

1917

“To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International”

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Down With Bush’s Terror War!

Defend Iraq!

George W. Bush’s proclamation to the United Nations General Assembly on 12 September that the United States has “no quarrel with the Iraqi people” was a signal that the world’s most powerful military would soon be dispatched on a mission in which thousands, and perhaps tens of thousands, of Iraqi civilians will be killed. American and British jets have been bombing Iraqi installations for over a decade, while a U.S.-initiated embargo has blocked dialysis machines, incubators, water-treatment equipment, as well as food and medicine. The sanctions have killed an estimated million and a half Iraqis, but have not dislodged Saddam Hussein. So Washington has now opted for “regime change” via military conquest.

Saddam Hussein is a blood-soaked dictator who has massacred thousands of Iraqis and ruthlessly crushed all political opposition. In other words, he is a typical Third World U.S. ally. America has long propped up feudalist monarchies in Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, as well as military dictatorships in Egypt and Algeria. The sudden enthusiasm about “liberating” Iraq and bringing “democracy” to its benighted citizens is a transparently cynical public relations exercise.

Originally the rationale for going after Iraq was that one of Saddam’s intelligence agents had supposedly met Mohamed Atta (the purported leader of the horrific September 11 attacks) in Prague a few months earlier. When this story was discredited, the White House began warning of the dangers posed by Iraqi chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. But Scott Ritter, the former U.S. Marine who headed the UN weapons inspection program in Iraq until 1998, considers it very unlikely that the Iraqis still possess either operational “weapons of mass destruction” or the means to deliver them.

To bolster its case, the Bush gang points to Saddam’s use of poison gas against Iranian soldiers and Iraqi Kurds in the 1980s. What they don’t mention is that Iraq’s “weapons of mass destruction” program was launched, like Osama Bin Laden’s original network, with American assistance. In 1980, shortly after he took power, Saddam got a green light from Washington to attack the Islamic Republic of Iran. The United States provided intelligence and logistical support to Iraq throughout the 1980s as the brutal conflict dragged on. Hussein hoped that defeating Iran would make Iraq the dominant power in the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

Washington did not want either Iraq or Iran to win, and sought to prolong the conflict to bleed Iran, and thereby curb the influence of Ayatollah Khomeini’s “Islamic Revolution.” Whenever it seemed the Iraqis were gaining the upper hand, the U.S. provided covert support to Iran, but through most of the conflict Iraq’s military was under pressure from the more numerous and highly-motivated Iranians. The U.S. helped

Saddam develop a chemical and biological weapons program to level the killing fields:

“The Iraqi bio-weapons program that George W. Bush wants to eradicate got its start with help from Uncle Sam two decades ago.”

“The CDC [Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control] and a biological sample company, American Type Culture Collection, dispatched strains of all the germs Iraq used to make weapons, including anthrax, the bacteria that make botulinum toxin, and the germs that cause gas gangrene. Iraq also got samples of other deadly pathogens, including the West Nile virus.

“The transfers came in the 1980s, when the United States supported Iraq in its war against Iran. They were detailed in a 1994 Senate banking committee report and a 1995 follow-up letter from the CDC to the Senate.”

—Associated Press, 2 October

On 27 March 1984, the *New York Times* reported that Donald Rumsfeld, the current U.S. Defense Secretary, had visited Baghdad as Ronald Reagan’s emissary and “met with Iraq’s Foreign Minister today to discuss the Iran-Iraq war and other issues.” The same issue reported that the United Nations had determined that Iraq had been using “chemical weapons, in the form of aerial bombs” in Iran. The weapons included “mustard gas and nerve agents.” The U.S. was neither particularly concerned by this, nor by the news in 1988 that Saddam’s forces had killed 5,000 Kurdish civilians with poison gas in the town of Halabja. Only in 1990, as American troops prepared to invade Iraq, did the U.S. express alarm about Saddam’s “weapons of mass destruction” and threaten massive retaliation if the Iraqis dared use them.

