

## Notes to Prepare for the First Section of War Times August 17 Retreat

*Note: These notes were prepared to stimulate discussion at a War Times retreat, they do not represent positions of the paper or its staff. They were drafted by Max Elbaum.*

The purpose of this first section is to step back and look at the big picture. What is the relative strength of the key players on the world and national scene? What are best-case and worst-case scenarios for the next, say, 3-5 years? Where are openings for the peace and justice movement, and what do we think might be a useful strategic framework to take advantage of them?

Partly this is to stretch our thinking, to give us all a place to say what's on our minds and find out what how others see things. More concretely, this discussion will frame the following sections on the elections and on War Times role and work priorities between now and November 2004.

Below are some notes to help folks prepare. We are also sending the following seven articles which look at the current situation from different angles and perspectives. (Additional readings for folks with extra time are listed at the end.)

1. Eric Hobsbawm, "After the Winning of the War" (\hobsb.doc).
2. Walden Bello, "The Crisis of the Globalist Project," a main article plus a short excerpt from a second presentation Walden gave on the same topic. (bello.doc) .
3. Arundhati Roy, "Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy" (\roy.doc)
4. Paul Krugman, "Toward One-Party Rule" (\Krugman.doc).
5. Max Elbaum & Bob Wing, Perspective from Fall 2001 (\maxbob1.doc).
6. CPUSA Chair Sam Webb, opening report to the CPUSA's June 2003 National Committee meeting (cpusaUpd.doc)
7. United for Peace and Justice, Overall Strategic Framework (\ufpjstra.doc).

For the session itself Max will open with a 10-15 minute presentation based on the notes below. Then we'll throw the floor open for general discussion. After an hour or so we will tap Arnoldo to present an assessment of developments in the immigrant rights/civil liberties arena, and Hany to do likewise regarding UFPJ. Then discussion on those and related movement-specific areas. We plan to close this section with a go-round giving everyone a chance to toss out their thoughts on two points: what do you see as the most likely realistic development that would toss a wrench into Bush's Permanent War agenda, and what do you see as the probably best and worst case scenarios for the next 3-5 years?

## Points to Frame Discussion

**1. The bad news: perilous times and an unfavorable balance of forces.** There are differences of opinion and emphasis among the scholars and activists whose articles we are reading, but a few central themes are common to all:

\*These are very dangerous times. The next years are likely to see lots of violence and wars. Large-scale death and destruction has already visited the Middle East and is underway in parts of sub-Saharan Africa; the possibility of use of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction cannot be discounted. Poverty, hardship, ill-health, malnutrition and the like are likely to increase for very large numbers of people as the global polarization between rich and poor is probably going to get even worse than it is already.

\*The balance of forces is unfavorable for advocates of peace and justice. The U.S. stands alone as the world's sole superpower. This rests in part on overwhelming U.S. military dominance. But the U.S. also exercises lots of cultural and media power ("soft power"). And while the U.S. economy is not as dominant over rival capitalist powers/blocs as it once was, it remains an economic powerhouse and the single most important player in the world economy. (Beyond these general points, there are differences among leftists in assessing the relative degree of U.S. power, economic prospects, potential vulnerabilities, etc.)

\*Governmental power in the U.S. is now held by extreme reactionaries. The circle around Bush is committed to unilateralism and use of military force; contemptuous of international agreements; wedded to imposing neoliberal "open-up-to-the-market" policies on everyone else while using any means necessary to protect their own economic core interests from competition, etc. (The shorthand label widely accepted now for their international agenda: **empire**, or even imperialism.) In domestic policy they pursue the path of repression, massive shift of wealth to the rich, intensification of racism and anti-immigrant policies, all-out effort to destroy the trade union movement, dismantling of what remains of the welfare state and social safety net, encouragement for the anti-feminist and homophobic Christian Right, etc. They see prospects for entrenching reactionary politics in power for generations (up to and including effective one-party rule) and are already going beyond previously accepted norms of U.S. bourgeois politics to get there. (We are still **searching for a shorthand term** to describe their domestic agenda that would be a counterpart to the term empire: Hobsbawm mentions militarization of U.S. society, others have floated the term oligarchy, still others have begun to say fascist or quasi-fascist.) The overall justification for the whole package remains fighting a permanent "war on terrorism."

