

Into the maelstrom: The crisis of American imperialism and the war against Iraq

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28 March 2003

The following is the opening report to the World Socialist Web Site and Socialist Equality Party Conference "Socialism and the Struggle against Imperialism and War: The Strategy and Program of a New International Working Class Movement" delivered March 29, 2003 in Ann Arbor, Michigan by David North, chairman of the international editorial board of the WWSW and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party in the US. It was originally posted on April 1, 2003.

In assessing the first 10 days of the "war of choice" launched by the United States government against Iraq, I am reminded of the subtitles given by the British historian Ian Kershaw to the two volumes of his biography of Adolf Hitler. The first volume, which follows the career of the fascist leader up to the triumphant reentry of German troops into the demilitarized Rhineland in 1936, is subtitled *Hubris*, which the author defines as "that overweening arrogance which courts disaster." The second volume traces the descent into the catastrophe that finally engulfed Hitler and his "thousand-year" Reich. It is subtitled *Nemesis*, after the Greek goddess who exacts retribution for the folly of *Hubris*.

In the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq, the hubris of the Bush administration knew no bounds. Hurling insults and threats against whomever dared question the right of the United States to dictate to the world, Bush and his associates promised to teach Iraq and everyone else a lesson they would never forget. But it has not turned out as the administration expected. In the era of the Vietnam War, nearly four decades ago, it required several years before the gross fallacies of the political and military strategy upon which the American intervention was based became clear. In this war, the bankruptcy of the entire project has been exposed within one week.

The 10 days of war have dealt a staggering blow to the aura of American invincibility so assiduously cultivated by the media. Donald Rumsfeld suddenly looks like a rumpled and cranky old man, with a bead of sweat above his upper lip. What remains of the predictions of the Bush administration, the military experts and the media: That within the first hours of war, Iraq would be "shocked and awed" into submission? That the Iraqi regime was completely isolated and would crumble? That the Iraqi military was incapable of fighting? That the bombing of "command and control" centers would paralyze Iraq's ability to organize any significant military operations? And, above all, that American and British forces would be welcomed as saviors and liberators.

In advance of the war, Kenneth Adelman—one of the right-wing strategists who had been urging the invasion of Iraq for a decade—wrote in the *Washington Post*: "I believe demolishing Hussein's military power and liberating Iraq would be a cakewalk." Richard Perle, another leading instigator of the war, declared on MSNBC: "There may be pockets of resistance, but very few Iraqis are going to fight to defend Saddam Hussein."

The media accepted these claims without any reservations. It dispatched its celebrity correspondents to Kuwait, to be "embedded" (or in bed with) the American military. They were all entranced by the prospect of

participating in the glorious victory lap to Baghdad.

There was not a trace of critical reporting, let alone a probing analysis of the claims made by the Bush administration. The last year witnessed the complete degeneration of the establishment media into nothing more than an outlet of White House and Pentagon propaganda. It made no attempt to distinguish fact from misinformation, lies and pure fiction. The media gladly accepted its integration as a tool of the military's psychological operations. Let us recall just a few of the stories reported by CNN, MSNBC, FOX and the other networks during the past two weeks: that Republican Guard generals were negotiating surrender terms via email; that Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz had defected; that Saddam Hussein had been killed; that American troops were being warmly welcomed as they entered into Baghdad; and, most recently, that an uprising was in progress in Basra.

All of these claims, crudely and stupidly concocted by the Pentagon, were accepted by the media and broadcast as objective facts. As recently as last Sunday, the *Washington Post* produced an editorial in which it fantasized about "families with children ... lining roads near the southern city of Basra, waving and cheering at US and British forces as they rumbled north." It denounced "obstructionist diplomats, and many of the antiwar demonstrators" who "closed their eyes to the threat of Saddam Hussein and the terror of his regime." Haughtily, the *Post* instructed those who opposed the war to "look at Iraqis who are greeting the Marines as liberators."