U.S./British Proposal: ‘Invasion Without War’

Under mounting pressure from the U.S. and Britain, in September the Iraqis agreed to allow United Nations weapons inspectors to re-enter their country. This was a major concession, as it was widely acknowledged “that American spies had worked undercover on teams of United Nations arms inspectors” (*New York Times*, 7 January 1999). Washington was clearly irritated by Saddam’s response as it complicated public relations preparations for war. So the U.S., backed by Britain, countered by proposing a series of conditions designed to be unacceptable to Baghdad and thus provide a pretext for an attack. This was the same tactic used against the Serbs at the Rambouillet “peace” negotiations in 1999 when the U.S. demanded the Yugoslavs grant NATO troops “unimpeded ac-

cess” to roam throughout their country. When Belgrade refused, the bombing began.

The *New York Times* (2 October) reported:

“The draft resolution prepared by the United States and Britain would make the inspectors’ mandate far more intrusive, including creating no-flight and no-drive zones protected by United Nations or United States security forces along the routes that the inspectors would travel, according to extensive excerpts obtained by the *New York Times*. The proposal also calls for the inspectors to be guarded by ‘sufficient United Nations security forces’ for their protection.”

Robert Fisk summed this up as:

“Washington can order forces of the US (a Security Council member) to ‘enforce’ these ‘corridors’ through Iraq—on the ground—when it wants. U.S. troops would thus be in Iraq. It would be invasion without war; the end of Saddam, ‘regime change,’ the whole shebang.”

—*Independent* (London), 4 October

‘Liberated’ Iraq: A U.S. Oil Colony

Following World War Two, the U.S. pushed for the dissolution of the remaining colonial holdings of its European rivals. Washington’s “anti-colonial” posture created opportunities for American corporations to move into territories previously closed to them while simultaneously burnishing its “democratic” image in the ideological competition with the USSR for the hearts and minds of the colonial masses. But the Soviet Union is no more, and the White House seems to have concluded that its high-tech military will make the indefinite occupation of Iraq’s lucrative oil fields a low-risk undertaking:

“In the initial phase, Iraq would be governed by an American military commander—perhaps Gen. Tommy R. Franks, commander of United States forces in the Persian Gulf.... “Until now it had been assumed that Iraqi dissidents both inside and outside the country would form a government, but it was never clear when they would take full control. “Today marked the first time the administration has discussed what could be a lengthy occupation by coalition forces, led by the United States.”

—*New York Times*, 11 October

It is clear that U.S. plans to invade Iraq have little or nothing to do with Saddam Hussein or his hypothetical arsenal:

“Asked what would happen if American pressure prompted a coup against President Hussein, a senior official said, ‘That would be nice.’ But the official suggested that the American military might enter and secure the country anyway, not only to eliminate weapons of mass destruction but also to ensure against anarchy after Mr. Hussein’s departure.”

—*Ibid.*

So, all the talk of “democracy” and “freedom” boils down to replacing an Iraqi military dictatorship with an American one. Saddam Hussein is a vicious dictator, but at least under his rule, Iraqi oil revenues in the 1980s funded a significant modernization program and considerable industrial development (most of which has since been destroyed by imperialist military attacks). Under U.S. occupation Iraq’s natural wealth will flow to the shareholders and coupon clippers of the international oil cartels. The imperialists are not concerned about the quality of life for their neo-colonial subjects—they offer death squads, not land reform.

The Pentagon considers Afghanistan to be a model for the conduct of all future colonial wars because the combination of indigenous surrogates and U.S. air power defeated the Taliban with minimal American casualties. The thousands of Afghan civilians killed during the bombing campaign and subsequent “mopping up” operations are shrugged off as mere “collateral damage.” For those who survived, life is even worse under the feuding warlords

than it was under the reactionary Taliban, and there is little prospect that it will improve in the foreseeable future. In the first flush of victory President Bush talked grandly of a new “Marshall Plan” to rebuild that devastated country, but ended up committing a paltry \$300 million, less than a fifth of what the U.S. currently spends *every month* to maintain its garrison in Afghanistan.

Iraq, unlike Afghanistan, possesses valuable and easily exploitable resources, so the U.S. anticipates a lengthier, and more lucrative, occupation:

“For as long as the coalition partners administered Iraq, they would essentially control the second largest proven reserves of oil in the world, nearly 11 percent of the total. A senior administration official said the United Nations oil-for-food program would be expanded to help finance stabilization and reconstruction.”

