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Bush Is Losing It

By **Marty Jezer**, [AlterNet](#)

January 23, 2003

It was a bad week for the Bush administration, and it's likely to get worse. The American people are beginning to understand the folly and greed that inform its economic policy. And most of the civilized world has turned decisively against the Iraqi adventure. The great coalition that George W. Bush proposes to lead against Saddam Hussein is now a coalition of two, and British prime minister Tony Blair has lost the support of his own people, most especially members of his own Labor Party, who warn of a political revolt if Britain goes to war without a new UN resolution.

In France, 75 percent oppose Bush's policy; in Germany the number is 76, in Italy it's 61. In Turkey, a country crucial to the Administration's military effort, opposition to the war, according to the Wall Street Journal, registers at between 80 and 90 percent.

Even the Journal is wondering what's up. As staff reporter Gerald F. Seib wrote on Jan. 22, "President Bush's policy toward Iraq is in distress, and the reason is stunningly simple: His administration hasn't made a very effective public case for war with Saddam Hussein."

In the United States, confidence in the Bush Administration is evaporating, and it's no wonder. Reality is out-running the rhetoric. The Administration has announced probable federal deficits of \$200-300 billion over the next two years (which many experts conclude will be higher). While Bush proposes huge tax-breaks for the wealthy, the General Accounting Office says that social security faces tax increases and benefit cuts if it is to remain solvent.

Anticipating the coming deficits, the Administration has shamelessly cut veteran benefits to what it describes as higher-income veterans. In fact, the new cut-off applies not to wealthy veterans but to middle-class veterans with annual incomes of \$30,000 to \$35,000.

Many states are confronted with multi-billion dollar budget deficits and will have to raise taxes, most of which will fall on working people, the middle class and the poor. In an attempt to save money for the states, the Administration is moving to limit emergency room access to Medicaid patients; i.e., to senior citizens and low income families. Is there not a pattern emerging? Slash taxes for the rich, slash services for everyone else?

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Bush introduced his plan to abolish the tax on stock dividends by saying "double taxation is wrong." But, as Daniel Altman wrote in the New York Times (1/21/03), "Corporate dividends "are not the only kind of income that is taxed twice. Other taxes create a double, triple or event quintuple burden. And unlike the double taxation of dividends, which mainly affects the wealthy, the burden of other forms of multiple taxation – sales taxes, import taxes, payroll taxes, among others – often falls most heavily on poorer Americans."

Yes! What Bush proposes is class war.

Utilizing a Reagan-era tax loophole that grants larger business deductions to pick-ups than it does to ordinary cars, the Bush Administration, according to the Times (1/21/03), would "increase by 50 percent or more the deductions that small-business owners can take on the biggest and most expensive sports utility vehicles and pickups."

Thus, if a small business owner buys a gas-guzzling (10-11 mpg) Hummer H1, with a list price of \$102,581, he or she can deduct \$75,000 from the price as a capital equipment deduction. A business that purchases a gas-efficient (45 mpg) Toyota Prius with a \$20,500 sticker price, can't even deduct half of that cost, even with the \$2,000 deduction the government is allowing for fuel-efficient vehicles included.

In a radio address on Jan. 18, Bush declared that his tax cuts would give 23 million small business owners an average tax cut of \$2,042 a year." As New York Times economist Paul Krugman noted, an "average" is a meaningless figure. If one business owner gets a tax-break of \$20,420 and nine business owners get nothing, the average tax-break is \$2,042, as Bush has described it. The reality, however, as Krugman pointed out, is that most business owners will get less than \$500 and about 5 million business owners will get nothing. Bush's promise of a tax windfall to help the economy is a sham. And the public is catching on.

A CNN-Time poll shows support for Bush down to 52 percent, just 1 percent higher than Bill Clinton's worst showing during the era of Monica Lewinsky. An NBC-Wall Street Journal poll registers Bush's support at 54 percent, his handling of the economy at 44 percent and his handling of foreign policy at 51 percent. By more than two to one, according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll, Americans prefer more spending on education, health care and social security than a tax cut, which 61 percent correctly perceive as benefiting the wealthy. A dwindling majority still supports a war against Iraq, but only with U.N. backing and only after the weapon inspectors are given time to do their job.

Bush could take credit for getting the U.N. to focus on Iraq and effectively containing Saddam, but he seems to be intent on war. Faced with the European demand for diplomacy, Bush had a snit fit.

"This looks like a rerun of a bad movie and I'm not interested in watching it," he declared.

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Those are not the words of a statesman or a world leader. As an American, I am embarrassed. As more and more people are coming to understand, this isn't a movie we're watching. It's real life with real consequences, and many people are going to die. A war in Iraq risks destabilizing the Middle East, invites terrorist attacks against Americans all over the world, and will encourage politically motivated attacks on civil liberties here at home.

Bush is losing it. His composure, his "good-guy" image, the debate about economic policy, the sympathy and support of the international community and, as polls indicate, the backing of the American people.

Marty Jezer's books include [The Dark Ages: Life in the U.S. 1945-1960](#). He writes from Brattleboro, Vermont and welcomes comments at mjez@sover.net

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