\*There is a significant mass base in the U.S. for the reactionary agenda (the Christian right, much of the white male South, etc.); and there are also deep-rooted, historical factors that cause large numbers beyond this base to support or at least acquiesce in its implementation. National chauvinism and racism are central here. Related to these, but

with their own distinct dynamic as well, are the general ignorance/lack of interest among much of the US populace about the rest of the world (related to the state of the education system & media); and the increasing link between the Jewish Zionist right and the Christian Right & Republicans, and the weight this carries in popular consciousness in the U.S. Jewish community & beyond. The longstanding pattern of right-wing, racist populism in US history is of great relevance here. Left and progressive activists need to squarely face these realities and the tremendous challenges they pose.

\*Finally, in terms of the ability to exercise power, the counterweights to US imperialism are weak and/or unreliable. The Cold War era alignment of the Soviet bloc and allied Third World liberation movements is gone. What few progressive governments remain in the world are boxed in militarily and by the constraints of the US dominated world capitalist economy. Capitalist rivals to the US in Europe and Japan are much weaker than the US and do not (yet?) have an alternative program, unity, etc. China is touted as the most likely strategic rival long-term but there are big questions both about whether this can happen and about the nature of the Chinese regime. Progressive movements worldwide have gained some momentum the last few years in the fight vs. neoliberalism and then against US pre-emptive wars (more in #3) but still lack unity, cohesion, truly massive influence, etc. In the Middle East, central in Washington's gunsights right now, the main resistance to imperialism is led by authoritarian groups with reactionary economic and social programs and in many cases committed to terrorism as a strategy. In important parts of the world where imperialism has left a trail of devastation, for example several parts of Africa, the social fabric is in such disarray, human suffering is at such a level, and inter-ethnic and other conflicts rage to such a degree, that mere stabilization, much less progress toward anti-imperial liberation, is in doubt. These latter points, along with the repressive character of many regimes around the world, have contributed to the appeal "humanitarian intervention" has to many liberals and progressives, causing new dilemmas for anti-imperialists.

## **2. Some wild cards: the economy & environment;**

\*A lot of how things go in the next few years may depend on what happens in the world and US economies. Most analysts on the left seem to agree on two things: the world economy is not in good shape - problems of over-capacity, massive debt, potential deflation, etc.; and the weight of the US economy is, in broad strokes, in decline relative to other big economic players (Europe; Japan; China). But beyond that, there are big differences and no one has a crystal ball. Is a worldwide downturn on the immediate horizon? How much ability to "manage" financial crises do the big capitalist international institutions (WTO, IMF, World Bank) still have? In what ways have dramatic scientific and technological changes altered traditional left/Marxist paradigms about the functioning of the economy, the forms of inter-capitalist and other conflicts, etc.? What is the real extent of inter-imperialist rivalry, how is it likely to unfold over the next while? What's in store specifically for the US economy over the next while? Let's welcome a little informed speculation on these matters.

\*Another wild card is the speed and severity of the unfolding environmental crisis. With Bush opting out of Kyoto, and this administration's general assault on environmental protection measures internationally and domestically, the progress the world seemed to be making in the late 80s and into the 90s has stalled or been reversed. Even then many voices were arguing that this progress was very little and very late. Global warming and its impact and other unfolding environmental catastrophes (for instance, large scale water shortages worldwide) have been pushed off the front pages by militarism and war. But that doesn't mean they aren't still happening. What are prospects on this front for the coming few years? What about the idea that we are entering a period of dangerous "resource wars" (Michael Klare has a book out by that name.) What human and political impact is all this going to have? Especially as it intersects with neoliberal privatization of everything (water supply) as well as war/militarism and return to nuclear testing/development if not actual military use with all their attendant pollution? Again, informed speculation welcome.

### **3. The good news: growing people's movements and some openings and prospects.**

\*The starting point here is that the overwhelming majority of people on the planet do not want to be dominated by a unilateral, bullying US and they do want peace. That sentiment has been registered loud and clear over the last year in a host of direct and indirect ways, from actual movements and demonstrations to opinion polls and pressures on governments. This congealing of worldwide public opinion is widely recognized and termed "**the world's second superpower.**"

\*Trying to control the entire world is a big agenda and there are already numerous signs that Washington is militarily and otherwise **overextended**. Walden Bello's article made the key point that "Overextension... is to a great degree a function of resistance. An overextended power may, in fact, be in a worse condition even with a significant increase in its military power if resistance to its power increases by an even greater degree." Walden goes on to identify several specific indicators of current US overextension. These create vulnerabilities for their side and big opportunities for the peace and justice camp.