—*New York Times*, 11 October

If all goes according to plan, after Iraq, the next target could be Saudi Arabia, the only country that has more oil. The U.S. already has several military bases in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia, ostensibly to safeguard the kingdom from an Iraqi attack. But things do not always go according to plan, as the U.S. discovered in Vietnam in the 1960s. More recently, in Somalia in 1993 and Lebanon a decade earlier, resistance from indigenous “terrorists” resulted in the ignominious withdrawal of American forces. These reverses have evidently not been forgotten:

“Richard Armitage, the US Deputy Secretary of State, last week decided to include the Lebanese Hizbollah [on a U.S. list of “terrorist” organizations]. With a vague, though un-specific, reference to the 291 [sic] American servicemen killed in the suicide bombing of the US Marine base in Beirut [in 1983], he announced that ‘they’re on the list, their time will come, there’s no question about it. They have a blood debt to us.’”

—*Independent* (London), 11 September

Armitage does not consider that any “blood debt” was incurred when 17,000 Lebanese (mostly civilians) were killed during Israel’s U.S.-approved 1982 invasion. But the drivers of the Islamic Jihad truck bombs that blew the imperialist troops out of Lebanon took a different view. At the time we wrote that revolutionaries must “defend any military actions by the oppressed aimed at the imperialist presence, *regardless* of the political character of those who launch them.”

U.S. Military Doctrine: Nuclear First Strike

The United States has repudiated an earlier pledge never to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear powers and now approves the use of tactical nuclear weapons against underground bunkers, troop concentrations and other unspecified targets. This provides a powerful incentive for countries not currently possessing “weapons of mass destruction” to get some. If Saddam had a few nukes, and the means to deliver them, Bush might be taking a slightly less aggressive approach.

The assertion of an American right to take “preemptive” action against any country Washington decides may be attempting to develop chemical, biological or nuclear armaments is complemented by a withdrawal from existing international conventions limiting the development and deployment of such weapons. Most of these agreements were originally designed by U.S. policy makers to prevent proliferation and lock in existing U.S. advantages. Today the White House rejects them as an infringement on American sovereignty, along with the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, the International Criminal Court and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

The celebration of an openly imperial role for the U.S. in the Third World includes a threat to prevent any other country ever getting close to military parity. In his 20 September report to Congress, Bush proclaimed: “Our forces will be

strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup in hopes of surpassing or equaling the power of the United States.” Like the bid to take control of the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf, this is directed at the U.S.’s European and Japanese rivals. In the September issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Michael Hirsh bluntly sums up the new policy as “neoimperialism”:

“This belief holds that the unilateral assertion of America’s unrivaled hard power will be the primary means not only winning the war on terror, but of preserving American dominance indefinitely, uncompromised for the most part by the international system or the diplomatic demands of other nations. Hailing mainly from the anti-détente right wing that dates back at least to the 1970s, the Bush hegemonists feel that for too long America has been a global Gulliver strapped down by Lilliputians—the norms and institutions of the global system. They feel vindicated in their assertion of U.S. power by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and of the Taliban a decade later....”

Jay Bookman of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* described the Bush doctrine as “a plan for permanent U.S. military and economic domination of every region on the globe” through “a stark expansion of our global military presence.” He notes that the pending war on Iraq:

“is intended to mark the official emergence of the United States as a full-fledged global empire, seizing sole responsibility and authority as planetary policeman. It would be the culmination of a plan 10 years or more in the making, carried out by those who believe the United States must seize the opportunity for global domination, even if it means becoming the ‘American imperialists’ that our enemies always claimed we were.

“Once that is understood, other mysteries solve themselves. For example, why does the administration seem unconcerned about an exit strategy from Iraq once Saddam is toppled?

“Because we won’t be leaving. Having conquered Iraq, the United States will create permanent military bases in that country from which to dominate the Middle East, including neighboring Iran.”

—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 29 September

Cracks in the Colossus

Contrary to “anti-globalization” theorists who chatter about the supposed impotence of governments in the face of the inexorable process of global economic integration, the current U.S. campaign against Iraq demonstrates that economic, as well as military and political, power is ultimately exercised through nation states.

