

Socialism and the struggle against US militarism

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6 March 2007

The following report was delivered by Nick Beams, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) and a member of the International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site to local electorate meetings last week in Sydney and Newcastle. The meetings were held to launch the SEP's intervention in the March 24, New South Wales state elections. Beams is heading the party's slate of 15 candidates for the Legislative Council (upper house).

My task this evening is to explain the underlying historical importance of the struggle against war, which the SEP has placed at the very centre of its election campaign. We live in a period when, quite literally, the fate of humanity for decades to come is being decided.

Let me begin by recalling some of the remarks made by US Vice President Dick Cheney during his recent visit to Australia. In his address last Friday week, Cheney began by emphasising the significance of the terrorist attack on 9/11.

Since then, he declared: "We have learned the nature of the enemy's beliefs and the extent of his ambitions." The US and its allies were confronted with a global movement "determined to sow chaos and destruction within civilised countries." The terrorists, he insisted, were at war with practically every liberal ideal and "in their vision, everyone would be powerless except them." In other words, the "war on terror" is being waged against a movement, which, through "chaos and destruction", is attempting to establish a kind of global dictatorship.

Just to make sure the message was not lost, Cheney continued: "... it is they, the terrorists, who have ambitions of empire. Their goal in the broader Middle East is to seize control of a country, so they have a base from which they can launch attacks against governments that refuse to meet their demands. Their ultimate aim—and one they boldly proclaim—is to establish a caliphate covering a region from Spain, across North Africa, through the Middle East and South Asia, all the way to Indonesia. And it wouldn't stop there."

These wild claims recall nothing so much as the ravings of Adolf Hitler in the 1930s as he proclaimed that the historic mission of Germany was to protect European civilisation against the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy.

First of all, Cheney's claims themselves are unadulterated rubbish—B.S. to use the vernacular.

Or, to put it in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former National Security Adviser to US President Jimmy Carter, in his recent testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee warning of the danger of expanding US military involvement across the Middle East: "A mythical historical narrative to justify the case for such a protracted and potentially expanding war is already being articulated. Initially justified by false claims about WMDs in Iraq, the war is now being redefined as the 'decisive ideological struggle of our times', reminiscent of the earlier collisions with Nazism and Stalinism. In that context, Islamist extremism and Al Qaeda are presented as the equivalents of the threat posed by Nazi Germany and then Soviet Russia, and 9/11 as the equivalent of the Pearl Harbour attack which precipitated America's involvement in World War

II.

"This simplistic and demagogic narrative overlooks the fact that Nazism was based on the military power of the industrially most advanced European state; and that Stalinism was able to mobilise not only the resources of the victorious and military powerful Soviet Union, but also had worldwide appeal through its Marxist doctrine. In contrast, most Muslims are not embracing Islamic fundamentalism; Al Qaeda is an isolated Islamist aberration; most Iraqis are engaged in strife because the American occupation of Iraq destroyed the Iraqi state; while Iran—though gaining in regional influence—is itself politically divided, economically and militarily weak. To argue that America is already at war with a wider Islamic threat, of which Iran is the epicentre, is to promote a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Significantly, there was not one commentary in any of the mass media, or from any of the would-be critics of US foreign policy calling attention to the ravings of Cheney.

Why no serious examination? Because to draw attention to the fact that the central policy of the US, the most powerful nation in the world, is based on a scenario worthy of the mind of an Adolf Hitler would raise far too many disturbing questions. Let us try and illuminate some of them.

Just as a psychiatrist probes the phenomenon of insanity to try to discover the underlying reality of which it is a distorted expression, so a probing of Cheney's remarks begins to make clear the real driving forces of the so-called "war on terror."

In the case of Adolf Hitler, the invocation of the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy served two foreign policy goals of the Nazi regime: on the one hand, the struggle against its rival imperialist powers, Britain and France in the immediate sense, but in the long run Wall Street and the US; and on the other, the drive to open up the East, conquer the Soviet Union and provide *Lebensraum* (living space) for German imperialism—a base from which it could challenge its global rivals.

Likewise, the war against Islamist extremism, or Islamofascism as it has been called on occasions by members of the Bush regime, to prevent the establishment of a new Caliphate and defend Western civilisation serves very definite foreign policy interests of US imperialism. It is the ideological cover for the unending war to establish US global dominance.

Cheney's speech made this clear. This was, he insisted, a war unlike other wars and could not be fought with strategies developed in other wars. "An enemy that operates in the shadows, and views the entire world as a battlefield, is not one that can be contained or deterred. An enemy with fantasies of martyrdom is not going to sit down at a table for peaceful negotiations. The only option for our security and survival is to go on the offensive—face the threat directly, patiently, and systematically, until the enemy is destroyed."

