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WHY WAR ON IRAQ?

It's Not (All) About Oil

Millions of Americans oppose the Bush administration's determination to wage war on Iraq, and they are speaking out. Their slogans make it clear that they believe that Iraq's oil is at the bottom of the Bush administration's warmongering. They do not want men, women and children slaughtered to make the Middle East safe for American oil companies. They have joined the antiwar movement in the belief that their opinions count and that their voices will be heard. They believe that public sentiment will be enough to deter the administration and to stop the war before it starts.

The Socialist Labor Party also opposes the administration's war plans. Indeed, the SLP has stood up and spoken out against every war since the 1890s.

The SLP, however, knows from experience that public sentiment has little influence on the foreign policy decisions of the government. History shows that similar movements preceded every major war of the 20th century, but succeeded in stopping none. Even now some within and close to the Bush administration are advising the president to ignore the massive antiwar sentiment, presumably on the theory that it will disintegrate once the bombs start to fall. "Mr. Bush's advisers are

telling him to ignore them [the demonstrations] and forge ahead, as are some leading prowar Republicans." (*The New York Times*, February 17)

President Bush has taken that advice. He has already expressed his contempt for the antiwar movement. "Size of protest, it's like deciding, 'Well I'm going to decide policy based on a focus group,'" he said after the demonstrations on February 15.

The president also expressed his contempt for democracy. "Democracy is a beautiful thing," he said. "People are allowed to express their opinion, and I welcome people's right to say what they believe." In short, the beauty of "democracy" is that it allows people to blow off steam.

Credit where credit is due. President Bush understands that opinion does not decide policy.

President Bush did not mention Saddam Hussein by name in his State of the Union address on January 28. He did not mention oil. But he referred to both when he said: "A brutal dictator, with a history of reckless aggression, with ties to terrorism, with great potential wealth, will not be permitted to dominate a vital region and threaten the United States."

The "vital region" is the Middle East, of course, and oil is what

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makes it vital. American capitalism's dependence on foreign oil sources has grown steadily since the end of World War II. The United States now imports half of the oil that is consumed on American markets, and one-third of what it imports comes from the Middle East. The stake that U.S. capitalism has in the flow of oil from that part of the world is an established fact that even the Bush administration would not deny. Indeed, that growing dependency is behind efforts to open up new areas for oil exploration in Alaska and for development of offshore oil operations.

If by imperialism one understands the forcible subjugation of another nation or nations, for whatever alleged purpose, then the United States is an imperialist nation bent on dominating markets and controlling resources for the benefit of its ruling class. For despite all the lip service to peace, democracy, international law, human rights, etc., the stakes in Iraq and the Middle East generally are grossly materialistic. Markets, spheres of influence and sources of raw materials vital to the industries of all nations have been at the root of every major war of modern times, and the present situation is no exception.

What brings on these economic rivalries that are the root cause of war in today's world? Under the capitalist system the workers receive in wages only a fraction of the product of their labor, hence

can buy back only a fraction. What the workers cannot buy back, and what the capitalists cannot consume in extravagant living, or use up in expanding industry, or in willful destruction, must be sold or bartered in foreign markets. This is the reason capitalist nations will do anything, even to the point of waging war, to preserve and extend their foreign markets and spheres of influence, and to dominate sources of raw materials and cheap labor. As the *Guardian*, an English newspaper, recently put it:

"The underlying problem the U.S. confronts is the one which periodically afflicts all successful [sic] economies: the over-accumulation of capital. Excessive production of any good—be it cars or shoes or bananas—means that unless new markets can be found, the price of that product falls and profits collapse. Just as it was in the early 1930s, the U.S. is suffering from surpluses of commodities, manufactured products, manufacturing capacity and money. Just as it was then, it is also faced with a surplus of labor, yet the two surpluses, as before, cannot be profitably matched. This problem has been developing in the U.S. since 1973. It has now tried every available means of solving it and, by doing so, maintaining its global dominance. The only remaining, politically viable option is war."

Obviously it is ludicrous to describe as "successful" a system that produces such contradictions

and has no better way of coping with them than war. Apart from that, however, this evaluation is essentially correct.

The *Guardian* continued by citing some of the advantages the United States hopes to gain by resorting to its "solution" to its problems—another war on Iraq.

"Attacking Iraq offers the U.S. ...means of offloading capital while maintaining its global dominance. The first is the creation of new geographical space for economic expansion. The second...is military spending (a process some people call 'military Keynesianism'). The third is the ability to control the economies of other nations by controlling the supply of oil. This, as global oil reserves diminish, will become an ever more powerful lever..."

Under the overriding competitive profit motive inherent in capitalism, and in the reaching out for control over sources of oil and other raw materials so vital to modern industry, clashes are inevitable.

Considering the basic cause and real factors that have produced the wars that have plagued a world dominated by capitalism, it is obviously irrational to blame international disputes and wars on this or that individual or group of individuals. Capitalism means war.

Saddam Hussein and his government may be utterly crushed by another war, but at a horrendous price in human blood and suffering. None of the basic problems that beset the Middle East

and its long-suffering peoples will be solved. It will not resolve the contradictions of capitalism or make the world a safer place. For when the war ends, the identical process will start again, leading to new clashes of interest and in time to the next greater and more destructive war.

Can we do anything about that? The SLP believes we can.

We believe that the American working class must at last come to recognize that the competitive capitalist system of private ownership of the land and plants of production, means of transportation, mines, etc., is in fact the basic cause of the present state of world anarchy, and of wars, declared and undeclared. To avoid future wars, therefore, the capitalist cause must be abolished. Society must be reorganized on socialist lines, replacing private (and state) ownership and competition with social ownership and cooperation. We must make the factories, mills, mines, railroads and all the other means of social production the collective property of society so that we can produce things to satisfy human needs instead of for the profit of the few. Only then can the competitive, war-breeding struggle for international markets, spheres of influence and sources of raw materials be ended. Only then will the nations of the world have an economic foundation for lasting cooperation, harmony and peace.

Socialism—genuine socialism—is literally the hope of humanity.