

The tasks facing the anti-war movement

Statement of the World Socialist Web Site and Socialist Equality Party

Rarely has a war crime been set out as openly before the eyes of the entire world as the imminent war against Iraq. For several months the US government has been demonstrating its determination to invade this impoverished nation, place it under American military rule and seize its oilfields. Military preparations are proceeding strictly according to schedule. Everything else—Saddam Hussein's supposed weapons of mass destruction, for which there is no credible evidence, the resolutions and debates in the United Nations Security Council, the UN inspections—is just propaganda for the purpose of manipulating and deceiving public opinion.

The war against Iraq is threatening all of humanity with a catastrophe. With its ruthless course of action, American imperialism is aggravating tensions between different nationalities and religions. The conquest of Iraq will not satisfy Washington's appetites. It will further whet them.

The war against Iraq is the opening shot of an eruption of militarism that threatens to end in a world conflagration.

Millions of people will express their concern and opposition on February 15 and 16. Europe is likely to experience the largest anti-war demonstrations in its history. We welcome these protests. They show that the overwhelming majority of the world's people are opposed to war.

However, these protests will not alter the fact that Washington decided on war long ago. While people are taking to the streets in unprecedented numbers, the countdown to war is inexorably proceeding. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and the rest of the war cabal in Washington will not be impressed by public opinion in America or around the world.

This imperviousness is not due to any inherent strength of the Bush administration. The US president owes his office not to a democratic majority, but to vote-rigging and a politically motivated court decision. The relentless media propaganda notwithstanding, there is no enthusiasm for war among the American people.

In a column published in the *New York Times* last week, Thomas Friedman, himself a vehement proponent of war, acknowledged that there is an "incredibly narrow base of support that exists in America today for this audacious project." He wrote: "I've had a chance to travel all across the country since September, and I can say without hesitation there was not a single audience I spoke to where I felt there was a majority in favor of war in Iraq."

This broad opposition to war has, however, found no organized political expression. The Bush administration can afford to ignore the opinion of the majority because the paralysis of the workers movement ensures that it will encounter no serious political resistance.

In the US, not only the Republicans, but also the leading Democrats are to a man supporting the war. In Europe, even those governments and parties that reject a military strike at this point accept the American war aims as plausible and legitimate. Not one of them declares what this war is really about. Even the German government, which thus far has been most pronounced in its opposition to a military strike, upholds the fiction of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, thus legitimizing Washington's war aims.

The closer war approaches, the more directly the governments in Europe, the Middle East and Asia are converging on a war course. Germany, while still refusing to vote in favor of a war resolution in the UN Security Council, has guaranteed the US the right to cross German airspace and use US military bases in Germany. France no longer rules out war "as a last resort" and has deployed its sole aircraft carrier to the

Middle East. Turkey, after prolonged indecision, has opened up its military bases to the US.

Against this background, protest against war will not suffice. The struggle against war requires a consciously elaborated and consistent political strategy.

The anti-war movement must be transformed into a powerful political movement of the working class. This requires a program based on an understanding of the causes and driving forces behind this war. Not unity at any price, but clarity is the demand of the hour.

What are the reasons for the war?

Most critics know that this war is about oil. The significance of the Iraqi oil reserves, the second largest in the world, has been widely documented. Control over these supplies would satisfy the energy demands of the US for a long time and lessen its dependence on increasingly unstable Saudi Arabia. The fact that president Bush and a large part of his administration have their roots in the oil industry underscores the critical role of oil as a factor in the US war drive.

However, oil is but one aspect of the war. The US is pursuing a much more far-reaching and ambitious goal. It is striving for world hegemony, i.e., the political and economic reorganization of the world in the interests of American capital.

This requires that not only weak and underdeveloped nations like Iraq, but also America's imperialist rivals in Western Europe and Japan be forced to submit to its will. The conquest of Iraq would enable the US to dominate the entire Middle East, with the help of Israel. Control over the world's main energy resources would provide the US with a powerful lever against its competitors in Europe, Japan and China.

As the great Marxists of the early twentieth century demonstrated, imperialism arises not simply from the greed of one or another government or capitalist clique, but from the fundamental contradictions inherent in capitalist society.

The modern form of production, which binds together billions of people around the globe in mutual interdependence, cannot be reconciled with the system of nation states and the economic relations anchored in private property on which capitalism is based. The incompatibility between world economy and the nation state compels the imperialist powers to divide and re-divide the world by force.

This was the basic cause of the two world wars that devastated large parts of the globe in the last century. Germany, whose dynamic productive forces were suffocated by the European nation-state system, launched two attempts to reorganize Europe. Today, the US is trying its hand at an even greater challenge: America seeks to reorganize the world.

The European dilemma

Europe is divided on the issue of war. The much-touted "common foreign policy" is in tatters. The British, the Spanish and the Italian governments, as well as several eastern European states, have thrown in their lot with Bush. No small factor in this decision is a desire to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Germany. France and Germany, on the other hand, are trying to curb the US by diplomatic means.

