

Stop this war

Why we say **no to war**

The terrible events of 11 September are being met by a far more terrible response argues **Lindsey German**

I was preparing to watch Tony Blair's speech to the TUC on television when news of the World Trade Centre disaster struck. Like millions of others around the world I looked in horror at the twin towers collapsing, at tiny figures jumping to certain death, at shocked and petrified survivors on the streets below. The attack killed thousands of working people in the most horrific way-people of many different races and nationalities, cleaners, firefighters, security guards and secretaries. No socialist could condone this act. Individual terrorism attacks innocent targets, in this case turning US workers into the enemy and allowing the real enemies of US workers to unite the country behind them.

However, I also thought of the terrible devastation which the US government would now unleash against innocent people in other parts of the world. And I thought of the terrible hypocrisy of our rulers and their media. For the people in the World Trade Centre died in exactly the same way as those in the Baghdad bomb shelter which took a direct hit during the Gulf War, or those in the Belgrade television station or those 300 civilians in an Iranian airliner shot down by the US. This escalation of terrorism is itself the product of western, especially US and British, policy. There are two major faultlines running through the Middle East. First is the continued oppression of the

Palestinians by Israel, backed by the US to the tune of \$3 billion a year. The other is the continuing campaign of sanctions and bombing of Iraq. The crisis in both these areas has escalated over the past year.

The intifada began a year ago in response to war criminal Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa mosque. Since then, of the more than 700 casualties of the intifada, nearly all have been Palestinians. Sharon, prime minister since earlier this year, has used the horror of the past weeks to make further incursions into Palestinian territory. After the bombing he referred to Yasser Arafat as 'our Bin Laden'. This about sums up his attitude to peace and his resolute backing for extreme right wing Jewish settlers. There are now half a million armed settlers in 200 settlements-a third of them created since the Oslo peace accord, which has been shown to be a complete sham.

One of George Bush's first acts as president was to escalate the bombing of Iraq, carried out unilaterally by Britain and the US. The million deaths as a result of sanctions and bombing which have occurred in Iraq since 1991 will not be forgotten by many in the Middle East, who believe the inhabitants of the country have been penalised by the western powers, and that double standards are constantly applied.

The greatest example of this is the attempt to portray the present conflict as a war between civilisation and barbarism, or about the clash between democracy and dictatorship. Little could be further from the truth. Some of the closest allies of the US in the coalition which Bush is trying to pull together rank among the most repressive in the world. Saudi Arabia is an autocratic monarchy. Egypt will not allow political opposition.

Islamic fundamentalism is portrayed as fanatical and extreme. Yet many of the Jewish settlers are religious fundamentalists, holding views as extreme as any. And Christian fundamentalists are vociferous in the US, where right winger Pat Buchanan has

said the bombings were caused by an angry god who did not like the prevalence of abortion and other equal rights.

Bombed in 1999

The US is not just targeting terrorist groups, but states which harbour them. Indeed, as Bush has made clear, this is a 'crusade' to root out terrorists worldwide. Central to this is the thesis that the world community (of 'civilised nations') has to pit itself against certain 'rogue states' which act outside the norm of their civilised behaviour. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan is public enemy number one today, but the term has been used much more in relation to North Korea and especially Iraq, which is seen by the hawks in the US as its ultimate enemy.

The US and Britain have a slight problem here. There are many alleged connections between the hijackers and two states- Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Yet these are completely safe from US attack because of their right wing regimes and their close alliance with the US. Instead US intelligence is trying to find evidence of links with Iraq, since at least sections of Bush's administration want to 'finish the job' of 1991 by invading and overthrowing Saddam Hussein.

The attitude towards terrorist groups today is likely to lead to all-out war. It is as if Britain and the US bombed not only West Belfast but Dublin, Boston, Chicago and parts of London in response to IRA bombs. Such a response would have been met with outrage by all but a handful of Loyalist fanatics (Christian fundamentalists to a man).