France and Germany are openly displeased by the American bid to control Middle Eastern oil production. Yet at this point the U.S. is too powerful to openly defy. When Socialist Party members proposed that France use its Security Council veto to block UN support for any attack on Iraq, the French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin responded: “If France waves this veto, it will deprive us of influence and the capacity to be part of the international game” (*New York Times*, 9 October). The “game” is dividing up Iraq’s oil after its “liberation”:

“Government sources say they fear—existing concessions aside—France could be cut out of the spoils if it did not support the war and show a significant military presence. If it comes to war, France is determined to be allotted a more prestigious role in the fighting than in the 1991 Gulf war, when its main role was to occupy lightly defended ground. Negotiations have been going on between the state-owned TotalFinaElf company and the US about redistribution of oil regions between the world’s major companies.

“Washington’s predatory interest in Iraqi oil is clear, whatever its political protestations about its motives for war. The US National Energy Policy Report of 2001—known as

the ‘Cheney Report’ after its author Vice President Dick Cheney, formerly one of America’s richest and most powerful oil industry magnates—demanded a priority on easing US access to Persian Gulf supplies.”

—*Observer* (London), 6 October

The mercenary calculations over Iraq’s future are so transparent that even the *New York Times* (9 October) admits: “The idea that American lust for oil is the overriding motive for war with Iraq has been a persistent theme in global opinion in recent weeks.” Despite the hoopla accompanying the anniversary of “9/11” and a non-stop barrage of pro-war propaganda in the media, there is very little popular enthusiasm among Americans for attacking Iraq. Saddam is simply not seen as much of a threat by millions of working people who are far more concerned about disappearing jobs and pension funds. At this point, however, active resistance is largely confined to the campuses. The prevailing attitude seems to be that Bush can have his war if he wants, but it had better not produce many American casualties nor have a negative economic impact. If things begin to go wrong, domestic opposition to a failed adventure could mount very quickly.

The White House is concerned about widespread public skepticism regarding the “threat” posed by Iraq and has been leaning on U.S. intelligence agencies to produce assessments to back up its public relations campaign. This has reportedly been causing resentment:

“Basically, cooked information is working its way into high-level pronouncements and there’s a lot of unhappiness about it in intelligence, especially among analysts at the CIA,” said Vincent Cannistraro, the CIA’s former head of counter-intelligence.”

—*Guardian* (London), 9 October

Important elements of the American bourgeoisie have expressed the view that the White House’s “go-it-alone” posture on Iraq is reckless and unnecessary. Brent Scowcroft, George Bush Sr.’s national security adviser, went public with his reservations in the 15 August *Wall Street Journal*. Others who have dissented include General Wesley Clark (a former NATO commander), General Anthony Zinni, former chief of U.S. Middle East forces and George Tenet, the director of the CIA. They don’t object to seizing Iraq’s oil, but think that it should be done more decorously with more international cover. There are risks associated with “hot” wars, and it is conceivable that Bush Jr. and his gang might still stop short of an actual invasion if they gain enough leverage in the region through threats alone.

Bush’s War Targets Left, Labor and Minorities

Imperialist jingoism goes hand in hand with attacking democratic rights at home. From “no fly” lists of known anti-war activists, to “preemptive” arrests of peaceful protesters, to the creation of a corps of civilian government informers, the Bush administration is using the “terrorism” bogey for a wholesale assault on civil liberties. The official xenophobia hits minorities, immigrants and undocumented workers particularly hard, especially those of Middle Eastern extraction. But organized labor is the most important target of the current “national security” drive.

Using the supposed “national emergency” as a pretext, the Republican administration wants to strip collective bargaining rights from 170,000 government employees slated for assignment to the new “Homeland Security” department. If they get away with this, their next step will be to try and level down other federal employees, which would soon ripple down to state and municipal workers. Meanwhile, the White House is participating, along with the shipping companies and a number of major retailers, in a carefully orchestrated attack on the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). In an October 14 article, David Bacon, a well-known California labor reporter, observed:

“Despite the fact that they themselves had locked the gates of their own terminals, the Bush administration got a Federal judge to order the union to work under its old contract, with no interruption, for 80 days.