This stance has nothing in common with a principled opposition to

war. Neither the German nor the French government is questioning the right of the great powers to move against Iraq. Both have agreed to UN Resolution 1441, which poses an ultimatum to Iraq, threatening it with “serious consequences”.

They merely fear that too strong an American dominance will inhibit their own interests in the region. In defense of these interests, they are cynically playing with the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis. If the US won't be stopped, they are prepared to agree to a second UN resolution that sanctions war, so as not to miss out on the division of the booty. Both French President Chirac and German Foreign Minister Fischer have made remarks to that effect.

Germany and France are old imperialist powers that pursue their own global aims—as demonstrated by the recent French military intervention in the Ivory Coast. The aggressiveness of the US has thrown them into a dilemma. If they bow to the dictates of the US, they renounce any independent role in international politics for a long time to come. If, however, they put up some resistance, they run the risk of grave conflicts with incalculable economic and military consequences.

The other side of the criticism they voice about US war plans is the intensification of their own rearmament. In order to stand up to Washington, Europe has to be capable of military action on its own accord. The disagreements on the fate of Iraq are merely the harbinger of a direct and open conflict between the imperialist powers themselves.

This is why it is wrong to place hopes in the German or French government, as some sections of the peace movement do. Their call to “give moral support” to Schröder, Fischer or Chirac against the US is futile. You cannot fight imperialism by supporting one imperialist power against the other.

It is equally wrong to leave the decision on war or peace to the UN. Whether or not the US has the official sanction of the United Nations when it attacks Iraq will not alter the imperialist nature of this war. Far from representing the “world community”, the UN constitutes—like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international institutions—a tool of the imperialist powers. It is employed by them to force their will upon the world's people.

The crisis of American society

When Germany went to war in 1914 and 1939, it did so not only to conquer new sources of raw materials, new markets and more “living space”. War was also a means to escape its domestic crisis. In 1939, Hitler had no option left but war. The German currency and economy were about to collapse, producing a shock that his regime would hardly have been able to survive.

The US is in a similar situation today. The unanimity displayed by the ruling elite, including the leading Democrats, in uniting behind Bush is an expression of their political desperation. They need a war because they have no answer to the economic and social problems tearing American society apart.

The collapse of the speculative Wall Street bubble revealed the rotten foundations on which the economic growth of the 1990s was based. Enormous financial assets were squandered. Billions of dollars flowed into unproductive and wasteful speculative transactions. The pretence that value could be created independently of and separate from the process of production had a profound effect on the structure of society and the nature of the ruling elite.

The conduct of corporations took on an increasingly criminal character. Their transactions, which were driven almost exclusively by the private enrichment of top executives and corporate insiders, amounted to an ever more brazen plundering of society. While a small upper layer amassed fabulous wealth, the broad mass of the working population saw

their position stagnate or even deteriorate.

Social inequality in the US is more pronounced than in any other highly developed country. The combined annual revenue of the 13,000 wealthiest families is higher than the total income of the 20 million poorest families. Below the surface, American society is ravaged by a bitter class war, which does not find any open political expression because both traditional parties—Democrats and Republicans alike—unreservedly defend the interests of the ruling oligarchy.

This connection between Washington's war fever and the crisis of American society is being overlooked by large sections of the peace movement. But it is precisely this which constitutes the driving force behind the war danger, and also the key to overcoming it. The only way to stop the warmongers is to mobilize the working class.

A political strategy against war

This historical and class analysis of the causes and driving forces of the war leads to a number of fundamental conclusions, without which the anti-war movement is bound to fail.

* The opponents of war must turn to the working population, which stands in fundamental opposition to the entire system of capitalist exploitation and imperialist plunder, and is experiencing the system's decline on a daily basis, in the form of unemployment, social cuts and attacks on democratic rights. Opposition to war must be bound up with a program that addresses the burning social issues of jobs, income, education, health care, housing and the defense of democratic rights.

* The allies of the European opponents of war are not the European governments that are haggling with the Bush administration, but rather the working people of America. Any alliance with the European governments cuts the anti-war movement off from both the American and European working class. It is an alliance with governments—for example, France and Germany—that are themselves carrying out brutal attacks on democratic rights and social conditions.

* The movement against war must be international. It must unite the workers of all countries, colors and religions against the common enemy and reject all attempts to divide the working class.

* The movement must be politically independent. It must not subordinate itself to parties standing with one or both legs in the camp of the bourgeois order—this includes not only the Democrats in the US, but also the Social Democrats, the Greens, the German PDS, the Communist Party in France and the Democratic Left in Italy. A new workers party must be built on the basis of an international socialist program.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has created the *World Socialist Web Site* as an instrument for the development of such a party. On a daily basis, the WSWS analyses major political events and provides its readers with a political orientation. With its editorial offices on four continents and readers in almost all countries of the world, the WSWS provides the initial structure for a new, international workers party.

We invite all participants in the demonstrations this weekend to read the WSWS every day, contact our editorial board, distribute our statements and send in articles yourselves. Contact the Socialist Equality Party in your region. Join our international movement and contribute to its development as the new leadership of the working class.

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