

# TWENTY THOUGHTS ON THE TASKS OF THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

FEBRUARY 2003

## THE DRIVE TO WAR

**1. Militarily, the Bush administration is about ready to roll.** Two-thirds of the country of Kuwait is now off limits to Kuwaitis—it's a staging area for invasion. Difficult summer weather is coming, and an invasion force of 150,000-plus is extremely difficult to keep supplied and poised to attack for a long period of time.

**2. Right now, the main battlefield is in the United Nations.** The Bush administration badly needs a fig leaf of international approval to conceal two ugly truths. First, this war will be an unjustified, illegal, unilateral act of aggression. Second, its goal is to put the US in control of Iraqi oil, which will give it huge leverage over countries throughout the Middle East, Europe and East Asia.

The battle is intense, with skirmishes all over the place—in the press, inside NATO, in the Turkish parliament, within the Saudi royal family, in the British trade unions, in the streets. These smaller battles are largely aimed at affecting the main clash inside the Security Council. The alliance of the rulers of France and Germany, the core of the European rival to US imperialism, is leading the other side, with Russia aboard as well, at least for now. Their defiance has boosted the value of the euro against the dollar, underlining the erosion of the dollar as the world's sole reserve currency. Some economists have pointed to the "euro menace" as a reason behind the urgency of the Bush administration's global power bid.

**3. The struggle in the UN shows how high the**

stakes have become. The US government has taken a "rule it or ruin it" stand. If a Security Council resolution authorizing invasion is not forthcoming, Bush & Company declare, we will conquer Iraq anyway, and then the Security Council will be irrelevant, by definition.

The Bush administration is out to restructure the current capitalist order into one that this country's rulers dominate in an unprecedented way. This bid was outlined in documents produced by Paul Wolfowitz and others as early as 1991, and updated in the new US "National Security Policy," issued by Condoleezza Rice last fall.

Now the administration has had to threaten to shred the UN charter and 50 years of painful and partial progress toward international law and human rights norms, and to substitute the law of the jungle, unless it gets its way.

**4. This stand makes it extraordinarily difficult for Bush & Company to back down from an attack.** Their best hope is to bully or bribe their way to a UN resolution they can use to legitimate their attack. Their nightmare is a resolution like the French proposal to put in more inspectors, for a much longer stay—perhaps even with a contingent of UN troops for "protection." **War, soon, is very likely.** By raising the stakes so high, in order to bring the UN into line, the Bush administration has also left itself almost no way out. They cannot now back down to the UN without suffering enormous domestic and international political damage.

## THE DRIVE TO PREVENT THE WAR

**5. We are part of the biggest global anti-war movement ever.** The millions of people, the hundreds of cities worldwide, taking part in the February 15 demonstrations are unprecedented. The people of the world, too, sense how high the stakes are, and are determined that our voices will be heard.

Even those European leaders who are cozying up to the US are looking over their shoulders. It's not just lopsided opinion polls and huge demonstrations that they're worrying about, it's action. The two locomotive engineers in Britain who refused to move a military train carrying supplies are a straw in the wind. Plans are underway for labor action, boycotts and militant demonstrations and, in some cities, general strikes if and when an attack commences.

The rise of mass anti-American sentiment around the world is an important factor in raising already considerable doubts within the US ruling class about the wisdom of the administration's course.

**6. The anti-war movement has broken through in the US.** The last half of January marked a qualitative turning point, highlighted by three developments. The January 18th protest in Washington and San Francisco, which many mainstream commentators recognized as the largest anti-war demonstration since the Vietnam era, showed the reach of the movement. When newspapers and TV emphasize the universality of a protest movement ("Not just green-haired college students but grandmothers and soccer moms with strollers..."), it's a sure indication of their intention to paint it sympathetically. The expanded and more favorable coverage reflected the corporate media's fear that they had been giving Bush too much of a free ride on his war drive, and were becoming out of sync with the feelings of masses of people whose attention they have to hold. It also reflects continuing consternation within sections of the ruling class about the risks of Bush's unilateralism in a world economy where global interpenetration is the source of so much of their wealth.