Yet we are promised an even more draconian retaliation to the attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. This is certain to wreak devastation on Afghanistan, already one of the poorest countries in the world, and to spread war more widely to countries such as Pakistan. Any attack on Iraq will cause uproar throughout the Middle East. The possibility of this becoming a

much wider war unless the western powers can be stopped is very strong.

In Iraq and the Balkans

We have seen the devastation that western intervention has already caused in the aftermath of the Cold War. These interventions have been motivated by the economic and political interests of the west. The war for oil in the Middle East, for political and military hegemony in eastern Europe and for control of the oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian sea through the Balkans, have marked the past decade. The increased globalisation of capital has fuelled the drive to war, impoverishing whole regions, increasing inequalities in the world and backing western investment with military might. Globalisation has exacerbated the world's tensions, not eased them.

Thus international capitalism and the competition between it breeds war. It also uses war to try to dampen down internal dissent. One of the main socialist arguments against terrorism is that it makes it easier for the ruling class to do this. Bush is trying to create a situation in the US where anyone who does not support the flag and the president is for terrorism. In Britain, Blair escaped criticism at the TUC, which then closed down early to avoid dissent. Dissent is also under attack through curtailment of civil liberties, with the threat of identity cards and the crackdown on 'terrorists' likely to include many others who do not agree with their governments. Blair tells us we can't discuss the war at home, but it is business as usual for government and big business to wage their attacks on us. Even as the TUC was being called off, the arms fair in London's docklands continued. The moves to privatise schools, hospitals and the London tube continue, while the union leaders call off their campaigns. George Bush has promised \$40 billion for military intervention and reconstruction. Airlines are being underwritten by governments, yet there is supposedly no money for pensions or welfare. Nor is there any money to put into

some of the world's poorest countries. Why can't the money which is spent on weapons and war go to providing food and jobs in these countries, and so alleviate the threat of war?

The alliance put together by Blair and Bush has fantastic difficulties ahead. The internal tensions in regimes such as Saudi Arabia, the intransigence of the Sharon regime in Israel, and the deep scepticism about US motives in waging this war can all help to destabilise it. The fact that the US has no conventional enemy makes it harder. Therefore the contradictions may come to the surface sooner rather than later. But we should not count on it. War looks almost inevitable and we do not yet know what its consequences will be.

We do know, however, that there are already the makings of anti-war movements around the world, not least in the US itself. And in Britain an Observer poll (13 September 2001) found that 62 percent of British voters have little or no confidence in Bush taking the right decisions. Only 27 percent of voters support massive air strikes against countries harbouring terrorists with 60 percent opposed.

A Stop the War Coalition has been formed, launched at a meeting which overflowed into two other meetings, attracting nearly 2,000 people at only five days notice. The mood has been much angrier and the crowds bigger than at comparable times during previous wars in the Gulf and the Balkans.

This at least in part reflects the radicalisation which has been taking place in the past couple of years and especially the anti-capitalist movement which has grown up since Seattle, and which was so successful in mobilising for Genoa in July. Many anti-capitalists can see the connections between global capital, the drive to war and the political problems in the Middle East. They are likely to be a very important and dynamic part of the anti-war movement in the months ahead. The more they make the connections between war, capitalism and imperialism, the stronger they will be.

Events of the past weeks have made millions around the world fearful for the future. A world wracked by war, and recession-which is accelerating quickly-is a dangerous place to be. Society is increasingly polarised between those who want to accelerate the globalisers' agenda, through war if necessary, and those who want to change the world into a fairer, more equal and safer place. We are facing big battles against war, but also against the neo-liberal agenda and the racism and scapegoating it breeds. Our rulers want us to pay the price. We must refuse to do so.

Stop press: Egyptian activist Faud Zahran, member of the coordinating committee of the EPCSPU, a Palestinian solidarity group, has been arrested by the regime.

<http://www.swp.org.uk/SR/256/SR1.HTM>