\*The clash between popular sentiment worldwide and Washington's actions is manifesting itself in the growth of peoples movements in all parts of the globe. They are of widely varying character and are focused on a host of different issues, but there are increasing links and contacts (via the World Social Forum in particular) and an even broader sense of affinity or even solidarity between many of them. (Wallerstein talks about "the camp of Davos" vs. "the camp of Porto Allegre.") It is tricky to make broad generalizations about this motion. But the combination of a sense within these movements that they truly represent the world's majority; that they are up against an extremely dangerous enemy; that there is grave urgency in moving forward; all these sentiments combined with the participation of both energetic contingents of young people and many seasoned veterans of activism from the 1960s through the 90s

especially give grounds to think that this cycle of activism is on the rise rather than already peaked or in decline.

\*Taking a quick trip around the planet, we can see both the extent but also diversity/unevenness of the people's movements. (We could probably spend a whole retreat on any of these areas, but for this discussion we should concentrate on getting a only a broad-stroke horizon picture.) As we've noted in other discussions, Latin America probably has a more dynamic, influential, deeply rooted constellation of progressive/popular/left movements of any continent/region. Building on a long anti-imperialist tradition; with a socialist left that was less ideologically discredited than in other regions; developing powerfully in fights against neoliberalism through the 1990s; and with a hold on or access to state power in Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela, Latin America is a relative bright spot. Europe - especially but not only "old Europe" - has huge peace movements and still important labor and left movements trying to defend what remains of the welfare state. There are strong progressive movements in parts of sub-Saharan Africa - South Africa, Senegal - but the region is wracked by HIV, civil and ethnic conflicts, extreme poverty and parts have in some respects been shoved out of the major flows of the world economy. In Asia there are anti-imperial and progressive movements in the Philippines, India and Indonesia, and a still viable left in Japan; Vietnam trying to build a "socialist market economy"; crisis flashpoint on the Korean peninsula; and China a growing economic (and military) power but many differences on the left over assessing its regime and role. In the Middle East the secular left has been all but wiped out in many countries and lost considerable ground within the Palestinian struggle (though it is hard to say now what is the real situation in Iran or even Iraq). There is huge anti-American and anti-Zionist and anti-imperial popular anger but the main organizations/forces capturing and channeling that sentiment now do not have a progressive program. The Palestinian struggle is at a very dangerous point and it is not impossible that the US and Israel may be able to bully a collaborationist PA into signing on to an agreement that will cause grave problems for the Palestinian masses and liberation movement.

\*In the US, we want to hone in for today on the immigrant rights/civil liberties movements (presentation by Arnoldo) and the antiwar movement and its various formations, in particular UFPJ (presentation by Hany). While specifics about the elections will be discussed in the next part of the retreat, we note here that sentiment is growing among progressives that Bush may be vulnerable in 2004, and just about every sector of the popular movement is already immersed in planning for the electoral contest and thinking of its immediate grassroots struggles in that context.

\*Finally in this area, it is crucial to note that splits within the ruling class play a vital role in US politics and it is crucial for the peace and justice movement to both understand and take advantage of them. The situation is quite fluid in this area right now. For quite some time, but especially in the last few weeks, it is clear that sections of the ruling elite are quite anxious about Bush's heavy-handed unilateralism and the effect it is having on long-range US interests. At the same time, the combination of 9/11; the Bush team's aggressive promotion of its reactionary agenda; and the

difficulties that Clinton's project of a multi-lateral, capitalist globalism under US leadership had encountered (see Bello's article), have moved the debate within the ruling class substantially to the right of where it was a few years ago. The unilateralists now hold the main initiative; and there is not (or at least not yet?), any substantial ruling class motion to return to what Bello calls "liberal internationalism Clinton-style." But there are powerful elite voices warning about US overextension, calling for less bellicosity and less reliance on militarism, and willing to make more accommodations to other players on the world scene and, even more than that, more concessions on domestic policy to popular sectors at home. Pressure from below can both take advantage of and widen these divisions.