The second thing was the 46-to-1 vote that passed

an anti-war resolution in the Chicago City Council. This was *Chicago*, not San Francisco or Santa Monica or Seattle. Scores of other cities, towns and village have taken similar steps, showing up the mouse-timid statements of many national-level "liberal" Democrats. Third, activists in the trade union movement formed US Labor Against the War, to coordinate and expand the amazing spread of anti-war sentiment in the unions. Finally, during one week in January, the left-liberal "virtual organization" MoveOn.org signed up 100,000 people to its email list, reflecting the broad range of activities various liberal forces had launched, like taking out anti-war ads and orchestrating barrages of phone calls, faxes and visits to Congress.

**7. The split in the US body politic is wide, but it has to become deeper.** Some people who have just begun to oppose or have doubts about the war will be pulled back to the administration's camp or neutralized if the US manages to get a UN resolution, no matter how bought and bullied it may be. That's why it's important to get people to do even one little thing to show their opposition, because once they've acted on their views, they may be more likely to stay the course. This could be to go to one rally for half an hour, to send a fax to a senator, to wear a button or put a flyer up in their building—just something!

One issue that has really sharpened things up for a lot of people is the draft. For this the movement has to thank Rep Charles Rangel (D-NY). For many who had been sleeping on the war issue, his January call for a draft was a real eye-opener, and started people thinking and talking about the domestic costs of war and how it could affect their lives. (Rangel's critics on the left should bear in mind that the Pentagon at this time is adamantly opposed to a draft with all its potential for breeding rebellion and is bragging about the efficiency of its all-volunteer armed forces. And if a draft is adopted, it will be because of a difficult invasion or occupation and not because of a call from Rangel, an African-American Korean War veteran who has consistently opposed this war.)

## IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES FACING THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

**8. After the urgent push for February 15, both energizing and exhausting, several strategic dilemmas confront the anti-war movement.** February 15 has provided a compelling central focus for the overwhelming majority of activists over the past month, but there is little follow-up in place to keep the movement's momentum and focus going. Several suggestions have been floated: a national day of action (from Not in Our Name); an e-mail campaign in support of the Kennedy-Byrd Bill, requiring Bush to go back to Congress before initiating military attack on Iraq; a massive appeal to the General Assembly to intervene, which is allowed in the UN Charter for the purpose of safeguarding peace when the Security Council is deadlocked.

Since the movement needs to both broaden and deepen opposition to the war drive, these suggestions are not necessarily incompatible but they can't probably all be done well. This contributes to the overriding difficulty with which the enlarged movement is grappling—the growing sense that despite our numbers we may not be able to stop this war. We all hope for a Security Council veto that could block a pro-US UN resolution—but will any government really have the courage to do that?

This unstable conjuncture the movement is in now has particular impact on the left, or conscious progressives—pick your term—the layer of people who have opposed the war drive since it started, including anti-imperialists, radical activists of color, pacifists, faith-based activists, women's peace groups, socialists, anarchists, anti-capitalists. By comparison with newer folks caught up in the surge of the movement, we're not so likely to think, "My God, there're millions of us—they can't just go ahead and attack." We know that they can, and that it's very difficult for anti-war movements to stop wars before they start. But we're still not immune from demoralization when we realize that the biggest movement since Vietnam may not succeed in its stated and most immediate goal.

**9. We're also grappling with the reality that the movement has outstripped the left.** People are organizing in towns that we never went to and often not because of leaflets that we gave them. More mainstream forces, with staffs, media consultants, fundraising apparatuses, have come in. There are new volunteers to take on the tasks we once had to do. The movement has its own momentum. Thrilling as all this is, it calls for some readjustment and redefining of the role of the left.

On one hand, the explosive growth of the movement, combined with the sneaking suspicion that Bush is going to order an attack no matter what, can feed feelings of burnout and irrelevance. Some of us will be nagged by doubts about whether conscious leftists are still relevant and still essential.

Even more dangerous, this big-movement/little-us dynamic can't help but foster unhealthy behaviors among organized left forces. Some may take grandiose stands that "because my organization was out there first, people should follow our leadership, and anyone who doesn't is a sectarian or an anti-communist." Some cadre organizations might pull the forces under their leadership out of the united front and issue their own calls for actions or campaigns without consultation. Or some may also decide that since the movement has become too big for them to control, it's time to stop organizing and concentrate on recruiting whomever they can.

