

What way for the anti-war movement?

Mobilise the unions

The key to any serious anti-war movement is mobilising the organised working class. That includes political mobilisation as well as industrial.

Anti-war protesters are rightly crying: "Blair out!" But the slogan hangs in mid-air unless we can say how, and who will replace Blair.

By a Lib-Dem government under Charles Kennedy? But he now supports the war too. No: our campaign should be for the trade unions to demand a special Labour Party conference, a vote of no confidence in Blair, and a new Labour leadership election in which trade unionists and Labour Party members can vote for a new leader who has left-wing views – their own views – and is against war.

If the New Labour machine uses its bureaucratic grip to block the unions, then they should call a special conference of their own, which could open the way to a new, democratic, worker-based "real Labour" party.

When Labour's National Executive debated the war, on 28 January, every single trade-union representative there voted for the pro-Blair motion, so that the anti-war motion presented by Mark Seddon fell without a vote. Every single one, including those from vocally anti-war unions like the RMT! The unions' rank and file must call their leaders to account, and insist they fight for union policy within the Labour structures.

Stop work to stop war

The Government's threat to ban strike action by the Fire Brigades Union during the war should be condemned. But it spotlights where the power to paralyse the war machine lies.

The Government admits that the armed forces could not cope both with sustained FBU strike action and with war in Iraq. Strike action even by a small union (50,000 members) could paralyse the war machine.

In a capitalist society, nothing moves unless the working class makes it move. Industrial action like that by the Scottish train drivers who refused to transport war materials is the most powerful way of hindering the US and UK governments' war for oil.

Cut the roots of war

This war, like dozens before it, is driven by the rival desires of big capitalist interests for a world, or regions, cleared of all obstacles to their profit-making.

If they get an easy victory in Iraq, the US "hawks" have a long list of countries they want to blow up in the course of assisting US capitalists' power and will to do what they like in the world.

To cut the roots of war we must fight to replace capitalism, driven by production for profit and competition for maximum profit. The alternative is a world regulated by human (in the first place working-class) solidarity and by consistent democracy in economic as well as political life.

The way to that world of solidarity and democracy lies through international working-class solidarity in struggle now. Anti-war activists should take up that cause through campaigns like No Sweat, which unites workers across the world in fighting sweatshop labour conditions and multinational exploitation.

To try to confine anti-war meetings to organisational detail and general exhortations to activism, to squeeze out political debate on the grounds that we have no time for it, is short-sighted and ultimately self-defeating.

No to war – and no to Saddam

If the USA is aggressive capitalism, should we support Saddam? No. If Saddam were to defeat the USA, which he won't, he'd be out to conquer or reconquer Kurdistan, Kuwait, Khuzestan. Socialists and consistent democrats oppose war, but we do not side with the smaller, weaker, regional imperialist capitalism, Iraq, against the bigger world power and its satellite Britain.

Solidarity with the peoples of Iraq

Our banners will be seen on TV across the world, including in Iraq. How much more effective they would be if they proclaimed solidarity with the peoples of Iraq against both the US war drive and Saddam's dictatorship!

The main Kurdish parties, and most of the Iraqi exile opposition, have supported the US war drive, not because they have illusions in the USA's motives, but because to them it seems a "lesser evil" than Saddam's totalitarian tyranny, and they see no better alternative. The anti-war movement should offer them a better alternative.

Left-wing Iraqi parties, like the Worker-communist Party of Iraq and the rump Communist Party of Iraq stand equally opposed to war and to Saddam's "fascist" regime.

Internationalist, democratic, secular

Demonstrations, lobbies, rallies, teach-ins, walk-outs can all help to build the anti-war movement. But, if they are going to help build more decisive action,

rather than cut across it, their basis should be clearly internationalist, democratic and secular.

One of the great things about the current anti-war movement is that it is international, with synchronised action in dozens of cities across the globe. If we are to unite working people worldwide in a single effective campaign, our message must be clear, simple, and free from any hint of religious sectarianism, nationalism, or sectionalism.

No alliance with Islamic fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism is as reactionary as Christian fundamentalism or Hindu fundamentalism, and similar to fascism in its attitude to democracy, working-class organisation, and women's rights. Its main victims have been Muslim workers, women and democrats, in the countries where it is strong – Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Algeria, Iran...

It is wrong for the Stop The War Coalition to accredit the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) as co-sponsor of anti-war demonstrations.

The MAB is not a loose, naive community movement. It is the British wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest and biggest Islamic-fundamentalist party of the Arab world. In a freesheet distributed on the 28 September demonstration, it explained that in its ideal (Islamic) state, people brought up Muslim who then abandon religion should be put to death or at least punished for "mutiny and treason". The slogan added to the demonstrations in deference to MAB – "freedom for Palestine" – is vague, but for MAB it means "Zionists out of

Palestine" and an Islamic state, from the Jordan to the sea.

These are canny, "realistic" – and rich – fundamentalists, different in approach from the shrill fundamentalist "sectarians" of Hizb ut Tahrir and Al Muhajiroun, but, because they are more subtle, even more dangerous in a country like the UK. Their endorsement by Stop The War has served mainly to help their right-wing movement, previously feeble in members if not in funds, gain standing in Britain's Muslim population. It should be withdrawn.

"Broad" – or effective?

Obviously huge demonstrations will contain people with disparate politics. But no-one would argue that representatives of Saddam's Baathist party, or of the British National Party (which opposes this war for its own reasons), should be accredited as allies in the anti-war movement. There are limits.

What are the limits? Was it right to invite Charles Kennedy to speak at the rally on 15 February? We think not. To aim for a broad alliance trying to keep Lib Dems (or dissident Tories?) on board, and to aim for a movement which can culminate in effective organised working-class action against the war machine, are two incompatible directions.

To set up Potemkin-village "People's Assemblies", supposedly the "alternative democratic voice" of the whole British people, is not a good use of anti-war organising energy.

Democratic, secular, internationalist, open to political debate, and working-class oriented – that is how an effective anti-war movement should be.

Web links

Workers' Liberty: <http://www.workersliberty.org>

More from Workers' Liberty on the war: <http://www.workersliberty.org/war>

No Sweat: <http://www.nosweat.org.uk>

Labour Against The War: <http://www.labouragainsthewar.org.uk>

Stop The War: <http://www.stopwar.org.uk>

A Marxist day school: The war on Iraq, imperialism and class politics

Discussions include: The politics of oil + The war on Iraq + The situation in Iran + What is imperialism? + Globalisation + Islamic fundamentalism.

Noon to 6pm, Sunday 23 March.

Second floor, University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1 (Tube: Euston, Euston Square, Russell Square, or Goodge St).

Organised by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. All welcome.

Workers' Liberty 2/3: The new world disorder

Includes: The USA as hyperpower + Iraq: trajectory of a state + Capitalism, nation, classes, Empire + Two critiques: 'Empire' and 'new imperialism' + Hamas and nationalism + Ultra-imperialism + Socialism and colonial policy + ABC of national liberation movements + Dossier on socialists and war: Kosova 1999, Kuwait 1991, South Atlantic 1982. 200 pages. £3.50 (£2 unwaged) post free from AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.

Workers' Liberty, P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Phone 020 7207 3997, fax 020 7207 4673.
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