

# Kucinich Forum Hears Opposition to Iraq War

by Suzanne Rose

Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) has launched a campaign to open up the U.S. Congress to a discussion of why we should not go to war in Iraq, with a series of forums beginning on Aug. 20 on Capitol Hill. Himself opposed, he said that he wants to create an opportunity for bipartisan, diverse voices to be heard. The three speakers at his opening forum were Dr. Donald Cortwright, president of the Fourth Freedom Forum; Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS); and former UN chief weapons inspector in Iraq, Scott Ritter. By far the most relevant and effective presentation was Ritter's, in countering the propaganda campaign which is accompanying the drive to war. No one, however, challenged the underlying motive for war, which, as has been pointed out by Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche, has nothing to do with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. U.S. Iraq policy is a foil in the strategic policy backed by Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and allied financial elites to impose perpetual war on the world, in the midst of a global financial breakdown crisis.

## Where's the Threat?

Ritter opened by criticizing the lack of democracy reflected in the want of debate on this issue, specifically in the one-sided Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings chaired by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) prior to the Congressional recess. Ritter said you can't make a case for going to war unless you discern a threat, and in his view, there is no evidence that a threat exists.

He specified, that before the inspections were ended in Iraq in 1998, Iraq had been disarmed. If Baghdad has tried to produce weapons of mass destruction (WMD) since 1998, which is the central argument for going to war, the Iraqi government would need an infrastructure, and that would be detectable from the outside. Ritter asserted, that every nuclear facility was destroyed and then blanketed with gamma detection sensors. The technology to detect poison gas production also exists, he said, though he was not sure it is being used. In response to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recent assertions that Iraq is producing weapons of mass destruction in underground factories and on mobile trucks, Ritter said this is speculative: Iraq's geography is not conducive to building things underground, and the inspectors never detected any factories on trucks during their exhaustive and often surprise inspections. He also attacked those who want war against Iraq

for their own ideological reasons. This war has more to do with domestic U.S. policy than anything else, he charged, adding, that there are people who want to hijack our foreign policy to promote their own ideology and ambitions.

Ritter debunked the idea that Iraq would proliferate WMD through Islamic terrorist networks, even if they had them, by describing an operation Iraq has in its North to eliminate Islamic fundamentalist infiltration of the Kurds there. Soldiers are being trained for this mission at a camp south of Baghdad, which had been formerly used for training hostage-release missions. The U.S. government has been giving a false picture of the purposes of this camp, Ritter said.

He confirmed that contrary to the pro-war propaganda, the UN inspectors were not thrown out by Iraq, but pulled out six days before the U.S. bombing campaign in 1998, after Iraq had been manipulated into creating a provocation, which then became a pretext for the bombing. After seven years of inspections and destruction of weapons of mass destruction capability, Ritter said he was confident that Iraq was disarmed, and incapable of projecting military power beyond its borders. Iraq, he said, is no threat to the region.

## **Alternatives to War**

Phyllis Bennis of IPS argued that the United States would be violating international law, if Iraq were attacked, because Article 51 of the UN Charter allows a country to wage war to defend itself only if there has been an armed attack. She said that any pre-emptive strike is a violation of international law.

Dr. Cortwright advocated a series of alternatives to “contain Iraq,” rather than going to war. He called the consequences of a pre-emptive attack so dangerous that no one who was truly concerned with future terrorism, would contemplate such an action. “If we go to war, it will make the terrorist threat worse. It would recruit people to taking extreme actions against us. It would undermine international cooperation.”

Neither Ritter nor Cortwright believes the Bush Administration wants inspectors to return to Iraq. It would be contrary to existing law passed by Congress in support of a regime change, when it authorized support for the opposition Iraqi National Congress. Ritter also does not believe Iraq will allow inspectors in, as long as the U.S. policy is for a regime change. Cortwright said the new inspectors might be more acceptable to the Iraqis, because they would be less likely to be manipulated and used for spying as the previous UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors were, because they will not be the agents of any state, but civil servants working for the UN.

Kucinich said he expects many other opponents to the war to surface after Congress reconvenes. He is not opposed to responding to the Iraqi offer to U.S. Congressmen to visit, but said it would have to occur in tandem with the return of inspectors. He hoped Russia could be drawn into the process of finding a resolution, and referred to the U.S. Congressional delegation which worked with Russia to negotiate a solution to the war with Serbia in 1999.