The media overdosed on its own propaganda. Everything was anticipated except Iraqi resistance. The media projected its own prostration before the might of the American military onto 23 million Iraqis. Its own subservience to the state left it completely unprepared for the difficulties and setbacks encountered by the invaders. In fact, the self-deception continued even as the difficulties confronting the US military forces mounted. Nothing broadcast by the media in the opening days of the war indicated to the public the extent of the logistical, tactical and strategic miscalculations of the Bush administration. The media spoke rapturously of the "column of steel" that was moving north at breakneck speed, of the earth quaking beneath the weight of the treads of mighty tanks driving forward relentlessly.

But by Thursday the façade had cracked. The *Washington Post* carried a report that revealed growing anxiety within the military over the strategy of the Pentagon:

"The combination of wretched weather, long and insecure supply lines, and an enemy that has refused to be supine in the face of American military might has led to a broad reassessment by some top generals of US military expectations and timelines. Some of them see even the potential threat of a drawn-out fight that sucks in more and more US forces. Both on the battlefield in Iraq and in Pentagon conference rooms, military commanders were talking yesterday about a longer, harder war than had been expected just a week ago, the officials said.

"Tell me how this ends," one senior officer said yesterday."

The Pentagon is now being compelled to confront the unanticipated consequences of its own illusions. Tens of thousands of additional troops are being dispatched to Iraq—not only to provide manpower for an assault on Baghdad, but to protect overextended supply lines that are highly vulnerable to attack.

With unbounded cynicism, the Bush administration has dubbed this war “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” In the face of increasing mass resistance, the logic of its objective—the seizure of Iraq and its transformation into an American colonial protectorate—will drive the United States into increasingly violent reprisals against the Iraqi people. The United States will seek to “liberate” the people of Iraq by laying siege to Baghdad and bombing and starving its people. Bush has repeatedly stated that this will not be a war of half-measures. Unless the government is stopped, this war will degenerate inevitably into an orgy of mass murder.

A history of unrestrained brutality

It has been remarked frequently that the level of popular opposition to the war exceeded, even before it had begun, the opposition to the Vietnam War, even at the height of that era’s antiwar movement. The protest demonstrations prior to the outbreak of war were the largest in history. The demonstrations and rallies held on the weekend of February 15-16 were without precedent—not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. Never has there occurred such a manifestation of international opposition to war. Not even in the heyday of the Second International, before the outbreak of World War I in 1914, had it been possible to organize such a coordinated international movement against war. A movement that embraces millions of people all across the globe must have deep objective significance—all the more so as it emerged more or less spontaneously. For reasons that I will attempt to explain somewhat later in this report, these mass demonstrations mark the beginning of a new stage in the struggle against imperialism.

However, it is first of all necessary to acknowledge that the mass protest demonstrations could not stop war. For the movement against war to become a powerful social force requires that it attain a far higher level of political consciousness. It needs a program and perspective upon which a mass struggle against imperialism can be based.

The greatest mistake would be to underestimate the tenacity of the ruling elite and its capacity for ruthlessness. The American ruling class and its military are not invincible. But they are not pushovers. All its vast historical experience, accumulated in the course of countless wars against enemies abroad and in bitter struggle against opposition at home, has conditioned the ruling elite to respond with unrestrained brutality to challenges to its class interests. The crass violation of democratic principles by Attorney General John Ashcroft has many precedents in the history of the American ruling class: the Palmer Raids of 1919-20; the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937; the McCarthyite witch-hunts of the 1950s; the bloody suppression of the ghetto rebellions in Newark, Detroit and other cities in the late 1960s; the killing of four Kent State students protesting the Vietnam War in May 1970; the massacre of inmates at Attica prison in September 1971 ... all the way up to the incineration of more than 80 confused and politically harmless men, women and children in Waco, Texas in April 1993.