#### **4. Possible strategic frameworks and speculation on best-case/worst-case scenarios for the next 3-5 years.**

\*The peace-and justice/anti-imperial camp faces a very difficult, uphill road for the foreseeable future. But there are openings from now through November 2004 to beat back some of the most dangerous aspects of the reactionary/militarist agenda, increase the fighting capacity and self-confidence of popular forces broadly, and make a coherent peace-and-justice pole a recognized, institutionally stable and dynamic pole within mass politics. To take advantage of these openings, we must combine a great deal of broadmindedness and tactical flexibility with serious digging in to build our unity, organizational strength and independent base. In broad strokes, the **broad coalition/popular front** perspective outlined in the presentations Bob and Max put together in October 2001 still seems to hold up as a useful strategic framework. How to update that framework and apply it especially to the electoral season between now and November 2004 is an immediate challenge. In doing so, the question of what single development might throw the biggest wrench into the current imperial offensive (speculation welcome) can strongly affect how we allot our energies.

\*Finally, to ground ourselves in realism and tie the different threads above together, it is useful to speculate: Assuming everything we can think of goes our way, **what's the best-case political scenario we can imagine for the next 3-5 years?** Alternatively, **what's the worst case scenario** if things unfold badly?

One worst case scenario (leaving aside near apocalyptic catastrophes) might be that Republican hard right rule gets further entrenched in all branches of government and extends its domination over the media and other institutions. Internationally they are able to keep the lid on resistance in the Middle East and elsewhere while forcing European governments, Brazil, South Africa and others to accommodate further to US interests. Conditions of life for the masses worldwide, especially in the global South, deteriorate even further, with massive resource (water, food) shortages, environmental and health disasters and so on. Conditions also deteriorate for the majority of the US population, with accelerated dismantling of what remains of New Deal programs and gains won in the 1960s (meaning further slashing of welfare, deeper assault on public education, more imprisonment and expansion of the prison-industrial complex, Patriot #2-type attacks on democratic rights, all with a racist and anti-immigrant sharp edge,

etc.) and perhaps even institutionalization of some kind of national service (or the draft) under military or “homeland security” command. The World Social Forum international motion does not get beyond its current level; anti-empire and radical politics are relegated to the margins of US politics by a combination of repression, intimidation, internal disunity, etc; lots of demoralization and chaotic, individualized forms of alienation/resistance in popular sectors.

In contrast, a best case scenario would be that the Republican hard right’s grip on governmental power is substantially loosened. In response especially to US military over-extension, forces within the ruling class who are into at least some accommodation with others in the world take control of the federal government. They may sign Kyoto, start cooperating a little more with the UN, tone down the bellicose imperial rhetoric and engage in no major new military interventions. Domestically, they back off Bush’s current course, let-up in attacks on the safety net, implement less regressive tax and spending policies, install a more balanced judiciary, and maybe even make enough room for some popular gains on education, health care, rollback of more provisions of Patriot Act 1. The UN begins to regain some actual clout; some Third World countries get some breathing room; the World Social Forum motion gets stronger institutionally, programmatically and in terms of mass influence. In the US, some optimism starts to infuse popular sectors; trade union movement, communities of color, immigrant communities, women, lesbians and gays win a few victories here and there, peace-and-justice/anti-empire/Rainbow front begins to assume identifiable shape as a reference point in mass politics, with serious footholds and some initiative within key sectors and even an electoral expression, in the sense that a bunch of office-holders are clearly identified as aligned with both these politics and one-another. Links between US and international activists are substantially strengthened and even the outlines of a revitalized radical left begin to appear.

Let’s shoot for that latter scenario!

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**Additional Readings.** These are available via e-mail from Max if you let him know which ones you want at maxie@igc.org. One indication of where the peace and justice movement is at, by the way, is the disparity in authorship (and ability to get published) of “big picture/strategy” articles - which is the type mainly chosen for this retreat - along gender, activist/grassroots vs. academic, and other lines):

1 & 2. Anatole Lieven, “What the Bush Administration Hopes to Gain from Attacking Iraq” (lieven1.doc) and “The Empire Strikes Back” (lieven2.doc); the first, written before the war and published in the London Review of Books, offers many insights into the worldview and culture of the hard nationalists/unilateralists now running US policy; the second, a review of a bunch of books on imperialism & empire, is Lieven’s effort to take stock of where things are post-Iraq including what has changed in the Clinton-to-Bush transition. Lieven is not a radical but has a lot to say about the dynamics in elite opinion and policy as well as broad US & European political culture.

