

US Labor Against the War  
National Steering Committee & Leadership Meeting Statement  
**Growing Labor and Popular Opposition to the War in Iraq  
and the War on Working People at Home**

December 3, 2005

From its very beginning, USLAW has publicly opposed the war in Iraq. We stated that Bush was lying, that we had no right to invade Iraq, that oil was more the issue than weapons of mass destruction. We predicted that war with Iraq would lead to a prolonged and bloody guerrilla war, while encouraging terrorism in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. We warned the war would divert our nation from the essential tasks needed to provide for our own people.

Since February 15, 2003, when more than 10 million people across the globe went out into the streets to say much the same thing, *it has been clear that the people have been smarter than our political representatives.* If members of Congress and leading opinion makers in the United States wanted to believe the Administration's lies, it was not because the truth was not there for all to see.

Almost three years after USLAW was founded, the peace movement has resoundingly won the public debate. Most polls now show more than 60% of all Americans and more than 73% of Democrats want the U.S. military to leave Iraq as soon as possible. A November 2005 New York Times/CBS news poll found that more than 8 in 10 Americans are concerned that the \$5 billion spent each month on the war in Iraq is draining away money that could be used in the United States. Only 19% of military-related people polled in the heavily militarized state of North Carolina said the war was "worth fighting."

In the labor movement the USLAW-initiated effort to call for rapid withdrawal from Iraq passed overwhelmingly at the July convention of the AFL-CIO, and many of the largest national unions are on record against the war. *Such opposition to a war in progress within the U.S. labor movement is unprecedented and bespeaks the depth of antiwar sentiment among working people.*

This of course is a reflection of the disastrous effects of the war: more than 2,100 U.S. soldiers dead, more than 10 times that number wounded, many seriously scarred or maimed for life. More than 100,000 Iraqis are dead, much of Iraq has been destroyed by U.S. military actions, and most of the Iraqi people are still without jobs, water, electricity, basic sewage services, health care and any minimal sense of personal security. Meanwhile our money pours into Iraq at *\$8 million an hour*, much of it directly to the coffers of corporate cronies of the Bush Administration.

U.S. policies in the Middle East, and the war and occupation of Iraq in particular, have made our country and the world more vulnerable to terrorism, not more secure. The occupation is fueling the violence in Iraq and *has turned Iraq into a school for terrorism.* Attacks there are up from 150 last year to 700 per week today. Polls in Iraq show 80% of Iraqis want U.S. troops out. It was recently reported that after almost 3 years of training Iraqis to serve as U.S. proxies in this war, less than 1% of Iraqi military units can act independently of the U.S. military. In desperation the United States is bringing back Saddam loyalists to run the army, the very brutal enemy we claim to have gone to war to eliminate. Many of the Iraqi military units are under the control of religious and sectarian militias. *At home, military recruiters are in a panic and despite all their rosy promises, inducements and monetary incentives, young Americans are refusing to enlist.*

The use of torture against Iraqi prisoners, the use of chemical weapons like white phosphorous on cities like Fallujah, the U.S. refusal to permit international monitoring of detention camps and operation of secret CIA prisons, our government's flouting of international law – all these have turned international public opinion against the United States and have destroyed any claim our government might make to the moral high ground.

Congressman John Murtha (Dem-PA) made it clear: *the occupation is the problem and can't be the solution.* As the Iraqi trade unionists said in the joint statement they signed with USLAW at the end of a 25-city USLAW-sponsored tour in June: *"The principal obstacle to peace, stability and the reconstruction of Iraq is the occupation. The occupation must end in all its forms, including military bases and economic domination."* The Iraqis cannot work out their differences under occupation.  
**It must end now!**

Those politicians who claim to support the troops yet call for "staying the course 'til victory is won" are compounding the tragic and needless slaughter that has already occurred there by adding still more lives to the tragic cost the Iraqis and we have borne. A failed policy cannot be made right by doing it longer, harder or better.

It is important to realize that the essential goals of the war were in fact to secure control over Iraq's oil reserves, take out a leader who had slipped from under the thumb of the United States, and strengthen U.S. military presence in the Middle East. The Bush Neocons also seek to make Iraq into an unregulated free market, privatizing the large public sector

industries and opening the economy to foreign corporate control, just as they seek to use the disaster in the Gulf Coast to privatize the schools and remake New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in their corporate image. *None of these "alternatives" has anything to do with democracy or the genuine interest of Iraqis. They are more about preserving prerogatives for U.S. power abroad and greater corporate domination at home.*

The most serious threat to the real security of the American people today comes from the White House and its Congressional supporters. With the 2006 elections looming, *we need to seize the opportunity to move members of Congress and all elected officials to publicly and decisively oppose the war and occupation.*

For too many political leaders, "victory" means having the Iraqis fight as our proxies while U.S. troops remain in permanent military bases and the Pentagon's control over reconstruction funds and armed forces results in a compliant Iraqi government. We reject and must oppose such phony schemes for ending the war. The challenge before us is to escalate the demand for immediate withdrawal within the labor movement, to join forces with the growing opposition to the war across the country to force our political leaders to remove all U.S. troops, to provide the Iraqis with the funds they need to reconstruct their country, and to redirect our tax money to taking care of the serious social problems we face at home.