It is appropriate to recall such historical experiences because the struggle against war must base itself on a detailed and profound knowledge of the historical development of American imperialism and of the world capitalist system of which it is the most decisive component. The war against Iraq can best be understood as both a culmination and turning point of a complex and lengthy historical process. Though it

certainly instigated this war, and bears full political and moral responsibility for its consequences, the Bush administration is far less the maker of history than it is the tool of powerful objective processes it can hardly comprehend. As in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I, and in 1939 with the outbreak of World War II, the eruption of war in 2003 arises out of deep-rooted contradictions in the world capitalist system. Understood in the broadest historical context, the contradictions that have given rise to this war are, in their essence, the same as those which produced the previous world wars. Once again, war arises out of the underlying conflict between the essentially global character of economic development and the anachronistic character of the nation-state system.

The hegemonic project proclaimed by the Bush administration, most openly in its National Security Strategy document of September 2002, represents an attempt to subordinate all the vast resources of the world economy to the needs and interests of the United States—or, to be more precise, the ruling elite of the United States. All conflicts over access to, and utilization of, resources among existing national capitalist states, of which oil is the most important, are to be resolved by the most powerful of capitalist nation-states, the United States. These decisions are to be made not on the basis of rational calculations of genuine human needs, but on the basis of the profit calculations of the largest shareholders in American-controlled transnational corporations.

The historical roots of the war against Iraq

I will have to ask the indulgence of this audience to do something that goes against the grain of the dominant pragmatic tendency of American thought—that is, to seek an understanding of, and solution to, present-day problems by examining their historical roots. Therefore, as we approach the bloody climax of American imperialism, it is necessary to review its origins and development. Strangely, and to a great extent unconsciously, this history has been invoked by various representatives of the Bush administration, including Rumsfeld. This has taken the form of asserting that the United States has no colonial ambitions or any sort of predatory designs on Iraq’s territory and natural resources. As always, America seeks only to liberate the people of the country it is invading.

No other imperialist country has so persistently and successfully cloaked even its most barbaric deeds with the rhetoric of democratic idealism. This success may be attributed to the revolutionary origins of the United States. At the moment of its birth it proclaimed the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That these blessings were denied to 3 million people who toiled as slaves was a contradiction that the founding fathers and their immediate progeny sought to paper over. But even as the United States embraced its “Manifest Destiny”—to secure control over an entire continent—the unresolved issue of slavery tore the country apart and led, in 1861, to Civil War. Under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, the defense of the Union assumed revolutionary dimensions. The economic foundations of the Confederacy were overthrown and property in slaves valued at \$4 billion was expropriated.

But the development of the United States in the aftermath of the Civil War proceeded along lines very different from those that had been imagined by Lincoln. The destruction of slavery and the preservation of the Union did not produce a “new birth of freedom,” but, rather, the consolidation of industrial capitalism on the North American continent. The outcome of this inevitable economic process was not government of, for and by the people, but of, for and by the new capitalist plutocracy. All impediments to the expansion of capitalism and the unchallenged hegemony of the profit system were ruthlessly destroyed or suppressed. What remained of Native American society and culture—which resisted

assimilation into an economic system based on private ownership of land and industry—was shattered within 30 years. At the same time, the American bourgeoisie brutally suppressed the first great struggles of the emerging working class: the national railway strike of 1877, the struggle for the eight-hour day in the 1880s, the Homestead Steel strike in 1892, and the Pullman strike of 1894, to name only the most famous eruptions of class struggle.

The national consolidation of American capitalism set the stage for its extraterritorial expansion. The outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898 marked the beginning of America's career as an imperialist power. Proclaiming as its mission the liberation of oppressed peoples, the United States celebrated its victory over Spain by subjugating Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean and the Philippines in the Pacific. The "liberation" of that Pacific archipelago required the brutal suppression of a national democratic insurgency, at the cost of over 200,000 Philippine lives.

The emergence of the United States as a world power at the end of the nineteenth century was part of a world process. While the initial growth of colonialism had many varied political and economic motivations, it had, by the late nineteenth century, metastasized into an imperialist system characterized by an increasingly ferocious struggle among the most powerful capitalist states for markets and spheres of influence. Through these struggles the major capitalist powers sought to secure for themselves a dominant position in the world economy.