**10. We believe that leftists need to focus on some crucial new tasks in the upcoming period.**

- **First, we need to help newer participants become, and see themselves as, organizers,** as people who bring others into motion by reaching out in neighborhoods, campuses, workplaces. We have to help them make the leap to that all-crucial task of expanding the circle of people who have stood up in public, have taken action, have done something concrete about their feelings of opposition to the war.

• **Second, we need to push deeper, to explain that although we hope for a UN veto, we can't count on it.** Our opposition to the war should not be conditioned on a UN veto but on the principle that it's wrong to attack a country that poses no real threat to us. Thousands of civilians and soldiers will die, and the war will cause instability in many countries, make more people hate the US, and make us less safe inside the US. By addressing the question of why Bush is doing this, (see point 1) we can contribute to building an anti-imperialist pole in the movement.

• **Third, we have to raise the social/political costs of war—not let profit-making and business as usual go on here in the US.** The US warmongers can absorb union resolutions and big demos. We have to make the costs higher and start to think about civil and un-civil disobedience. We have to help build ongoing dialogue between militant younger activists from the direct action and anti-capitalist movements, and older radicals. Tactically, there is a fine line between alienating potentially supportive people who are questioning but not sure, and being too conventional and legalistic to effectively raising the social costs of war. That doesn't mean flail out of frustration, although if some forces do that, we must defend them. We cannot allow those forces to be marginalized, even if we disagree with their tactics.

• **Fourth, we have to propose some targets for the movement to focus on,** and be clear to everybody about why they're targets: Bush administration figures and advisors, pro-war politicians, corporate war profiteers. The combat veterans have provided a valuable model by going after "Chicken Hawks"—politicians who avoided military service themselves but are eager for other people to go off to war.

• **Fifth, we have to take an exemplary and educational approach to struggling against white supremacist, sexist and other oppressive practices that crop up in the movement,** usually despite best intentions. This means, if a person of color raises issues of respect and not being heard, a response like "Oh, how can you feel that way, don't be divisive, we're all here to stop the war" can't be allowed to stand. Conversely, a person (especially somebody new) shouldn't be driven out of a coalition for one national chauvinist remark—there needs to be an attempt to explain why the comment was destructive to the goals we all share, and a request for more respectful behavior.

• **And finally, we need to help people prepare for the next phases—the warmongers' counter-attack and the tasks that will face the movement should a US invasion of Iraq go forward.**

## **PREPARING FOR THE COUNTER-ATTACK**

**11. The Right's counter-attack is just starting to heat up.** We have been extremely fortunate so far. Our movement grew so fast and so unexpectedly, that the Bush administration and its allies have not been very effective in developing strategies to counter us. That is changing right now, with a three-pronged offensive against anti-war forces gearing up.

Already we see increased red-baiting and un-American-baiting. Workers World Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party, the main forces behind A.N.S.W.E.R. and Not In Our Name respectively, are being attacked in the mainstream media. Liberal hacks like David Corn and Todd Gitlin

should be drawing overtime pay from Bush for their coordinated efforts to make the presence of left organizations a splitting issue in the movement. The charge is that they hold "extreme" positions, having vocally supported Yugoslavia's Slobodan Milosevic (WWP) or Peru's Shining Path (RCP). But since other groups holding similar positions are not being mentioned, let alone targeted, obviously the targeting is because of their effectiveness in helping to build the anti-war movement.

Along with these assaults, we can expect to see in the media and in non-governmental institutions more attacks and blacklisting of individuals who stand up against the war—entertainers, professors, etc.

**12. As implementation of the Patriot Act is ramped up, the legal system will be increasingly used to silence, intimidate and punish dissenters.** Attempts to deny permits—like the one for the February 15 march in NYC—and limit freedom of speech and assembly will likely increase. Dissenters and any individual whom the US government places in a suspect category will be even more vulnerable to detention without rights. This category now includes anyone from the Mid-East, from the “axis of evil” countries, and individuals who are accused of being members of organizations on the “international terrorism” list—a list which encompasses several organizations that progressives would recognize as waging legitimate struggles for the liberation of their peoples. Foreign-born activists—particularly Filipinos, Indonesians, and Koreans along with the South Asians, Arabs and Muslims who were the first to be detained—are, we believe, likely to be particular targets in the upcoming period. The struggle to defend them may involve huge resources of time and energy and must be seen as an integral part of

the whole movement—not just the task of national minority communities. Additionally, the recently-leaked provisions of Patriot Act II, which the administration has in the works, would go much further in allowing the government to strip US citizens of their citizenship and the rights it entails.