Our labor movement is fragmented and divided over organizing and politics, power and leadership. Despite these divisions, in 2005 USLAW made dramatic strides, mobilizing for national demonstrations, organizing the discussion that led to an historic resolution at the AFL-CIO convention, touring Iraqi trade unionists to 25 U.S. cities, spawning large Educators to Stop the War conferences, and holding numerous union educational events around the country. Though most unions are caught up in a fight for survival against hostile employers and a hostile government, *the struggle to end the war and to reorder national priorities can be a unifying force between the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, both of which have affiliates in USLAW.*

USLAW has grown to over 125 affiliates representing millions of workers. *Today we have an opportunity, given the climate and the success of our work in 2005, to double the number of our affiliates.* Our support and credibility in the labor movement are much greater than our affiliations — many labor organizations are working with us that are not officially part of USLAW. Many more share our goals but are not yet in our network. USLAW provides the vehicle for the labor movement to effectively fight against the war in Iraq and to link it to the war against working people at home. It is a vehicle through which organized labor can break with decades during which it blindly followed Cold War foreign policies that were crafted in the interests of global capital, not the interests of American or international labor.

Local, regional and national sectors of the labor movement, as well as the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, need to step forward in 2006 to make this effort effective. We must move the antiwar message and conversation down from the leadership level of our organizations to the rank and file, and then move our members into action for a new foreign and domestic policy agenda.

The labor movement is in a position not only to be an integral part of the antiwar movement, but to actually *lead* the movement. That is the role that unions and workers should play; it is the role that unions in many other countries do play. We in the labor movement should be the conscience of U.S. workers on the war. We must make our voices heard.

*Why should labor lead the movement against the war?*

- ▶ This is not an "extra issue." This issue is at the center of the national crisis our nation is in. We cannot achieve any of labor's goals such as major health care and pension reform, the government-funded rebuilding of the Gulf Coast and the strengthening of our endangered public services, without ending this war.
- ▶ It is a budget issue, a Patriot Act issue, it is tied to the political club called the "War on Terrorism" that is used to attack labor rights and much that we hold sacred, and it is the horse that many right wingers in office have ridden for political gain.
- ▶ Our credibility as a labor movement in the rest of the world is at stake. As we strive to organize multinational corporations across borders, we cannot be for U.S. aggression and the domination of U.S. capital and claim to be in solidarity with workers in developing countries or even in Europe—no one will believe us.
- ▶ Defeating the U.S. policy in Iraq must be accompanied by a new vision of genuine solidarity, based on the mutual interests of workers, and on respect for international law and national sovereignty. .
- ▶ We can no longer let the issue of war and the false patriotism of tyrants and demagogues be used to drive an anti-worker agenda, as has occurred since 9/11.

**In consideration of all of the above, USLAW calls for:**

Expanding the USLAW Network

Doubling the number of USLAW affiliates to 250 labor organizations. Working to deepen the participation of International Unions, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win. This work will culminate in a National Labor Leadership Assembly on December 2nd, 2006.

Legislation to End the War

Put the issue of the war at the center of the political agenda for the 2006 election year.

This includes a broad based effort in the labor movement, in conjunction with the peace movement, to promote federal, state and local legislative initiatives aimed at ending the war and occupation and to ask political candidates to take these positions.

Massive Spring 2006 Anti-War Demonstration

A massive broadly based national demonstration in Washington DC in April 2006, with labor playing a major role along with a wide ranging coalition of national organizations.

Union-Sponsored Vet-Military Families Forums

A nationally coordinated series of forums to be held at union-sponsored events to include Iraqi vets, Military Families Speak Out representatives and members of Iraqi Veterans Against the War in order to engage rank and file members in anti-war education and activities.

Iraqi Labor Solidarity

Continue to work in support of labor rights for Iraqi workers and unions and explore sending delegations of US trade unionists to Iraq and bringing Iraqi trade unionists, including women, to the US.

**By mobilizing the labor movement at every level to end the war in Iraq, with an informed membership, we set the stage for labor to play a stronger role in the future in setting our nation's priorities at home and abroad.**

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