The European war and the Russian Revolution

The bitter conflicts among the major imperialist powers in Europe led finally to the eruption of war in August 1914. The historical causes underlying this war were explained most brilliantly by a Russian Marxist, Leon Trotsky:

"The present war is at bottom a revolt of the forces of production against the political form of nation and state. It means the collapse of the national state as an independent economic unit.... [T]he real objective significance of the War is the breakdown of the present national economic centers, and the substitution of a world economy in its stead. But the way the governments propose to solve this problem of imperialism is not through the intelligent, organized cooperation of all of humanity's producers, but through the exploitation of the world economic system by the capitalist class of the victorious country; which country is by this War to be transformed from a Great Power into a World Power."

War, then, was the means by which the ruling classes of the major capitalist countries sought to resolve, in their national interest, problems posed by the global development of the productive forces. Was there another solution to this problem? Yes, there was. There existed not only a bourgeois response to the problems created by the contradiction between world economy and the nation-state system. There also existed the potential of a working class solution to this same problem—that is, the overthrow of the entire nation-state system and the harmonious integration of the national components of the global economy through world social revolution. The same contradictions that drove the imperialist bourgeoisie to war would drive the international working class to socialist revolution.

This extraordinary insight into the dynamic of world historical development was confirmed in the eruption of the Russian Revolution in 1917.

The outbreak of the European war in 1914 and the Russian Revolution in 1917 was to have, for the United States, the most far-reaching historical consequences. Though the United States had become by 1914, in purely economic terms, the largest and most productive capitalist economy in the world, its belated entry onto the world stage kept it in the shadow of the

vast British Empire. But the European slaughter, which devastated Europe and drained Britain of so much of its accumulated wealth, transformed the balance of power between the Old and New Worlds. By the time the United States entered the war in 1917, its position as the greatest of all capitalist powers was already assured. However, at the very moment when the United States emerged as the preeminent world power, the victory of socialist revolution in Russia and the establishment of the Soviet Union posed an unprecedented historical challenge to the survival of the whole imperialist world system.

The United States responded to the threat by attempting to overthrow the revolutionary government. President Woodrow Wilson dispatched troops to bolster the efforts of the counterrevolutionary forces led by ex-tsarist generals. These efforts failed and the United States was compelled to withdraw its expeditionary force. In retribution, it withheld diplomatic recognition to Soviet Russia (a position which was not reversed until 1933) and launched a ferocious witch-hunt of radical and socialist sympathizers of the revolution within the United States.

It is clearly not possible within the framework of a single report to review the vicissitudes of world history in the course of the twentieth century. But this essential generalization can be made: the existence of the Soviet Union cast a dark shadow over the whole development of American imperialism for most of the remainder of the twentieth century. From the beginning of its international career as the greatest imperialist power, the United States saw in the Soviet Union a threat that was fundamentally different, and potentially far greater, than that posed by any capitalist rival. The existence of the Soviet Union called into question the historical legitimacy of bourgeois rule and the entire world capitalist system. The fear inspired by this fundamental challenge posed by the Soviet state accounts for the extraordinary role played by anticommunism in American political life.

It must be stressed that the character of the Soviet state underwent a vast and disastrous degeneration. Beginning with the political defeat of Trotsky and the Left Opposition between 1923 and 1927, and the subsequent consolidation of the dictatorship of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the principles of revolutionary internationalism upon which the October Revolution had been based were systematically and completely betrayed. Nothing remained of Marxism in the USSR except a sterile phraseology that served only to stultify genuine revolutionary thought and justify the policies of the parasitic bureaucratic regime.

However, to the extent that the Soviet Union blocked the establishment of capitalist property forms on a large part of the earth's surface, thwarted, in one way or another, the realization of the global ambitions of the United States and, above all, represented the possibility of a non-capitalist society, it provoked the unrelenting enmity of the United States.