**13. Finally, we believe that should there be an attack on Iraq, a propaganda blitz will be launched simultaneously with it.** The line will be something along the lines of: “We’ve had our differences and that’s healthy and democratic but now it’s time to rally round the flag and back our boys.” Grover Norquist, Bush adviser and head of the far-Right group Americans for Tax Reform, claims to have allies lined up to raise pro-war resolutions in every state legislature in the country on the day of an attack. The warmongers will try to use emotions to sweep everything before them. Then attacks on movement as un-American will become deeper and more savage, preparing the ground for not only marginalization of anti-war activists but blacklisting and vigilante attacks.

## PREPARING FOR WAR

**14. The movement needs to be prepared for the worst outcome.** In this spirit, Freedom Road would like to raise some thoughts about how to sustain the movement, if and when the US attacks Iraq:

- **We must fan outrage against civilian casualties.** We will have to expose the proposed Shock and Awe strategy, a concentrated opening wave of cruise missiles so massive that “there will not be a safe place in Baghdad,” as one Pentagon official boasted. This would involve the near total destruction of the city and massive deaths of civilians. Learning from some of the religious pacifists like Voices in the Wilderness, we need to put a human face on the Iraqis who will suffer and die. We can’t act, by omission or commission, as if only American deaths matter. Remember that since the rulers of the US milked the deaths of innocent civilians on September 11 so hard to win support for the “War on Terror,” they are more vulnerable to criticism and de-legitimization when they kill civilians.

We have to use this weakness to limit their killing as much as we can.

- **We should bring our analysis of why Bush’s drive for global domination is not in the interest of ordinary US people into our organizing around economic survival issues.** This means in workplaces (especially in the public sector), around welfare rights, within the struggles of low-wage and no-wage workers and public university students fighting cutbacks and tuition increases. And it means bringing the context of economic assault against working and oppressed people into our anti-war materials and campaigns. Unlike previous wars, this war won’t rescue the economy, as even pro-Bush economists admit.

- **We need to deepen the anti-war movement’s base among working-class people and people of color.** Jobs are scarcer across the board, and the most vulnerable workers are immigrant workers, particu-

larly low-paid Latinos and Asians who face arbitrary firings, detentions and criminalization in this period. Only a few unions rallied around the tens of thousands of mostly Latino and Filipino airport service workers who were locked out and sometimes fired under the pretext of national security. Imagine the greater impact and unity if more labor unions had put their resources and clout in these workers' defense. It has never been easy to go against the national chauvinist traditions deeply ingrained in much of the US organized labor, but class-conscious local officials and rank-and-file activists have made real headway. The fact that in NYC, for example, the unions most supportive to the anti-war movement are majority people of color in both membership and leadership shows the dynamic potential that arises when working class and oppressed nationality political currents converge. It's also heartening that many predominantly white and not traditionally radical union locals around the country have passed anti-war resolutions.

- **We should help promote resistance within the Armed Forces.** The organizations of the families of active duty GIs who oppose war against Iraq can play an extremely important role in influencing public opinion and must be supported and given outlets to speak. Projects like Citizen Soldier that support

GI rights and voices of dissent in the military will be more essential than ever. Army recruiters must be challenged in schools and on campuses—with leadership coming from veterans of previous wars who oppose this one. Working-class people (especially those from rural areas in the South and Midwest) and other people of color (especially African Americans, Native Americans, Chicanos and Filipinos) have always been the cannon fodder for US wars. They face the “economic draft” and when in trouble with the law, the choice of prison or military service. As public school high school juniors automatically have their names and contact info submitted to military recruiters by schools—unless the school is effective at informing parents of their opt out rights and parents jump to act—and as college becomes harder to afford, this disproportionate recruitment targeting can only intensify.