3. Tariq Ali, "Recolonizing Iraq" (\tariqali.doc); published in New Left Review and widely circulated on the internet, a "big picture" assessment of the current balance of world power, the role of governments, the UN, etc.

4. Phyllis Bennis, "Going Global, Building a Movement Against Empire" (\BennvEmp.doc); written for scholar/activist discussion, not as widely circulated as Tariq Ali's piece, a somewhat different take than he has on the potential role of various governments and especially the UN.

5. Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle Has Crash Landed" (\waller1.doc); maybe a year old, widely circulated, strongly advances his "U.S.-is-in-decline" thesis. Wallerstein has two more recent pieces out advancing this view as well. One is in the **special July-August 2003 issue of Monthly Review on "Imperialism Today"** - you can look at that one, or the entire issue which contains other interesting articles by Samir Amin, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Bill Fletcher and many others by going to the MR website at [www.monthlyreview.org](http://www.monthlyreview.org). The other Wallerstein piece, "Entering Global Anarchy," is a little more extensive than the MR article; it's from the latest New Left Review and available at this point only in hard copy.

6. Emir Sader, "Latin America: critical year for the left" (\sader.doc), a survey of the situation in Latin America written in early 2003 and published in Le Monde Diplomatique.

7. Washington Monthly editor Nicholas Confessore, "Welcome to the Machine: How the GOP Disciplined K Street and Made Bush Supreme" (\Confesso.doc), the piece which supplies a lot of the backup for Paul Krugman's Op-Ed on One Party Rule.

8. Michael Klare, "Resist War and Empire" (\klare.doc); from the Nation, Klare presents his strategic perspective on building a durable antiwar, anti-imperial movement.

9 & 10. Carl Davidson & Marilyn Katz, "Moving from Protest to Politics: Dumping Bush's Regime in 2004" (\davikatz.doc) and Steve Bloom, "Call for a Paradigm Shift on (and to) the Left: Responding to Davidson & Katz on the 2004 Elections" (\Bloom.doc); debate over left strategy for the 2004 elections, with both pieces putting their positions in the context of broader/more long range perspectives on the balance of class/political forces, what kind of progressive fronts need to be constructed, role of grassroots movements, etc.

11. Cynthia Peters, "Five Guidelines for Our Organizing" (\Peters.doc); featured on Z website, both reflects and influences important circles among "grassroots organizers," an effort to provide more "practical" advice to antiwar activists.

12. Samir Amin, "The American Ideology" (\Amin.doc); internationally well-known leftist's take on U.S. political culture and the dangers of the current moment.

13. ColorLines, Time line of new policies/events affecting immigrants post-9/11 (\ImmTimeL.doc); useful as a reference on just how bad things have gotten on this front.

14. Ron Karenga, “Du Bois and the Question of the Color Line: Race and Class in the Age of Globalization”; (\Karenga.doc); History and the current moment through anti-racist/Black liberation prism, from a veteran who has had many conflicts with the self-identified Marxist left. From a **special issue of Socialism and Democracy journal “Radical Perspectives on Race and Racism”** that is well worth checking out at [www.socialismanddemocracy.org](http://www.socialismanddemocracy.org).

15. Clark Kissinger, “The New Domestic Order: What Has Changed, Why It Has Changed, and How It Matters” (\rcpkissi.doc); Interesting mainly because it indicates that even the RCP thinks 9-11 was a turning point, that the current moment holds special dangers and there is an extraordinary attack on democratic rights underway.

16. Mike Marqusee, on the British SWP and the Antiwar Movement (\marq-swp.doc); covers the problems of working with the largest Leninist group in the UK and a perspective on the left in general.

17. Ron Faucheux, “The 30-30 Nation,” (\Faucheux.doc); hard nosed political consultant's take on the US electorate today.

18. Carol Brightman, “It Wasn't Supposed to Be Like This” (brightma.doc), puts in sharp relief the contrast between what the neocons hoped to see in Iraq at this stage vs. what is actually happening.

19. Noam Chomsky, check out one or more of his recent articles and interviews, posted on the Znet website ([www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)), for lots of information and access to his perspective, which has wide influence among antiwar and anti-imperialist activists.

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