The United States after World War II

The United States emerged out of the chaos of the Second World War as the indisputable arbiter of the affairs of world capitalism. All of its previous imperialist rivals in Europe and in Asia lay at its feet. Neither England nor France were in a position to maintain their old empires—and, as a matter of policy, the United States would not accept the perpetuation of old imperial relations that blocked its own access to resources and markets. They were compelled to fall in line behind the global leadership of the United States.

But its own hegemonic aspirations were curtailed by a world situation that did not permit the unrestrained exercise of America's military might. First, the Soviet Union had emerged as a world power, as a consequence of its decisive role in the defeat of Nazi Germany. Second, the defeat of

fascism and the evident weakening of the old European imperial powers were met with an unprecedented revolutionary movement of the masses, in what came to be known as the “Third World,” against colonialism. Third, the demands of the working class in the United States and other advanced capitalist countries for improvements in living standards, in the aftermath of two decades of Depression and war, did not permit the imposition of the levels of personal sacrifice that would be required by all-out war against the USSR and the insurgent masses throughout the Third World. Moreover, once the USSR acquired nuclear weapons, the risk that a third world war would pose to the United States was greater than any rational section of the American ruling class was willing to take.

However, the direction of American policy in the immediate aftermath of World War II was not altogether clear. Substantial and powerful sections of the ruling elite advocated an all-out offensive against the Soviet Union—that is, a “roll-back” policy that would reestablish the unchallenged supremacy of the world capitalist system under the leadership of the United States. But the general expansion of the world economy in the aftermath of World War II strengthened the hand of those sections of the American ruling class that favored the working out of some sort of compromise with the Soviet Union. The character of this compromise was elaborated in the program of “containment” pioneered by the most important of American diplomats, George F. Kennan. The United States would refrain from seeking a direct military confrontation with the USSR. It would tolerate its existence and the maintenance of a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. But it would attempt to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in all other regions of the world. “Soviet influence” was defined as any manifestation of socialist or anti-imperialist sentiments that potentially threatened American capitalist interests in any part of the world.

But how far could the United States go in the pursuit of containment? Up to the point at which it threatened the eruption of war with the USSR and, later, China, and raised the risk of a nuclear Armageddon. Thus, in the case of the Korean conflict, the United States intervened militarily to prop up the South Korean puppet state. But when General MacArthur’s reckless decision to cross the 37th Parallel and advance toward the Yalu River brought China into the war, the Truman administration rejected his demand that the US respond with nuclear weapons.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a bitter struggle raged within the American ruling class over the extent to which compromise could be tolerated with the Soviet Union, China and, indirectly, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. There always existed substantial sections of the ruling elite that favored the unrestrained application of military power—including the use of nuclear weapons—against countries that came into conflict with, or frustrated the attainment of, an important American interest.

As long as the postwar expansion continued, the strategists of American imperialism counseled “restraint”—if that is an appropriate word for policies which sanctioned the killing of 3 million Vietnamese in the course of a 10-year war, and the organization of innumerable CIA-financed coup d’états, such as the overthrow of the nationalist regime of Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953, of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, the overthrow and murder of Lumumba in the Congo in 1960, the countless efforts to destroy the Castro regime in Cuba, the overthrow of the Goulart government in Brazil in 1964, the organization of the Indonesian counterrevolution that brought Suharto to power in 1965, the orchestration of the revolt of the right-wing Greek colonels in 1967, and the overthrow and murder of Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973. That was the moderate policy. I can leave to your imagination what a hard-line policy would have consisted of.

By the end of the 1960s, there were mounting signs that the dominant position of the United States in world capitalism was fading. The rebuilding of the European economies and the emergence of Japan led

inevitably to a decline in the statistical indices of American economic superiority. The deterioration in America’s balance of payments, reflecting the relative weakening of its export-oriented industries vis-à-vis its European and Asian rivals, set into motion a protracted crisis of the international financial system based on the critical role played by the dollar as world reserve currency. By 1971, the United States was obliged to renounce the keystone of the postwar financial system—the guaranteed convertibility of the dollar into gold. This brought to an end the postwar economic expansion and set into motion a long-term crisis of the world capitalist system.

