

The Obama administration, public opinion and the drive to war

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A political charade is underway in Washington, with the Obama administration and leading members of both the Democratic and Republican parties engaged in a phony debate in the run-up to war against Syria.

Top government officials, including Obama himself, are utilizing the period preceding a likely congressional vote next week to express their hypocritical outrage over Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons and present "evidence" that consists of lies and unsubstantiated assertions.

The real causes and consequences of aggression against Syria are not discussed openly, with anything considered "sensitive"—i.e., that which must be kept from the population of the United States and the world—confined to closed hearings. All of the Obama administration's premises are accepted as given by the media and both big-business parties, including the lies about chemical weapons use, the claim that this is the motive behind the drive for war, and the assertion that the upcoming conflict will be "limited" in character.

The sentiments of the population find virtually no reflection in these proceedings. On the contrary, the congressional hearings are part of an operation aimed at browbeating and delegitimizing antiwar sentiment.

The ruling class is well aware of the deep opposition to war among the American people. According to a *Washington Post* /ABC News poll published yesterday, 59 percent oppose any military strikes, compared to only 36 percent who support them. And this lopsided opposition is in response to a question that presupposes the US government's central propaganda claim, that the Syrian government used chemical weapons to attack civilians, and that the planned strikes are a response to this attack.

There is not a single sector of the population—broken down by age, gender, political affiliation, education,

income or region of the country—that supports war. It is significant, however, that opposition to war is higher among poorer Americans than among the wealthy (63 percent opposition among those earning under \$50,000, compared to 51 percent among those earning more than \$100,000). Young people are more opposed than older Americans (65 percent among 18-39 year olds, compared to 55 percent among those 65 or older).

The gulf between the political establishment and the population is not limited to war. At the height of the vicious government and media campaign against Edward Snowden, polls showed overwhelming popular support for the whistleblower, who continues to reveal government criminality. A pollster noted at the time that public sentiment "goes against almost the unified view of the nation's political establishment." And so it is with war.

The antiwar sentiment is all the more significant in view of the fact that it follows two solid weeks of non-stop media propaganda, with the vacuous talking heads and agents of the state who function as news broadcasters eschewing any pretext of impartiality, let alone criticism. Syria is denounced as the "enemy," government claims are presented as fact, and the long history of lies used to drag the population into war is ignored.

Any forum where genuine popular sentiment can find any expression reveals the divide that exists. Comments on generally pro-war articles and editorials in the *New York Times* and other major newspapers are overwhelmingly antiwar, and those most "recommended" by other readers are almost entirely so. Many comments express outrage that neither the political parties nor the media (including the *Times* itself) are the slightest bit interested in what the population thinks.

It is not necessary to glorify the past to take note of the transformation that has occurred in bourgeois politics. During the Vietnam War, congressional hearings were a serious undertaking. Certain politicians made an appeal to broader popular sentiment, and the media served as a mechanism for exposing government lies and secrets. Prior to the 1991 vote in Iraq there were extensive hearings. Even in 2003, the Bush administration made more of a pretense of establishing a case for war, though based on complete lies, with a lengthy build-up to the invasion of Iraq extending over several months.

Now, a decision to launch a war with incalculable consequences—including the possibility of sparking a civil war throughout the Middle East and a direct conflict between the United States and Russia—is made without any serious public debate. The proceedings on Capitol Hill, which will likely be wrapped up within a week, were staged only after the failure of the vote in the British Parliament last week.

The decay of democratic and political forms is an expression of a social process—above all, the extraordinary growth of social inequality. The state is run by a military and intelligence apparatus, in league with a financial aristocracy, determined to implement deeply unpopular policies at home and abroad. It exists as a permanent conspiracy against the rights and interests of the vast majority.

The Obama administration represents a certain culmination of this process. The “candidate of change,” the “transformative” president (as at 2008 statement by the International Socialist Organization put it), is leading the most right-wing government in American history. Elected in large part due to antiwar sentiment, Obama, the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, has overseen an historic expansion of militarism, including an international policy of drone assassinations and wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and now Syria.

The pro-Democratic Party organizations representing more privileged sections of the upper-middle class, which organized and led antiwar demonstrations in the early years of the Bush administration, have become pro-war. Supposedly “left” organizations such as the ISO and its international co-thinkers, along with their coterie of “liberal” academics, have prepared over the past two years the ideological justification for war, presenting as a “revolution” a US-engineered civil war

that is dominated by Islamic fundamentalists.

Opposition to war now shifts decisively to the broad mass of the people—the working class. That there is general hostility to what is being planned is undeniable. As for those who supported Obama, there is an overwhelming sense that they have been lied to and sold a bill of goods.

This hostility must be given an active and conscious political form. There is no other political force outside of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International that can provide leadership in this struggle. From the beginning, the SEP has explained that the actions of the Obama administration would be dictated not by the hopes of the population, but by the class interests that he and the entire political apparatus represent. The source of war lies in the capitalist system and the financial aristocracy, whose ruthless interests this system serves.

The SEP is fighting to mobilize opposition throughout the United States and internationally to the impending war. We will be holding meetings and organizing demonstrations wherever we can. We call on all our readers and supporters to take an active role in this fight. The voice of the working class must be heard. Contact and join the SEP today .



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