

Hillary Clinton, the Democrats and the Iraq war: A socialist alternative

Bill Van Auken
29 April 2006

The following statement by the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US Senate from New York, Bill Van Auken, is being distributed to the April 29 demonstration in New York City demanding an end to the US war against Iraq. It is also available in PDF.

The tens of thousands of people marching through the streets once again to demand an end to the US war in Iraq are confronted with some painful yet inescapable political truths.

First, protest in and of itself will not shift the policy of those who have launched the illegal invasion of Iraq and who continue a bloody war that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and more than 2,400 US troops. Those who occupy the White House and the Pentagon are impervious and hostile to popular opinion, as all of their policies demonstrate.

Secondly, the two-party system that monopolizes political life in the US works to actively thwart the will of the clear majority of Americans who want this war to end and to see all US troops withdrawn now.

The one great advantage enjoyed by Bush—as a flurry of opinion polls show his approval rating dropping to barely a third of the public—is that he faces no real challenge from the ostensible opposition party, the Democrats.

These political realities are no revelation. They have been manifested continuously since even before the war began. Then, protests by millions upon millions around the globe failed to sway the Bush White House from launching its “preventive” war of aggression. And the Democrats in Congress—New York’s Senator Hillary Clinton prominent among them—echoed the lies of the White House and voted a blank check authorization for Bush to launch that war.

At that time, Senator Clinton praised her husband’s 1998 decision to launch “Operation Desert Fox,” in which cruise missiles rained down on Iraq, killing thousands. She likewise pointed out that it was under the Democratic Clinton administration—not the Republicans—that Washington changed its “underlying policy toward Iraq from containment to regime change.”

But more than three years have passed, years of unspeakable horrors, from the massacre of Fallujah, to the torture at Abu Ghraib and the mass killings by US trained death squads. It is high time to confront these realities squarely and draw the necessary conclusion: not a single serious step can be taken to end the war in Iraq and oppose the eruption of global US militarism outside of a

decisive break with the Democratic Party.

So long as it remains tied to the Democrats and the perspective of pressuring the parties and institutions of America’s ruling elite, the antiwar movement will be a means not of ending the war but merely of venting the outrage felt by millions. A real struggle against war requires a new political strategy based upon the independent mobilization of working people on a socialist and internationalist program.

This is the perspective upon which I am running as the Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Senate from New York, challenging the Democrat Hillary Clinton. My party and its supporters will utilize the 2006 election not merely to expose the thoroughly rotten record of Clinton, but to bring to the widest possible audience a socialist alternative to militarism, social reaction and the unrelenting attacks on democratic rights carried out by Democrats and Republicans alike.

Clinton’s record is clear. She voted in 2002 for the war and has continued to defend her vote, no matter that the vast majority of people in New York and throughout the country now know that the justification for attacking Iraq was based on barefaced lies that she herself promoted.

She opposes a withdrawal of US troops from the country and has voted repeatedly to continue funding the war.

As a leading figure in the right-wing Democratic Leadership Council, she joined in issuing a statement declaring that, “Democrats must make it clear to the public that we stand for winning in Iraq, not a rush for the exits.” In other words, the bloodbath must continue until all resistance is crushed and 26 million Iraqis are subjugated to US corporate control of their country and its oil wealth.

Nor is Iraq the end of it. Clinton has sought to attack the Bush administration from the right on the issue of Iran and its nuclear program. Speaking last January at Princeton University, she denounced the administration for having “lost critical time in dealing with Iran” and accused it of having acted to “downplay the threats” and “standing on the sidelines.” This, under conditions in which the Bush administration has carried out endless threats against Iran. Then, Clinton issued a threat of her own. While acknowledging the need to seek international support for sanctions, she added, “We cannot take any option off the table in sending a clear message to the current leadership of Iran.” One of those options was revealed recently: launching nuclear strikes against Iranian targets.

There are those who have protested against Clinton's policies, but she is by no means an aberration. Hillary Clinton is the most representative leader of the Democratic Party as a whole and its attitude towards war, which is why she is considered the front-runner in the bid for the 2008 presidential nomination.