All aspects of American policy, both foreign and domestic, under Democrats as well as Republicans, can be best understood as a response to the problems arising from the mounting contradictions of capitalism as a world system and to the deterioration of the position of the United States within that system. In its domestic policy, the response of the ruling class to the international crisis was the abandonment of any semblance of reformism and the launching of a sustained assault on the living conditions of all sections of the working class. In its foreign policy, the American bourgeoisie adopted an increasingly aggressive posture toward all rivals.

The intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, which set into motion the processes that culminated in the tragedy of September 11, 2001, was aimed at destabilizing the USSR and bringing about its collapse. The entire direction of the policy of the Reagan administration was intended to exacerbate the mounting problems of the autarchic Soviet system and to bring about, through a combination of military, political and economic pressure, the collapse of the USSR.

The efforts of the US in this direction were, to the amazement of the Reagan administration, preempted by the decision of the Soviet bureaucracy, under the leadership of Gorbachev, to liquidate the Soviet Union and promote the restoration of capitalism.

The causes of this breakdown were complex. But, in essence, the collapse of the Soviet Union was the outcome of the protracted betrayal of internationalism. The essentially nationalist and autarchic economic policies of the USSR, which cut it off from the resources of the world economy, rendered it totally unviable.

The US interpreted the collapse of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to establish a position of unchallengeable global hegemony. For the first time since 1917, there existed no clear international constraints on the use of American military power to achieve its global objectives. This was the meaning of the declaration of the first President Bush that the demise of the Soviet Union opened the way for the creation of a “new world order.” Though he did not define precisely what this new order would be, it would become increasingly clear that the United States intended to exploit the international political vacuum created by the demise of the USSR to reshape the world in accordance with the global interests of American capitalism.

Nearly 60 years earlier, Leon Trotsky had warned that the dynamism of American capitalism was too great to accept the constraints placed by existing national borders on its world economic ambitions. “US capitalism,” warned Trotsky “is up against the same problems that pushed Germany in 1914 on the path of war. The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of ‘organizing Europe.’ The United States must ‘organize’ the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.”

This prediction is now being realized. The strategy of American imperialism consists of utilizing its massive military power to establish the unchallengeable global hegemony of the United States and completely subordinate to itself the resources of the world economy.

What is to be done next?

The launching of an aggressive war against Iraq represents a final, climactic attempt to resolve, on the basis of imperialism, the world historical problem of the contradiction between the global character of the productive forces and the archaic nation-state system. America proposes to overcome this problem by establishing itself as the super nation-state, functioning as the ultimate arbiter of the world's fate—deciding how the resources of the world economy will be allocated, after it has grabbed for itself the lion's share. But this sort of imperialist solution to the underlying contradictions of world capitalism, which was utterly reactionary in 1914, has not improved with age. Indeed, the sheer scale of world economic development in the course of the twentieth century endows such an imperialist project with an element of madness. Any attempt to establish the supremacy of a single national state is incompatible with the extraordinary level of international economic integration. The profoundly reactionary character of such a project is expressed in the barbaric methods that are required for its realization.

For all its tragedies, the twentieth century was not lived in vain. In the course of the century, the objective conditions matured to a degree that makes the harmonious unification of mankind possible. Even within the framework of capitalism, the emergence of the transnational corporation signifies the triumph of global economic integration over nationalism. The nation-state is no longer, in any meaningful sense, the basic unit of economic life. The entire process of production proceeds on the basis of a highly integrated system of international production. The scale and speed of the financial transactions which fuel this process cannot be controlled by any system of national regulation.

The attempt of any nation-state to subordinate this vast process to its own hegemonic control is reactionary and irrational. Nothing illustrates this better than the pursuit of oil, which, as we all know, plays such a central role in the present war. The relentless struggle to achieve control over oil resources cannot change the fact that this is a finite resource. Even if the United States were to establish, on the basis of military conquest, complete control over all available sources of oil, it would not thereby add to the sum total of energy available for the long-term expansion of world economy.