- **We have to look out for and to avoid an orgy of movement infighting when things get rough and we're feeling demoralized.** We've seen before, including in the period after the invasion of Afghanistan, that frustration and feelings of powerlessness can lead to a lot of blaming and castigating others within the movement, and difficulties in working together. We can't afford to go there again.

## AFTER A WAR

**15. All-out war in Iraq is not likely to drag on for years.** If the US does attack Iraq and the war is really short and not too difficult or bloody, it will obviously be tactically much harder for us. Still, success, or something that can be painted in the short term as success, is by no means a sure thing either. Bush wants a long-term occupation to secure control of the oil—and it won't be quiet. It will mean a long-term series of headaches and costs. The rickety nature of the US-backed regime in Afghanistan, the glacial pace of “nation-building” there, and the expanding guerilla war all foreshadow how difficult and expensive dealing with a post-invasion Iraq is going to be.

**16. A big, if temporary, success for the US would actually make the world a far more dangerous place.** It would feed the arrogance of empire that

already burns so brightly in a big section of the ruling class. The never-ending “War on Terror” would be validated. The Bush administration could easily decide to go after North Korea, which has humiliated the US repeatedly through the course of the Iraq crisis. The scenario is all too easy to picture: a US “surgical strike” at North Korea, a North Korean counterattack against South Korea, Seoul in flames, hundreds of thousands of casualties—and someone decides to go to the nukes.

So no matter how the current situation plays out, it will be essential to keep an evolving anti-war movement strong and open to dealing with new challenges. The “War on Terror” may focus on the Philippines next, or on Colombia. New al Qaeda attacks could stir up new storms of national chauvinism and anti-immigrant pogroms here.

## FOUR REASONS FOR THE LEFT TO TAKE HEART

**17. This anti-war movement should reinforce in us a profound faith in everyday people.** The drive to war on Iraq was undertaken by the Bush administration using the cover of the shock, fear, anger and dislocation that followed the 9/11 attacks, and the deep patriotic upsurge that followed. The big media, especially television, kept up a steady beat of red-white-and-blue, "The Nation At War"-type programming, endorsing whatever claims the government made and painting Saddam Hussein as a deadly menace, while whitening out the anti-war movement entirely. The "opposition party," the Democrats, could not have licked Bush's shoes more cravenly. Yet somehow in the face of all this, millions, tens of millions of Americans said, "Wait just a minute, here. I don't think I'm buying this." And hundreds of thousands, millions, acted on it.

**18. We did a lot to help give those people a way to take action,** cobbling together a movement with spit and baling wire at a time when organized left and anti-war forces in this country were fragmented and coming off a bad decade. Building the movement against war on Iraq has been a difficult and stressful time, and there is precious little to indicate that things are going to get easier any time soon. This should not lead us to lose sight of how remarkable an accomplishment this movement represents, this movement that we have done so much to build and nurture.

**19. We also have to look at the enormous promise the anti-war movement embodies about the**

**future we can build.** The issue of the war and Bush military policy is beginning to coalesce an incredibly wide range of social forces: anti-globalization, anti-capitalists, labor, national movements, students, greens, liberals, anarchists, etc., etc. This movement is beginning to reflect, in *embryonic form*, the coalition of social forces that can ultimately transform society. Not even the anti-globalization movement was able to bring together such a broad array of sectors. This is an extremely precious embryo that we must nurture and protect very carefully. It has come together based mainly on common opposition to Bush's war plans, and deeper unities remain to be explored and spelled out. We have to think about what we can do to help articulate a vision, strategy, and possible program that can help the movement to endure long-term.

**20. The promise of a better world is a global one.** The worldwide anti-war movement, like that in the US, reflects a coalescence of broad and divergent forces, both in the global North and South. Fear of a Bush Planet is compelling the convergence of communists, anarchists, social democrats, liberals, labor unions, women's organizations, landless peasant movements, national liberation struggles, Third World nationalists and many, many others. What is even more exciting is that links between the various anti-war movements are being renewed, or newly established. Again, events are thrusting forward a form of internationalism that we have only dreamed about up 'til now.

**National Executive Committee  
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