

The struggle against war: Break with Labour and build a new socialist party

By Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
23 September 2006

The following leaflet is being distributed today to the “Time to Go” demonstration being held outside the Labour Party conference in Manchester.

It is now three-and-a-half years since the invasion of Iraq. Every day since then has witnessed bloodshed and terrible suffering inflicted on the Iraqi people by the occupation forces and their stooge regime in Baghdad.

Sectarian violence between Sunni, Shia and Kurd is reaching civil war proportions and the country is threatened with break-up into religious and ethnic enclaves.

Just as tragic is the fate of Afghanistan. The coalition of warlords imposed by Washington has neither stability nor authority. All the claims made that the Taliban had been defeated and that peace and security had been established ring hollow as each day extends the list of casualties suffered by British and other occupation troops in fierce fighting.

Now, in the last months, the world has witnessed the terrible destruction of Lebanon by Israel, backed by Washington and London—the brutality of which temporarily overshadowed the depredations visited against the Palestinians on a daily basis by Tel Aviv.

Each one of these military adventures has ended badly for the Bush administration and the Blair government. They have demonstrated as hubris Washington’s belief that it could impose its domination over the world’s vital resources by force of arms alone.

No one should believe that this in any way lessens the dangers of further wars of colonial aggression. We are witnessing a return to the type of imperialist politics that characterized the first half of the twentieth century.

The Bush administration has made clear that it will not contemplate any retreat in Iraq and that it has its sights set on military aggression against Iran. A report in *Time* magazine asserts that a massive bombing

campaign by air and sea is currently being prepared and that deployments could begin as early as next month.

Bush’s critics within the Republican administration and the Democrats alike combine calls for a more multilateralist approach—achieving a *modus vivendi* with Europe—with demands for a more effective military strategy.

For their part, the European powers are seeking to exploit America’s difficulties in order to more aggressively assert their own interests in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The same warning must be made with regard to Britain.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has been fatally wounded by his support for the criminal actions of Bush in the Middle East. Yet there is no indication that this will produce a fundamental change in Labour’s policies.

There is a widespread recognition that things have gone badly for the Bush administration and that it does not pay to be so closely associated with it. But the response is to seek to develop a more effective but no less predatory foreign policy.

This is the case regardless of who eventually assumes leadership of the Labour Party. Chancellor Gordon Brown and the other major contenders for leader and deputy leader are stalwart representatives of New Labour and share responsibility for its military adventures and attacks on the social and democratic rights of workers in Britain.

To date none of them has issued any statement on foreign policy. Like Blair, they are seeking to win the support of Rupert Murdoch and the financial oligarchy of which he is a representative. Should anyone break ranks, it will only be from the standpoint of seeking to emulate France and other European states in demanding more from Washington in return for Britain’s support.

Lobbying Labour for a change in course is a dialogue with the deaf. However, this is the perspective of leading representatives of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC)—individuals such as Tony Benn and George Galloway’s Respect organization together with the Socialist Workers Party that staffs Respect.

Together with various smaller parties, Respect and the SWP have responded to Labour’s crisis by offering themselves as allies of disaffected sections of the bureaucracy or a possible new political home if Labour continues to disintegrate. Their policies are nothing more than a warmed over version of the reformism abandoned by Labour, based on the claim that peace—at home and abroad—can be restored if only a few bad leaders such as Blair are pushed aside.

Even while Lebanon was being laid to waste the STWC was sending “Dear Tony” letters asking for Parliament to reconvene. Now that Labour has erupted into factional warfare, its leaders claim this opens the way for antiwar sentiment to find a voice within the party.

There is a pathetic and shamefaced character to the arguments being employed. And for good reason. Labour is massively unpopular and faces electoral meltdown. Its membership is in steep decline and its branches moribund. If this were not the case it would not be possible for anyone to contemplate a leadership challenge that did not address the question of Iraq.

Only one MP has done so—John McDonnell. His candidacy has been seized on by Galloway et al as proof that there is still hope for the Labour Party, when it in fact demonstrates that no such hope exists.

McDonnell, even though he advances the most timid of reformist policies, will in all probability not even get on any leadership ballot. Despite stating that his campaign is to help “rescue this Labour government from itself,” he is unlikely to muster the 44 nominations by MPs that are required in a party that is so avowedly right-wing.

As for the trade unions, they will line up behind either Brown or one of the Blair loyalists that have come forward to challenge him.

Here also there are attempts to spread political illusions based on the supportive noises towards McDonnell by a few ostensibly left trade union leaders. This relies on the deliberate concealing of the role played by the trade unions in the creation of New

Labour and their abject hostility to the antiwar movement ever since 2003.

Such is Galloway’s insistence regarding those MPs and councillors “who are belatedly coming out against the war and Blair” that “It would be churlish just to note how wrong they had been for so long.” He has appealed for a common front with “those in the Labour Party who want to see the back of Blair—even if only for reasons of self preservation.”

The worst mistake possible would be to “forgive and forget.” To do so would only facilitate the efforts of the bureaucracy to repackage Labour in order to continue to attack the working class, both here and abroad.

Galloway’s statement serves to chloroform workers and youth as to the real state of social and political relations.

Contemporary economic life is dictated by a parasitic and semi-criminal ruling elite that seeks ever greater wealth through the impoverishment of the world’s peoples. The Labour Party is a political instrument of that oligarchy—which is why it supported war, voted in favour of draconian anti-terror laws and backed Blair’s privatizations and destruction of social services.

The struggle against war and colonialism will not be conducted through such an organisation, but against it. The task facing working people is the building of a new party to defend their independent interests. This must be based on a socialist and internationalist perspective for replacing the capitalist system of private ownership of the means of production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states with planned production for need.

This is the programme of the Socialist Equality Party, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. We call on workers and youth to read the *World Socialist Web Site*, which provides daily analysis on the major social, political and cultural issues facing working people, and to join and build the SEP.



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