The present war testifies to the bankruptcy of the world capitalist system. Once again, it threatens to drag mankind into the abyss. The entire world is being drawn into this expanding maelstrom of destruction and death. Yesterday Rumsfeld shook his fist at Iran and Syria. Today, the *New York Times* put Russia on notice that the United States will not tolerate it giving any clandestine support to Iraq. How many more countries will be drawn into this catastrophe before it all ends?

But history never poses any problem for which it does not also provide the solution. There is not only the predatory imperialist response to the problems of world economic development. Lodged objectively within these global processes is the potential for an international social solution. And here we come to the historical significance of the mass demonstrations that have occurred throughout the world during the past month. These demonstrations, which have developed almost spontaneously, independent of, and in opposition to, all the traditional political forces of the bourgeois establishment, can only be understood as the preliminary expression of the emerging internationalist and socialist response to the crisis of the world capitalism system. It is not only the inanimate elements of the forces of production that have been internationalized. The objective significance of all archaic forms of human identity—tribal, ethnic, religious and national—has dramatically receded. The inherent process of world economic development is working toward the explicit emergence of a new international human identity.

Within this context, the fact that the youth have been in the forefront of

the antiwar demonstrations all over the world is a sign that this change is already under way.

But what is still an unconscious process of social development must be transformed into one that is politically conscious. This is the work to which the *World Socialist Web Site*, as the voice of the International Committee of the Fourth International, has dedicated itself. This is the one political movement which, in accordance with the objective nature of the working class, functions on an international scale. Its daily publication is the outcome of an extraordinary level of international collaboration, based on a unified conception of world developments.

The *World Socialist Web Site* works off of a theoretical capital based on the assimilation of the lessons of the vast revolutionary strategic experience of the twentieth century.

In calling this conference, we are setting out to lay the foundation for a vast expansion of the work of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The mass demonstrations raise the question: what is to be done next? The struggle against war cannot consist merely of organizing one protest demonstration after another.

The war has exposed the vast chasm that exists between the broad mass of the working people and all the old parties of the political establishment. None of these decrepit organizations has anything to offer the masses. The emerging mass movement requires a program and perspective. Our movement does not seek to conceal the hard truth that there is no simple and uncomplicated answer to the great problems of our age. These problems are, after all, themselves the outcome of a complex historical process. The world as it exists today was shaped by the tragic experiences of the twentieth century, of its missed opportunities for revolutionary change and its defeats of the working class. The lessons of these historic events form the basis of the analysis of contemporary developments that appear each day on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The influence of the *World Socialist Web Site* is rapidly growing. But let there be no mistake about it: the aim of our movement is not simply the organization of protests against this or that aspect of the capitalist system. Our aim is the taking of political power by the working class. In the final analysis, the fight against war is not a matter of protest but the working class coming to power and creating the foundations of a socialist society.

Questions are often raised about the nature of the working class. The changes in manufacturing processes, the revolution in communications, the revolution in information technologies, and the emergence of entirely new industries and forms of labor, have had a far-reaching impact on the form and character of the working class. It is, in fact, a larger and more diverse section of the population than the old industrial proletariat of the middle of the last century. If we include in our definition of the working class all those who are principally dependent for their livelihoods on their weekly wage, then the vast majority of the population within the United States is part of the working class. Moreover, the impact of globalization and the economic transformation of vast areas of the world that were hardly developed just 30 years ago, especially in Asia, has brought into existence new sections of the working class.

Throughout the world, the war will mean increased hardship and real suffering. None of the immense problems of capitalist society in the United States will be solved on the basis of war. All the conditions are emerging for an immense development in the political consciousness of the working class. It is our aim to develop the *World Socialist Web Site* as the intellectual and political center of a new international socialist movement—to provide the orientation, analysis and program required by all those entering into struggle against imperialist war, against all forms of human exploitation and injustice, and for social equality. It is our hope that this conference will mark an important step forward in the building of this new world movement.



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