Before we leave the field of mental disturbances, let us note one other well-known phenomenon—psychological projection in which the motivations and drives of an individual are ascribed to another person, that is, projected elsewhere. Here, as we can see, the spokesmen for

American militarism project on to the Islamist enemy the relentless drive of US imperialism itself for global domination in a war in which there can be no negotiation, no peaceful resolution and where the only option is to go on the offensive.

Outside the sphere of psychology, where do things stand on the ground? Here again we can refer to Cheney. While he did not mention Iran in his address, it was very much on his mind throughout his visit to Australia as emerged from interviews with journalists.

Asked by a journalist from the American ABC network about the progress of negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program and related issues, Cheney made the following revealing comment:

“Well, remember where Iran sits. It’s important to backup I think for a minute and set aside the nuclear question, just look at what Iran represents in terms of their physical location. They occupy one whole side of the Persian Gulf, clearly have the capacity to influence the world’s supply of oil, about 20 percent of the daily production comes through the Straits of Hormuz.”

Taking Cheney’s advice, let us back up a little further and examine the whole of the Middle East.

The map [1] before you, which was prepared in 2003, shows the relationship between US bases, oil fields, and pipelines. It makes clear the significance of the US invasion of Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq and the projected offensive against Iran. The US is waging a continuous offensive to secure its domination of the entire region and thereby exercise control over the world’s largest deposits of oil and natural gas. This agenda is not being pursued as an end in itself, but in order to ensure the continuation of US global hegemony.

The pursuit of this strategy, however, raises the threat of a new world war.

Consider the remarks of Russian President Vladimir Putin to the European conference on security held in Munich last month. Putin began by explaining that the structure of the conference allowed him to “avoid the excessive politeness and the need to speak in roundabout, pleasant but empty diplomatic terms.” Consequently, he was able to “say what I really think about international security problems.” We would, therefore, do well to listen.

Putin declared that the so-called unipolar world, based on one centre of force, one centre of authority and one centre of decision-making was completely unacceptable. He continued: “Unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies and created new centres of tensions ...

“Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force—military force—in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. As a result we do not have sufficient strength to find a comprehensive solution to any one of these conflicts. Finding a political settlement becomes impossible.... We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law....

“One state ... first and foremost the United States has overstepped its national borders in every way.... In international relations we increasingly see the desire to resolve a given question according to so-called issues of political expediency, based on the current political climate.... And of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe.... Because no one can feel that international law is like a stone wall that will protect them. Of course such a policy stimulates an arms race.”

There is nothing particularly surprising in Putin’s analysis. He is simply drawing out the implications of the unilateralism of the United States. In conditions of lawlessness, in which force rules, everyone has to resort to arms to defend their interests. However, at a certain point, this must lead to a clash between the major powers. Putin’s views, while not so openly expressed, are no doubt shared by many other European politicians.

Iran was not the only subject on Cheney’s mind during his Australian

visit. Significantly, he issued a thinly-veiled warning against China declaring that its recent anti-satellite test and “continued fast-paced military build-up” are not consistent with its stated goal of a “peaceful rise.” Accordingly, Cheney emphasised the importance of the trilateral security structure involving the United States, Japan and Australia and which is unmistakably directed against China.

What is behind this increasing bellicosity? A decade and a half ago, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cheney was centrally involved in preparing a new strategy for the US into the twenty-first century. The key issue, he and his associates insisted, was to prevent the rise of any power or group of powers that could economically and militarily challenge the US.

Since then the processes of economic globalisation have changed the map. Let me cite just one statistic that points to the scope of what is taking place. On February 7, the *Financial Times* reported that in the last year China added some 102 gigawatts of new capacity to its power-generating system. That is the equivalent of twice the total capacity of California—a state, which, if taken on its own, would rank within the top 10 in the world economy.

The question is this: can the United States as the pre-eminent capitalist power reconcile itself peacefully to the new situation resulting from the vast changes taking place in the very structure of the global capitalist economy or does the smashing of the old order mean the eruption of new conflicts and the possibility of world war?

The only way of answering this question is to consider it historically. At the beginning of the last century, in fact exactly 100 years ago in 1907, the Socialist International met to consider the implications of the new situation that had been created by what we could now call the first phase of globalisation taking place in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Prior to that time Great Britain had functioned as the pre-eminent capitalist power, a position grounded on its economic might. But now the situation had changed. On the continent of Europe, new powers had emerged, in particular, Germany. In the East, Japan was on the rise and in the West, the United States.

The old equilibrium had broken down and a series of incidents had taken place that pointed to the rise of conflicts between the major powers. It was impossible, the 1907 Congress resolution noted, to separate the struggle against militarism from the struggle for socialism as wars between capitalist states were the outcome of the struggle for markets and profits. If war broke out, it was necessary to strive to utilise the crisis it created to rouse the masses and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist rule.

Around the same time, within the bowels of the British Foreign Office, the issues of war and peace were also being considered. One of the chief matters of concern for the British bourgeoisie was the rapid rise of Germany and its striving to acquire a “place in the sun.” What were the implications of this development for Britain and its Empire? Germany insisted that it had only peaceful intentions in spreading its global reach, but how could Britain be sure.