“The administration’s legal brief voiced a startling new philosophy to defend the action, elaborated by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. He held that all commercial cargo could be considered important to the military, not just specifically goods intended for military use abroad. Any stoppage on the docks, therefore, was a threat to national security. ‘The DoD increasingly relies upon commercial items and practices to meet its requirements,’ he stated. ‘Raw materials, medical supplies, replacement parts and components, as well as everyday subsistence needs of our armed forces, are just some of the essential military cargo provided by commercial contractors that typically are not labelled as military cargo.’”

This is tantamount to proposing the *de facto* militarization of the docks—which would threaten the very existence of the ILWU. A successful attack on this powerful and historically militant union would be a signal for a generalized assault on all other unions, just as the cheap victories won in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan set the stage for Bush’s pending terror war on Iraq. The defense of the ILWU and the federal civil service unions is of vital interest to every American worker. Socialists in the American workers’ movement must seek to demonstrate the links between attacks on democratic freedoms and union rights at home and attacks on Iraq and other neo-colonies abroad. Faced with an impending assault on Iraq, class-conscious workers in the imperialist countries must seek to utilize all the weapons of class struggle, including political strike actions, to derail the war-drive of their “own” predatory rulers.

For Proletarian Internationalism— Not Social-Pacifism!

Various pseudo-Marxist organizations, like the International Socialist Tendency and the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), advocate anti-imperialism in the fine print of some of their propaganda, but concentrate their practical activity on cobbling together “broad” (i.e., multi-class) coalitions on a simple program of “Stop the War.” This inevitably results in political adaptation to popular illusions in the more “progressive” imperialists. The September issue of the CWI’s *Socialism Today*, for example, suggests that the Democrats, one of the twin parties of racism and imperialist war in the U.S., should be opposing Bush more vigorously:

“Short-sighted opportunists, they lack the political courage to warn of the disastrous repercussions for US workers of war with Iraq. They give no lead in mobilising mass op-

position to a pre-emptive military attack that would bring US casualties and have bloody consequences for the people of Iraq and surrounding states.”

It is hard to think of anything more ridiculous than self-proclaimed socialists denouncing imperialist politicians for not providing a “lead” in the struggle against imperialist aggression. The imperialist war machine can only be seriously resisted if the working class is imbued with the understanding that its historic interests are *counterposed* to those of its rulers, and its fate bound up with that of the oppressed masses of the neo-colonies.

The idea of simply building a movement to demand that the imperialists “Stop the War” overlooks the fact that wars end for different reasons—some in victory and some in defeat. Pacifists oppose war in general, but Marxists take sides in conflicts between imperialist predators and their victims. Revolutionaries want to see the *defeat* of imperialists in their wars of aggression against oppressed peoples. For this reason we reject the simplistic equation of Saddam Hussein and George Bush, expressed by anarchists as a “plague on both your houses”. In defending Iraq Marxists extend no political support to Saddam Hussein, but we insist that the job of ousting the oppressive Ba’athist regime belongs to the Iraqi workers and the oppressed, not the imperialists.

The task of Marxists is to chart a path out of the horrors of the poverty, brutality and exploitation endemic to capitalism. The first step is to recognize that the essential axis of the struggle for human liberation is not found along lines of nationality, religion, sex, race or ethnicity—but rather of social class. The exploiters and their hangers-on have interests that are diametrically opposed to those of workers and the oppressed. American working people have far more in common objectively with ordinary Iraqis than with Cheney, Rumsfeld, Bush and their ilk. A setback for the U.S. imperialist aggressors in Iraq will strengthen the position of the American labor movement, just as the transformation of Iraq into an American protectorate will weaken it.

The multi-racial American proletariat is potentially an extremely powerful ally for the workers and oppressed of the neo-colonial world. That is why in opposing American imperialism Marxists also combat anti-Americanism—the ideology of nationalist demagogues in America’s imperialist rivals and in the neo-colonies. The social liberation of the oppressed and exploited masses of the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Asia is inextricably connected to the fight for socialist revolution in the imperialist heartland. This is the perspective with which revolutionary internationalist workers’ parties must be constructed in every country, including the United States, the citadel of imperialist reaction. There is simply no other way forward for humanity in this, the epoch of wars and revolutions.

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