

Unite European workers and youth against militarism and social reaction

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The following leaflet will be distributed at demonstrations to be held throughout Europe on March 19 to mark the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

On March 19, demonstrations against war and social reaction are taking place in the European Union (EU) capital Brussels and many other European cities. In contrast to the official organisers, who adapt themselves to the European governments, we call on the working population of the continent to unite on the basis of an independent socialist programme to oppose militarism and the attacks on living standards and democratic rights.

March 19 is the second anniversary of the Iraq war. The war marks a historical turning point. The US attacked a largely defenceless country, based on lies and in violation of international law. So far, the war has cost the lives of at least 100,000 Iraqis as well as 1,500 dead and 10,000 wounded American soldiers. The city of Fallujah, with a population of 250,000, was razed to the ground. Some 9,000 Iraqis are incarcerated in US-run concentration camps. Aggressive war and occupation were, and remain, war crimes.

The Bush administration has made clear that it will continue to enforce its interests by military might and regardless of international law. Since Bush's re-election, figures such as John Negroponte, Elliot Abrams and John Bolton, who earned their spurs by supporting military regimes and death squads in Latin America—in particular, the Contra war against Nicaragua—have risen to top political posts. US foreign policy has now targeted Syria and Iran.

The rejection of the Iraq war by some European governments, in particular Germany and France, has revealed itself to be utterly duplicitous. They have since given their approval to the US-led occupation and provided active support in the training of Iraqi security forces and the dispatch of troops to relieve US forces in Afghanistan.

From the outset, the governments of these countries were not opposed to the military subjugation of an oppressed nation, but rather were motivated by fears for their own imperialist interests. The effort of the US to bring the Gulf region, with its rich oil supplies, under direct control threatens European energy supplies and lucrative markets.

The European great powers have responded to the explosion of US imperialism by initiating their own rearmament programs and developing their own security strategy, which includes the policy of "preventive war" adopted by the Bush administration. They have established European military forces capable of intervening around the world, independently of NATO, as well as a European arms agency, whose purpose is to make the continent independent of American weapons technology.

Both American and European imperialism aim to press ahead with

the neo-colonial redivision of the world that began with the Iraq war, competing among themselves to grab the lion's share of the world's raw materials, markets and sources of cheap labour. The logic of this process leads to the further escalation of military conflicts—against Syria and Iran, against North Korea, China, possibly Russia, and, finally, between the great powers themselves. As in the first half of the last century, the struggle for the division and redivision of the world harbours the danger of a world war.

The growth of militarism is accompanied by the destruction of democratic and social rights. Bush's "war against terror" has two interrelated sides. Internationally, it implies the unrestrained use of military force. At home, it involves the destruction of elementary democratic rights, the creation of a police-state apparatus, and a further redistribution of national wealth in favour of the rich.

Europe is following the same path. The aim of economic integration under the umbrella of the European Union is to make Europe's major powers and transnational corporations competitive on the world arena against their international rivals by destroying the living standards and democratic rights of the European working class.

The new European constitution does not guarantee the rights of European citizens, but rather the rights of big business and the ruling elites at the expense of working people. It allows the free movement of "services, goods and capital," while imposing strict limitations on the freedom of movement of workers.

This finds its crassest expression in the treatment of refugees and immigrants. Thousands die every year at European borders because Europe has been transformed into a sealed fortress. The concepts of "liberty, security and justice" are linked in the constitution to a pledge to defend "a single market where competition is free and undistorted." The constitution further envisages the framing of a common military policy to establish Europe as a force independent of the US and NATO, replete with its own command structure and foreign minister.

This course has met with broad resistance from the working people of Europe. Just two years ago, millions took to the streets to protest the Iraq war. The demonstrations were particularly large in Italy and Britain, where the governments of Berlusconi and Blair supported the war. Since then France, Germany, Italy and numerous other countries have been shaken by a series of mass protests against unrelenting welfare cuts.

What these protests lack, however, is a viable perspective that can unite the widespread resistance and direct it to a struggle against the source of war and reaction—the capitalist profit system and the nation-state system upon which it is based.

To fight against war and social reaction, one must understand their causes: the crisis of the capitalist system. The fight against war and

social reaction requires a socialist perspective. The working class must unite internationally and fight for a socialist society that places human needs above the drive for profit.