In the end, according to leading Foreign Office official Eyre Crowe who prepared a major report in 1907 for his masters in the British government, intentions did not matter. It was immaterial from the standpoint of Britain, he wrote, whether Germany was intent on spreading its military capacity or was only concerned with a “peaceful rise” and spreading the benefits of German culture. In the end, the impact on Britain would be the same—it would lead to a diminution of its global position.

Seven years later, after a series of international crises, the First World War erupted in Europe unleashing a wave of destruction that had never been witnessed in human history.

The war resolved nothing and, just two decades after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the Second World War was underway. It concluded with the rise to unchallengeable dominance of the United States—a dominance based upon its overwhelming economic supremacy. It was this

economic pre-eminence, which proved, in the final analysis, to be the most important factor in stabilising world capitalism and bringing about the establishment of a new economic and political equilibrium.

When we speak of equilibrium, it should not be understood as signifying a static phenomenon. The motor force of capitalism is the accumulation of profit—it is an inherently dynamic system. Accordingly, an equilibrium must be based on a set of conditions, which permit the expansion of the various components of the global capitalist order. It was the establishment of those conditions, through initiatives such as the Marshall Plan and the reconstruction of the international financial system, which had virtually collapsed in the 1930s, that made possible the post-war boom—the longest period of sustained growth in the history of world capitalism.

It was that very growth, however, that altered the relationships between the major capitalist powers.

Already by the beginning of the 1970s, the US has lost the overwhelming economic dominance it had enjoyed in the immediate aftermath of the war. Whereas in the late 1940s the crucial world economic problem had been the scarcity of US dollars within the international financial system, by the end of the 1960s the problem was a surfeit of dollars. Matters came to a head in August 1971 when President Nixon removed the gold backing from the US dollar—the guarantee that dollars could be exchanged for gold at the rate of \$35 per ounce.

The next 20 years were marked by the signs of an irreversible economic decline of the US: the recession of 1982-83, the deepest since the 1930s; the loss of American dominance in a series of manufacturing industries; the transformation by the end of the 1980s of the US from the world's leading creditor nation to its biggest debtor; and the 1987 stock market collapse, the most severe since the 1929 disaster.

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s brought all these accumulating economic problems to the surface—or, to put it another way, led to them being brought into the sphere of politics. Of course, this was not how it immediately appeared. The collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a barrage of propaganda to the effect that we had witnessed the final triumph of capitalism and the market, the end of history and the transformation of the United States into the sole superpower, the unchallengeable global hegemon.

If we now look back over the past 15 years, the real course of events begins to emerge. Far from the collapse of the Soviet Union signifying the triumph of capitalism, it marked the opening of a new period of conflict among the major capitalist powers. Increasingly, the US sought to take advantage of the demise of the USSR to use its military power to overcome the loss of its economic dominance. That is the meaning of the increased military aggression in the 1990s—the first Gulf War, the intervention in Bosnia, the war against Serbia, the war on Afghanistan in 2001 and then the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

But this is an ongoing process. There is no peaceful outcome. One war immediately raises the necessity for new aggression. The overturning of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq has strengthened Iran. It is therefore necessary not just to continue the occupation of Iraq, but to reshape the whole of the Middle East, above all through “regime change” in Iran.

How is this madness to be ended? How is it possible to prevent the world being plunged into a new series of disasters? How is it possible to prevent the use of nuclear weapons ... already placed on the table as one of the options with regard to Iran? These are the questions that concern the whole of struggling humanity.

The first step in finding the answer is to draw the lessons of the past experiences. There is no way forward through the existing organisations, parties and institutions. Look at the experience of the Iraq war. The US engages in an aggressive war—thereby committing the same crime for which the Nazi leaders were charged and convicted at Nuremberg—and the United Nations carries a resolution authorising its occupation. The result is that the US may launch a war against Iran, claiming the protection of

the UN charter, on the grounds that its forces in Iraq are under attack from Iran and that therefore it is acting in self-defence.

I will not review the experiences with all so-called left and labour parties around the world. But everywhere, from the Democrats in the US, the Labour Party in Britain, the Labor Party in this country, to the centre-left coalition in Italy, Social Democrats and Greens in Germany, the picture is the same—the alignment, in one way or another, of these organisations behind the drive to war.

The working class must strike out on a new road. This is the central message of our election campaign. In the next historical period it must begin the task of building a new international socialist party committed to end war and militarism through the overthrow of the capitalist system and the reconstruction of the world economy on socialist lines. Unless that task is undertaken, a catastrophe faces the whole of mankind. The way to begin that task is by reading and studying the analysis of our party, the International Committee of the Fourth International, joining its ranks, and building it as the new party of the international working class.

Note:

[1] Map is from *The Criminalization of US Foreign Policy From the Truman Doctrine to the Neo-Conservatives* by Michel Chossudovsky.



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