

Withdraw all troops from Afghanistan and Iraq! A socialist answer to war and militarism

The perspective of the “peace movement”

**The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Germany)
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Demonstrations calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan are taking place today in German, French and British cities. The Socialist Equality Party and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, the British and German sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, support this demand. We call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, this goal cannot be achieved using the political methods advocated by the organisers of these demonstrations, which are limited to pressuring their “own” respective governments and trying to influence a section of the ruling elite in each country.

The war in Afghanistan is an imperialist war. The aim of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force is to assert geostrategic control over access to oil and gas supplies in the region.

The plans for the conquest of Afghanistan had long been prepared when two airplanes struck the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The roots of this process can be traced back to the 1970s, when the West began channelling funds to the local warlords and Islamic fundamentalists in an effort to bring down the Moscow-backed regime in Kabul. After the struggle between the warlords had reduced the country to a heap of rubble, the Taliban, who had been trained by Pakistan’s secret service, finally took control.

NATO has now bombed the warlords and drug barons back into power, with devastating consequences. Opium production reached 8,200 tons last year, representing 93 percent of world yield. Afghanistan sits fourth from last on the UN Human Poverty Index of 178 nations. Average life expectancy is barely over 40 years, and 700 children and 60 women die each day from hunger and lack of health care. The illiteracy rate is running at 70 percent in the cities and up to 99 percent in the countryside. Only a quarter of the population has access to clean water and just 10 percent have electricity.

Like every colonial occupation, the imperialist seizure of Afghanistan provokes popular resistance, which the Western media indiscriminately ascribes to the “Taliban” or “terrorists.” NATO reacts by striking back brutally, killing innumerable

civilians.

In recent weeks, the United States has expanded the war into Pakistan’s national territory, threatening to drive this nuclear power into a civil war, destabilizing the entire Indian sub-continent.

Crisis of the capitalist system

This reckless and perilous policy cannot be explained by the arbitrary actions of individual politicians such as President George W. Bush. That is proven by the fact that both the Republican presidential candidate John McCain and his Democratic rival Barack Obama have called for an increase in the level of US troops in Afghanistan and for harsher action against Pakistan.

The real cause of the war, like all other social evils, lies in the contradictions of a social system that subordinates human and social needs to the drive for profit by the super-rich.

“So long, however, as the main productive forces of society lie in the hands of trusts, i.e. isolated capitalist cliques, and so long as the national state remains a pliant tool in the hands of these cliques, the fight for markets, for sources of raw material, for world domination must inevitably assume a more and more destructive character,” wrote Leon Trotsky at the beginning of the Second World War.

The more the crisis of world capitalism intensifies, the more ruthlessly the struggle for markets and raw materials is pursued. Securing access to the oil and gas reserves of Central Asia and the Middle East is the core task of imperialist foreign policy. This goal lies behind the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, and it is the same reason the US and its European allies, along with Canada, are conducting war in Afghanistan.

Only last month, Georgia’s unprovoked attack on South Ossetia raised the possibility of conflict between the world’s two largest nuclear powers, Russia and the US. Like Afghanistan, Georgia sits in an important energy corridor and

was armed to the teeth by the US before being encouraged to launch its attack.

The European powers also pursue their own geostrategic interests. They have all converted their armed forces into international intervention forces to secure the oil and gas transportation routes.

Attacks on working people at home go hand in hand with militarism. Everywhere social inequality is taking ever more glaring forms. Welfare benefits are being abolished, wages cut and jobs destroyed. This is accompanied by attacks on fundamental democratic rights, justified by reference to the so-called “war on terror.”

The fighting in Afghanistan can only be ended and further wars prevented if state power and control over the economy are taken away from the predatory imperialist cliques. The fight against war is inseparably bound up with the fight for a socialist society that places the social and economic needs of the many above the profits of a minority.

The basis for such a fight cannot be an adaptation to one or another wing of a given country’s ruling elite, but instead must be an independent and international movement of working people.

The perspective of the “peace movement”

The so-called peace movements in every country reject such an orientation. Instead they seek to close ranks with those elements of the ruling class that want to keep their distance from Washington and place their own national interests to the fore.

In Germany, the peace movement does not reject imperialist control over Afghanistan, but instead argues for civilian rather than military methods. A congress on Afghanistan was organised in June, in order to develop “alternatives to military deployment.” The Left Party Member of the European Parliament André Brie has said that the key task in Afghanistan is the “long overdue reconstruction of the police and judicial system.”

The real deficiency of European policy in Afghanistan, Brie stressed, is that it “has not emancipated itself from Washington and is always ready to subordinate itself to Washington ... The greatest obstacle for a new and constructive Afghanistan strategy is European devotion to a pro-US policy.”

In France, the statement calling for demonstrations is directly addressed to parliament and the president of the republic, with the request that they “order the withdrawal of the French military.” It also stresses, “We are against a France that submits to American strategy...”

The signatories to this statement include the Communist Party and the Greens (who in 2001 were members of the Jospin

government that voted to send French troops to Afghanistan) and Olivier Besancenot’s Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR).

In Britain, the Stop the War Coalition has centred the demonstration on the Labour Party conference and an appeal to the Brown government to “change its priorities,” directed in particular to the handful of remaining Labour “lefts.”

Such a political orientation, which subordinates the anti-war movement to an allegedly “left” or progressive wing of the ruling class, can lead only to dead end.

One should remember the experience with the German Greens. At the end of the 1970s, when the US was seeking to station its medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe and directed at Russia, threatening to turn Germany into an atomic battlefield, the Greens stood at the head of the peace movement. Just 20 years later, after the Iron Curtain had fallen and a reunited Germany could once again pursue its own foreign policy, they found themselves in the camp of German imperialism.

As foreign minister, Green Party leader Joschka Fischer shared responsibility for German participation in the Afghan war and organized the installation of Hamid Karzai, an advisor to the US oil company Unocal, as the country’s president.

A movement against war must be developed independently of the ruling elite and their “left” wing advisers, linking the question of war with the social question. The conditions for such a movement to grow already exist as popular opposition to militarism and social inequality deepens. The International Committee of the Fourth International is seeking to build a new international working class party that fights for a socialist perspective. We call on all those demonstrating today to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and contact us.



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