The Bush administration and its right-wing policy are an expression of the deep crisis of American capitalism. In the first instance, this consists of the protracted decline in the world economic position of the United States, reflected in massive indebtedness and the emergence of the euro as a rival currency to the dollar. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq embody the attempt of the American ruling elite to counter this economic decline by exploiting its military supremacy. Related to this is the explosive growth of social inequality within the US. The concentration of wealth at the top of American society, while the mass of the population leads an increasingly insecure and precarious life, is incompatible with democratic institutions.

The crisis in the US has direct repercussions for Europe. The policy of social reconciliation that prevailed in the post-war period was closely connected to the supremacy of American capitalism. In the interests of its cold war policy against the Soviet Union, the US rebuilt its western European rivals. The collapse of the Soviet Union has convinced the US ruling elite that it no longer needs to pursue a policy of stabilising European capital. This shift in US policy has unleashed explosive economic, political and military tensions. European imperialism has reacted by pursuing its own global interests with increasing aggressiveness and introducing “American” social conditions at home.

This course is supported by social democratic and conservative parties alike. There are only minor differences between the policy of the Social Democratic-Green Party government in Germany and that of the conservatives in France or the Labour government in Britain. Regardless of their different attitudes to the Iraq war, Germany, France and Britain are closely cooperating in the build-up of European armed forces. This in itself makes clear that increasing militarism and social reaction are not simply the result of a particular policy, but instead the product of a deep crisis of the capitalist system itself.

The Brussels demonstration against war and the economic policies of the European Union was called by a broad alliance extending from the trade unions to organisations such as Attac and various peace initiatives.

Virtually all of these organisations have links in one way or another with social democracy. German trade unions such as IG Metall and Ver.di have closely cooperated with the German government to push through massive attacks on welfare provisions and impose wage cuts. Attac emerged from a layer of the French Socialist Party when that party was in government. And the European Social Forum, which first made the call for the demonstration, met last October in London with the support of the Labour-led Greater London Council.

The central thesis of these organisations is that, in opposition to prevailing “neo-liberal” economic policies, a socially oriented economic policy is possible within the context of the capitalist European Union, and that, unlike the US, European bourgeois governments can be made to pursue policies of peace. Their aim is to exert pressure on the European ruling elites to induce them to alter their policy. They reject a socialist perspective and the construction of an independent socialist movement.

This perspective leads to a dead end. It prevents the working class from drawing the necessary conclusions from the betrayals of social democracy and the unions and overcoming its illusions in the efficacy of social reformism.

Just seven years ago, nearly all European countries were headed by

social democratic governments. In Germany and England, they are still in power. Everywhere, they have imposed economic policies in the interests of big business. Their lurch to the right is irreversible.

There is no alternative to “neo-liberalism” within the context of global capitalism. The globalisation of production has undermined the basis for reformist policies carried out within the framework of the capitalist nation state. Transnational companies, which dominate modern economic life, can shift production and service industries to countries where wages and taxes are lower. Trade unions and social democratic parties are helpless in the face of this development. As defenders of the nation state, they must inevitably participate in driving down the wages and living standards of the working class in the interests of national capital.

The EU’s capitalist agenda cannot be opposed on the basis of a national reformist orientation or calls to preserve national sovereignty. Such a nationalist perspective only serves to divide the working class and facilitate the attacks of big business.

The defence of the most elementary rights and past social gains requires a fundamentally different strategy. At its heart must be the international unity of the working class, based on a socialist programme.

Only the formation of a United Socialist States of Europe can open the way for the development of the productive forces of the entire continent under the democratic control of the working class.

The same economic and social changes that have stripped away the basis for the social reformist programme of social democracy are also creating the objective conditions for the realisation of the Marxist programme of socialist revolution.

Globalisation has enormously swelled the ranks of the international working class. The polarisation between rich and poor in all capitalist societies, increasing militarism and war, and the mounting conflicts between the great powers have brought social antagonisms to breaking point. Millions of people are alienated from the traditional parties and are looking for a political alternative.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is published by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its constituent Socialist Equality parties around the world. It has been established to elevate the political consciousness of working people and create the basis for an independent socialist movement that unites the working class internationally. It publishes in several languages, providing a daily socialist analysis of the most important political, social and cultural events.

We invite all those seriously seeking to oppose war and social reaction to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and take part in the construction of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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