationwide legitimacy increasingly threatens to intensify divisions between the groups that are expected to participate enthusiastically—the Shiites and Kurds—and an estranged and embattled Sunni community, which at this point appears likely to stand aloof.”

Defeat is unimaginable for the US ruling class—and for the editors of the *New York Times*. The editorial called for increased recruitment into the armed forces, more troops to be sent to Iraq, and for the stepping up of efforts to cultivate a pro-US Sunni layer.

The newspaper prudently avoided, however, any discussion of their strategy to manipulate and suppress popular opinion on the subject of the war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact