

New political strategy needed to end the war in Iraq

Statement by the Socialist Equality Party

March 19 marks the second anniversary of one of the most shameful events in the history of the United States: the launching of a war of aggression against Iraq, based on lies and in violation of the most fundamental precepts of international law.

What have been the consequences of this criminal action?

More than 1,500 American soldiers have been killed. More than 10,000 soldiers have suffered serious injuries. Countless thousands of American soldiers bear the psychological scars that arise from having witnessed and participated in brutal and inhuman acts that will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

At least 100,000 Iraqis have perished as the direct result of the US invasion of their country. The number of Iraqis who have been wounded and maimed has not even been calculated.

“Operation Iraqi Freedom” has proved a nightmare for the people of that country. Fallujah, a city of 250,000 people, was reduced to rubble by the American military in November. According to the *New York Times*, the US has incarcerated 8,900 Iraqis in three major concentration camps.

The American occupation of Iraq has been characterized by sadism and callous indifference to human life. The perverse and disgusting actions of US personnel at Abu Ghraib were not the product of a few rogue soldiers. The use of torture against Iraqis and other people deemed enemies of the United States has been sanctioned at the highest levels of the US government.

Those who planned and launched this war are political criminals who must be held accountable—as the Nazis were in their day—for grave violations of international law.

But those who oppose this war have a profound and inescapable responsibility, not only to fight for the immediate withdrawal of American forces from Iraq, but also to build a new and powerful political movement against the capitalist system that is ultimately responsible for militarism and war.

The Bush administration is preparing further military attacks, in the first instance against other Middle Eastern

nations such as Iran and Syria. The doctrine of preventive war unveiled by the Bush administration in 2002 and first applied in Iraq has set the stage for an escalating spiral of military aggression against an open-ended list of potential targets. This course of bloody interventions, if not halted, will lead ultimately to a new world conflagration, even more catastrophic than the world wars of the twentieth century.

The Bush administration’s policy of militarism and global domination has broad support within the American ruling elite. This policy serves the interests of the American corporate and financial elite, who employ military violence to secure access to critical raw materials—above all, oil—and new sources of cheap labor. This goes hand in hand with a drive to smash all obstacles to the establishment of American-style “free market” capitalism in every part of the world, and weaken the position of the United States’ major competitors in Europe and Asia.

Crisis of American capitalism

The Bush administration and its policies of militarism, social reaction and state repression are the expression of a profound crisis of American capitalism. There are two basic and interrelated sides of this crisis. First is the protracted decline in the world economic position of the United States, reflected in massive indebtedness and the emergence of the euro as a rival currency to the dollar. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq embody the attempt of the American ruling elite to counter this economic decline by exploiting its military supremacy.

Second is the colossal growth of social inequality within the US. The ever-more grotesque concentration of wealth at the top of American society is part of the same socio-economic process that leads to war and plunder abroad. Imperialist war and growing social inequality are ultimately incompatible with democratic institutions. And the more the wealth of society is diverted into military adventures abroad, the greater the assault on social conditions and democratic rights at home.

An understanding of the causes of the war is the prerequisite for developing a strategy to fight it. It is impossible to fight against war and militarism without fighting against the capitalist system that breeds these

evils.

It is necessary to build an independent, socialist political movement to unify the working class throughout the world against war and social reaction. The starting point for such a movement is the recognition that the fight against the war in Iraq is a struggle not only against the Bush administration, but also against the Democratic Party.

Lessons of the 2004 election

The lessons of the 2004 election must be drawn. The massive anti-war protest movement that erupted in the global demonstrations of February of 2003 was driven into a blind alley because it was channeled behind the Democratic Party and the campaign of its presidential candidate, John Kerry.

Bush and the Republicans were able to exploit the political vacuum on the left provided by the right-wing, pro-war Kerry campaign, which was supported by the so-called “anti-war” Democrats like Howard Dean and Dennis Kucinich, to narrowly recapture the White House and make gains in both houses of Congress.

Since the elections, the rightward trajectory of the Democratic Party has continued apace. Leading “liberals” like Hillary Clinton have made public overtures to anti-abortion forces, Senate Democrats have supplied the votes to confirm Bush cabinet appointees such as torture apologist Alberto Gonzales and police-sweep architect Michael Chertoff, and party leaders have praised the nomination of contra war conspirator John Negroponte as director of national intelligence.

The Democrats have solidarized themselves even

more closely with the war policy of the Bush administration. Kerry himself summed up the position of the Democrats when he opposed a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops and made clear he would vote for the administration’s new \$83 billion war-spending request.

One could not ask for a clearer demonstration that the election of Kerry would have made no significant difference in the war policy of the United States government.

The fight against militarism and war requires a struggle for the political independence of the working class from both parties of American big business and the financial oligarchy whose interests they serve. The Students for Social Equality supports the efforts of the Socialist Equality Party to build an independent socialist movement of the working class.

Workers and young people in the US must link their struggle against war with the broad masses of working people around the world, who overwhelmingly oppose the Bush administration and the crimes of US imperialism.

The fight against war must be connected to a struggle against the attacks on the social conditions of the American people: the assault on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, public education and pensions, and the relentless attack on the jobs and wages of workers. It must also be linked to the defense of democratic rights, against the police-state policies of the government.

This means the struggle against war must be connected to a social policy directed to the defense of the interests of the working class—one that places human needs above the drive for profit and the accumulation of personal wealth: that is, a socialist policy.

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