US students, workers speak on war threat against Syria

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18 September 2013

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to students and workers in Maryland and Massachusetts recently about the threat of war against Syria. Despite President Obama's tactical retreat from immediate airstrikes in his nationally televised speech last week, many we spoke to still saw a very real threat of US military action against Syria and oppose it.

WSWS reporters handed out the WSWS statement "Obama's speech: No end to war threat against Syria" to students at the University of Maryland, in the suburbs of Baltimore. The Obama administration's pretext for war, to protect the Syrian population from the Assad regime, was met with deep skepticism among students.

Chris Johnson is a junior in information systems and like millions of others his age has spent more than half his life living in a country at war. "I think with all of these conflicts, we don't know the whole story," he said. Chris called into question the logic behind the official claim that an invasion was necessary to protect Syrian civilians, saying, "With all of the terrible things happening around the world, why are they choosing to go to war with Syria? It doesn't make any sense."

"But with the whole media involved it doesn't take much to paint a picture that will affect peoples' perceptions," he added. "I think they need a military presence there. I don't want to sound like a conspiracy theorist, but I think they want a military presence to control their [Syria's] resources."

Chris's friend, Ali, asked, "But chemical weapons were used. Should nothing be done?" The WSWS reporters explained that no proof has been offered to link the August 21 attack to Assad's forces. Reporters went on to explain that the US-backed Syrian "rebels" are responsible for the deaths of scores of Syrian civilians, and that reports have linked them to the use of chemical weapons.

"I believe in no interference with Syria," said math and physics major Gordon Mcdonnell. "Attacking these other countries doesn't do us any good. We need to focus on ourselves. My grandmother has told me that this is the worst and longest economic decline she's ever experienced. We need to invest our resources into research and development, education, etc."

When asked what the real motives for a US invasion of Syria are, Gordon replied, "I think the ulterior motive here is energy security. The US wants to control the oil in the Middle East region."

Gordon drew the connection between imperialist aggression abroad and the decay of democratic norms at home. "These wars aren't just bad for the populations of those countries; they have a toll on us as well, with attacks on privacy rights and gun ownership laws. Actually, they are using the Patriot Act to limit the rights of citizens."

In response to the claim that the US was fighting terrorism, he said, "They can't even protect us from terrorism on our own soil. Look at the Boston bombing. They knew about these guys and did nothing."

After reading the statement, Sam, a math and computer science major, concluded, "There's a lot in here I didn't know, and if it's true then I'm absolutely against the war and the Obama administration, Congress and the State Department's lies to get us into war."

Sam noted the complete absence of anti-war sentiment in all sections of the media establishment. "Columnists from every publication from the *New York Times* to Fox News are for war in Syria," he said with contempt.

Like many of the students who talked to WSWS reporters, he was skeptical of humanitarian justifications for a strike. "They want to topple the Assad dictatorship, not save citizens."

Steve, a political science major, expressed incredulity about the democratic tendencies of the Free Syrian Army. "There's no such thing as the Free Syrian Army; it's a hodge-podge of different organizations with heavy terrorist elements, who are providing the money and financing the war."

When asked why the US would collaborate with the very terrorist elements it had been fighting against for more than a decade, Steve answered, "Because Syria is friends with

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Iran and Hezbollah. The US wants to put a puppet in Syria to further its geopolitical interests."

The WSWS also spoke to workers and young people at the Ruggles MBTA station in Boston near Northeastern University. Frankie Cruz took a copy of the WSWS statement "No to war against Syria!" and stopped to talk with our reporters.

"This control issue with the United States I don't understand," he said. "I read something in the news today in regards to Obama saying he's not going to focus so much on what's going on in Syria and he's going to focus more on domestic issues. He's gotten a big backlash over Syria."

Frankie added, "I don't agree with cutting social programs. As a society we need social programs so that everyone can develop socially and intellectually, so that we have a strong social norm; to be very educated and have a strong understanding of what's going on. I think that should be the focus, instead of spending so much money funding a war, to put us back into another recession."

Jose Alvarez, presently unemployed, was adamant in his opposition to war against Syria. "I don't agree with this war," he said. "I do agree with the fact that we shouldn't be involved in policing the world. But the rich are forcing this because a war makes money; war is a money-making machine."

Jose was also very skeptical about the pretext for war against Syria, saying, "Iraq was a war about stopping weapons of mass destruction and we knew that was a lie. Like in Iraq, Saddam Hussein was supposed to be a piece of cake, but it didn't turn out that way."

He was concerned about the threat of a regional war if the US strikes against Syria. "In Syria, the present situation is that it's going to cause a regional war," he said. "And then we're going to get bogged down into defending Israel. And the Arab world is going to fight to save the Arabs. Also, the Russians are their allies, and Russia wouldn't want to see the United States getting the upper hand, now that the Cold War's ended."

Asked about the US claims that Assad had used chemical weapons, Jose said, "The truth is that we don't know because the Syrian rebels, part of them are Al Qaeda, and Al Qaeda wants the United States to supply them weapons. And we already know that Al Qaeda is there.

"Assad does not have control of all of Syria. Part of the land the rebels have conquered had chemical weapons, so they could have used those chemical weapons to draw a reaction from the United States to facilitate Al Qaeda. They're even carrying out atrocities and claiming that it's the Assad government because they want the United States to supply them with weapons."

Asked if he saw a connection between the US drive to war and the attack on social programs, Jose said, "Of course, there is a relationship, because every war has to be paid for with taxes, our taxes. We already financed these two last wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of them was a farce, Iraq. The other one, Afghanistan, they had an excuse because they were pissed off enough about the Twin Towers. But we didn't have any rights in attacking the country because they supposedly had rebels that had attacked us."

He said that this time around, in the drive to war in Syria, "the government is deceiving the people, very intelligent people. And it's wrong to get into a war that's a revolution and none of our business. We won our independence through revolution, but we did it all on our own. They should be able to do it on their own, choose their own leaders.

"Did they use gasses? We have supplied governments with weapons of torture and gasses. The US used white phosphorous in Iraq and Agent Orange in Vietnam, which was biological warfare."

Elan Axelbank, a Northeastern student, said, "I think it would be horrible if we went into Syria. I think that going in without sufficient international support would not only be a violation of international law, but they would be violating American law as well. It shouldn't be like that. We shouldn't be the ones to take control of what's going on there."

Asked if he thought that the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons had been definitely proven, he said. "I tend to believe it, but after weapons of mass destruction with George W. Bush, who the heck knows? I would like to believe my government is telling the truth—I would say maybe it's fifty-fifty."

He had not heard the reports that the so-called rebels may have been responsible for the chemical weapons attack on August 21. "Oh, really? Of course you don't hear about that. If we're going in against Assad, essentially we're going with the rebels. And remember what happened the last five times we're aided rebels in the Middle East—like with the Taliban. And giving weapons to Al Qaeda? To think that this is our responsibility is stupid."

Elan added, "If we go in, I think this is World War III. I think that in 10 years, when we're discussing what causes World War III, I think this would be one of the first causes."

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