Indeed, the Democratic National Committee, at its spring meeting last week in New Orleans, took a decision not to discuss Iraq until after the election. Once again—as in 2002 and 2004—the Democrats are working to deliberately disenfranchise the tens of millions of Americans who want an end to this war and to prevent the elections from being turned into a referendum on Iraq.

Instead, the Democrats are running on a “real security” platform, unveiled last month, which vows to “rebuild a state-of-the-art military by making the needed investments in equipment and manpower so that we can project power to protect America wherever and whenever necessary.” As part of this pledge to outdo even the Bush administration in military spending and international aggression, the party promises to double the size of the Special Forces, the Army's elite killing units developed for the suppression of popular insurgencies.

Even the supposedly “liberal” wing of the party supports continued US intervention, as evidenced by the amendment to the latest “emergency” war appropriations bill put forward this week by Senator Russ Feingold. In presenting his proposal, Feingold stressed that his call for “withdrawal” concedes “the need for certain US forces to be engaged in counter-terrorism activities, the training of Iraqi security services, and the protection of essential US infrastructure.” In other words, tens of thousands of US troops would be redeployed to continue attacks on the Iraqi people and assure American control of the oil fields.

Those who claim that a blow can be struck against Bush and the war by supporting the Democrats against the Republicans in November are either fooling themselves or deliberately deceiving others. This is the Democrats' war is as much as it is Bush's.

The platform of the Socialist Equality Party upon which I am running against Clinton provides the only politically viable basis for mounting a genuine challenge to US militarism.

We call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US military forces from Iraq. We demand full compensation to the Iraqi people for the death and destruction unleashed upon their country, as well as to those who have suffered the consequences in the US itself—the families of slain troops and the soldiers who have returned with grievous physical as well as psychological wounds from this war.

And the SEP insists that all those responsible for conspiring to launch this illegal war of aggression must be held accountable, through the convening of war crimes tribunals.

The struggle against war can be waged successfully only if it is directed at its source, which lies in the social and economic crises that plague US and world capitalism.

The Iraq war arose out of a long-developed policy that enjoys the support of the two major parties and the corporate and financial interests that they both defend. It is a policy of utilizing US military might as a means of offsetting the relative decline of American capitalism by seizing control of strategic resources and markets, at the expense of economic rivals in Europe and Asia. To

maintain its position as the dominant power, US imperialism is determined to secure a stranglehold over the world's energy supplies. In this sense, Iraq is only the beginning, the prelude to far larger and bloodier confrontations.

This war is being fought for a ruling financial oligarchy whose interests and income are separated from those of working people by a social gulf unprecedented in history. Yet, the two-party system keeps this stark class divide from finding any expression in official political life, subordinating all foreign and domestic policy to the pursuit of profit and the self-enrichment of this ruling layer.

Hillary Clinton, who sits on a \$20 million campaign fund and who together with her husband, now counts her income in the millions, is a member in good standing of this wealthy elite.

The struggle against war requires the political mobilization of the working population. They are the ones paying the price for militarism and the reactionary social policies pursued in the interests of the profit system, in the form of unemployment, falling living standards, cuts in social conditions and the rising number of young working class men and women killed and maimed in Iraq.

The Socialist Equality Party advances a program for the radical reorganization of the economy in the interests of working people, including the repeal of the past two decades of tax cuts for the rich and a sharp increase in tax on corporate profits and the accumulated wealth of the super-rich. We propose the transformation of major corporations into public utilities to make resources available to put an end to poverty and create social equality.

I urge all those who support the fight for an end to war and inequality to join in the SEP's campaign. Participate in the drive to place our party on the ballot this summer and join in distributing our program as widely as possible. Through this fight we will lay the foundations for the emergence of a new mass socialist party of the working class.

Public Meeting

New York City

Saturday, May 20, 2 p.m.

Hudson Guild Carpenter Room B,

second floor 441 West 26th between 9th and 10th Ave

(Closest subway: 23rd St. stop on the “C” train.)



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