

Democratic Socialists
of America's message
to the marchers at the Oct. 27
National Day of Action to
END THE WAR IN IRAQ, NOW!

Ideology and Oil Power the War!

Seven of every 10 Americans support pulling U.S. troops and private security consultants out of Iraq.

So why are they still there?

What keeps the war raging?

And who benefits?

George W. Bush, perhaps the worst president the country ever produced, is chiefly responsible for using his imperial office to start and drag out this disastrous war. But a towel-snapping, cartoon-like frat boy's infirmities and chronic bungling can't explain a war that's lasted longer than any U.S. military action except for Vietnam.

Bush followed the lead of a group of neo-conservative ideologues who believed in a new American century in which American leadership and military might would reinforce free-market capitalism and shape the world in our image. Iraq was to be rebuilt as a new democratic outpost that would alter the regional political alliances and usher in a new period of peace and stability in the Middle East. The ideological rigidity of Bush, Cheney and company has turned the world against us at a cost of nearly 4,000 American lives and anywhere from 200,000 to 1.2 million Iraqi lives. And then there is the oil.

It's not that the Iraqis want us there. As Lawrence Wright said in *The New Yorker* (Oct. 22),

American military leaders say that the surge has reduced sectarian attacks to their lowest level in more than a year, and yet the number of Iraqis wanting the U.S. to withdraw has risen by 12 percent over the same period of time. Anbar Province, which President Bush recently visited because the surge had its greatest success there, has the highest concentration of those saying America should leave immediately. ... As long as we remain in Iraq, the Iraqi people will feel themselves to be subjugated by a foreign power.

It's not because of the gutlessness of the Democratic leadership in Congress. Too many Democrats share the Bush administration's vision. Any resolution calling for immediate withdrawal or even a highly justified impeachment would have failed, though the House leadership's inability to deny funding for the war and "the surge" taints the Democrats as a principled party of opposition and has given the war-makers

all they need to continue the slaughter. But it's a crass exaggeration to say, as one writer put it, that "the bulk of the anti-war movement has become subservient to the Democratic Party and to the agenda of its prime candidates for the presidency in 2008, with Hillary Clinton in the lead." Of all the Democratic presidential contenders, only Clinton fails to rule out a nuclear assault on Iran. This peace movement is a refutation of Hillary Clinton's neoliberalism, not an enabler for her. It's also a wake-up call to supporters of John Edwards and Barack Obama, who also hedge on a full U.S. pullout.

We are not demobilized

The peace movement has not died, as some radical critics would have it. Rejecting the fetid politics of the Iraqi opposition has not immobilized war protestors or blunted opposition to U.S. intervention. Today's mobilization is proof that no one is demobilized, that support for a radical change in U.S. policy is growing, and that those demanding immediate withdrawal need not also apologize or feel they are fronting for armed clerical reactionaries in the Middle East. With the U.S.'s history of abetting governments and movements temporarily allied to it that jail and murder secular leftist and union leaders, why the surprise when the State Department and the CIA's own attack dogs turn on them? Why blame the left for the growth of Islamic fundamentalism? Thank the *realpolitik* maneuvering of administrations from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush for that. And why should the U.S. Left turn a blind eye to Islamic reaction, let alone pretend yesterday's cold-war U.S. allies are today's friends? We can oppose U.S. imperial aims and frustrate corporate interests without giving a gram of political support to the Islamic fundamentalist Right.

The war grinds on fecklessly planned and ham-handedly carried out—Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez' recent comments that the administration's conduct of the war was "incompetent" and "catastrophically flawed" is only the latest and most public reflection of what career officers believe—the war is serving a bottom-line objective: it prepares the ground for keeping a major oil producer within the reach of U.S. corporate interests. One subtext of "Mission Accomplished" is "It's

the Oil, Stupid.” And that mission is close to being finished.

Former Federal Reserve chair Alan Greenspan let the cat out of the bag by admitting in his recent autobiography, “I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.”

As Jim Holt notes in *The London Review of Books* (Oct. 18), when looked at from the standpoint of long-term corporate interests, the war is neither unwinnable, a quagmire, a disaster, nor even much of a mistake. Iraq sits on a sea of oil, five times the reserves of those in the U.S., and perhaps one quarter of the entire world’s oil resources. “The value of Iraqi oil, largely light crude with low production costs, would be of the order of \$30 trillion at today’s prices. For purposes of comparison, the projected total cost of the US invasion/occupation is around \$1 trillion,” Holt writes.

No wonder the U.S. is so committed to privatizing Iraqi oil holdings, or why the 26,000-member Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions, the nation’s largest labor group—and once banned and hunted by Saddam’s Baath Party government—opposes the planned “hydrocarbon law” sell-off, or why the U.S.-backed Iraqi government called out the army to stop last June’s strike and arrest union leaders.

Iraqi unions resist privatization

This isn’t a new fight. In 2003, when multinational corporation Halliburton sought control of the wells, the union struck, exports were halted and Halliburton left. Similar actions forced U.S. and other foreign firms to drop takeover plans for deep-water shipping facilities. But passage of a new, U.S.-authored law, what the Bush administration calls a “benchmark” for the Iraqi government, would leave just 17 of Iraq’s 80 existing fields to the Iraqi National Oil Company. “The rest—including all yet to be discovered oil—[would be] under foreign corporate control for 30 years,” writes Holt. Five permanent military super-bases, away from urban areas and easily defensible, protect the oil infrastructure but not the population.

Thus, a partition of the country, proposed by presidential hopeful Sen. Joseph Biden, or even a significant draw-down of U.S. troops, though not necessarily of Blackwater-type contractors, would not change the thrust of U.S. policy: an oil grab. Nor would it interfere with the ancillary strategic advantages of owning the largest single oil deposit in the world.

That’s why a total and immediate pullout is necessary. Not because a radical stand by definition trumps a more gradual approach. Not because American consumers won’t benefit greatly from access to cheaper oil as the supply increases, or because every industry from travel and freight

hauling to pharmaceuticals won’t gain—the short-term domestic consequences would be rosy, at least for business—but because the same system that keeps American working people in economic peonage and politically powerless will get a new lease on life if Iraq becomes a U.S. oil field.

If we want to end war, we need to end the systemic compulsion for going to war. This war was not fought for nation-building—the Bush administration early disavowed that claim—nor to end terror. It was fought for strategic imperial advantages, from which most Americans will not and cannot benefit, while it maintains a clique of super-rich pirates in economic and political power. If war is politics by other means, then peace has to be politics, too. We stand a better chance of crippling the power of America’s oligarchs and making the U.S. an economic, social and political democracy again if, instead of being the world’s behemoth, the U.S. acts as the model of a nation with a democratic foreign policy.

Mark Twain, watching as U.S. troops butchered native Filipinos in an adventure his day’s aspiring colonialists had the cheek to claim was merely the action of protectors, concluded that “we have gone there to conquer, not to redeem.... I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.” The same talons the eagle puts into Iraq today are dug deeply into Americans, too. An immediate cutoff of military spending in Iraq and the withdrawal of every U.S. troop, private military consultant and intelligence officer helps not just the Iraqis to reconstruct their nation; it helps those of us at home to reconstruct ours, too.

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