

The ICFI's May Day 2023 online rally: A milestone in the building of a global, working class movement against war

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The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)'s tenth online May Day Rally held Sunday centred on two interconnected processes: the escalating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the rapid growth of the international class struggle. The rally provided a political direction to growing opposition in the working class to imperialist war, social inequality, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the threat of fascism and all the evils of a crisis-ridden capitalism.

A unified, historically grounded perspective was presented across three hours of political analysis by 19 speakers from five continents, delivered in nine different languages and subtitled in 10. Together, the speakers set out a socialist programme to unite the international working class and mobilise its immense social power in a struggle against the world's major corporations and governments.

The introduction to the rally broadcast interviews with young workers and students around the world politically educated by the *World Socialist Web Site*, animated by its perspective and determined to fight for a socialist future.

In the opening contribution, chairperson of the WSW International Editorial Board David North gave a summary of the deep socioeconomic and political crises driving the US and NATO powers to war in Ukraine—after 30 years of US-led military interventions and the 800-mile eastward expansion of NATO—dispelling the narrative of Russian President Vladimir Putin's "unprovoked war."

Among these crises, North explained, are "the protracted decline of the global economic position of the United States," a "series of economic shocks," the "breakdown of the American political system" and "the increasing domestic instability of a society scarred by staggering levels of inequality, intensified by the impact of the pandemic and a new inflationary spiral."

America's European allies, he explained, "are beset by the same political and economic diseases that afflict the United States, while possessing even fewer financial resources to deal with them."

This multifaceted crisis is driving the imperialist powers to violent attempts "to alter the existing division of the world's wealth and resources" of the kind analysed by Russian revolutionaries Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky based on their experience of the First World War.

No progressive answer to the war is to be found in the Putin

government, whose "definition of 'national security' is determined by the economic interests of the oligarchic class whose wealth is based on the dissolution and theft of the previously nationalized property of the Soviet Union."

"In demanding an end to the war," North stated, "we invoke the principle of socialist internationalism. The working class has no country. Neither the Ukrainian nor Russian working class has anything to gain from this war. Eighty years ago the workers of Ukraine and Russia fought side by side in a struggle to expel the Nazi invaders from the Soviet Union. Now, as a consequence of the restoration of capitalism, they are killing each other on the very soil they once defended side by side against fascism and in defense of the conquests of the October Revolution."

Both the devastating consequences of nationalism and the possibilities of socialist internationalism are contained in the history of the current bloody focal point of the war in Ukraine, Bakhmut—liberated twice in the 20th century by the Red Army from far-right Ukrainian nationalists responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of Jews. In 1919, the city's liberation was part of the unification in the Soviet Union of the multinational working class and peasantry of the former Russian Empire.

This history was given life in the rally, which uniquely featured comrades from Russia and Ukraine—members of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL)—who denounced NATO's imperialist war while opposing the policies of their own reactionary governments. Stepan Geller, speaking from Ukraine, and Andrei Ritsky, speaking from Russia, invoked the progressive history of the Soviet Union against the social counterrevolution carried out by the Russian and Ukrainian capitalist oligarchs, heirs to the Stalinist bureaucracy, and the national chauvinist, fascist traditions they have regurgitated.

In his remarks, opposing both the US-NATO war against Russia and the Putin government, Ritsky powerfully invoked the historical traditions of the Trotskyist movement. "This year marks the centenary of the founding of the Left Opposition under the leadership of Leon Trotsky, against the bureaucratic and nationalist degeneration of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet state, personified in Stalin's rise to power," he said.

"The struggle waged by the Trotskyist movement against the Stalinist betrayal of the October Revolution has been vindicated by history," he continued. "The Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists

exemplifies the resurgence of Trotskyism, under the banner of the International Committee, within Russia and throughout the former USSR.”

In the same spirit, the ICFI heard addresses in Sinhalese and Tamil from representatives of its Sri Lankan section, Deepal Jayasekera and Dilaxshan Mahalingam—a mark of its decades-long struggle against ethnic conflict and civil war stoked by the bourgeoisie in that country.

North and other speakers rejected the idea of a coming “multi-polar world” in which “a consortia of capitalist states ... will collectively and harmoniously preside over a more peaceful division of global resources”—an idea echoing German reformist Karl Kautsky’s century-old theory of “ultra-imperialism,” aptly labelled by Lenin as “ultra-nonsense.”

The opposed programme advanced by leading figures in the ICFI was based on the understanding that the only viable social basis for a struggle against imperialist war, collapsing living standards and assaults on democratic rights is the international working class, organised by a socialist leadership.

Contributions from Alex Lantier in France, Tom Scripps in the United Kingdom and Christoph Vandrei in Germany detailed the rapid remilitarisation of Europe and turn to police-state forms of rule. They charted the emergence of a potentially revolutionary wave of workers’ struggles which the Socialist Equality Parties have sought to free from the restraints imposed by the trade union bureaucracies and infuse with a socialist, antiwar consciousness.

In this regard, Will Lehman spoke as the representative of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the fight of the ICFI in every country to form democratic organisations of working class struggle.

Cheryl Crisp in Australia and Tom Peters in New Zealand explained that the war with Russia, already threatening a nuclear war, is considered by Washington as a steppingstone to war with its main geostrategic rival, China.

A report on the COVID-19 pandemic delivered by Evan Blake and a section of a speech from Turkey by Ula? Ate?çi on the earthquake which struck the east of the country and Syria this year underscored the indifference to human life with which the ruling class contemplates World War Three, and how basic democratic rights and scientific advances are withering in the grasp of the capitalist class.

Ate?çi, together with Eduardo Parati from Brazil, made clear that no national bourgeoisie, in any of its factions, is capable of securing independence from world imperialism or opposing its wars and the attacks on the living standards of the international working class that come with them. The role of Canada, analysed by Keith Jones, as one of the chief ideological bases of the anti-Russian offensive, and the experience of the pandemic have meanwhile exploded the myth of any possibility for a “kinder, gentler capitalism.”

A major feature of the rally were the contributions made by representatives Gregor Link and Oscar Grenfell of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)—which is organising a global series of public meetings against the war—speaking to the future of poverty, war and ecological disaster faced by young people.

Summarising the rally, Joseph Kishore’s contribution on the US was directed to the global importance of the American working class, positioned at the heart of world imperialism, and the significance of its growing interest in socialism. This was exemplified by the vote in the UAW presidential election by more than 5,000 workers, in the face of voter suppression, for the IWA-RFC’s candidate Will Lehman.

Looked at in its world historical context, May Day 2023 exemplified the intersection of the struggles of the working class with the political programme of Trotskyism under conditions of a spiralling crisis of world capitalism.

In both its form and content, the rally was entirely unique. The high political level of all the contributions was based on the programme and traditions of the Trotskyist movement. It exposed the lies and propaganda from the media and the parties of the ruling class. And it stood in stark contrast to the pro-war and pro-imperialist politics of the various Pabloite and pseudo-left organizations that are in the forefront of demands for the escalation of the war against Russia.

The International Committee of the Fourth International is leading the fight to rebuild the political culture of socialist internationalism, which sunk deep roots in the working class in the early 20th century and which underpinned the wave of revolutionary struggles, above all, the Russian Revolution, which brought an end to the First World War.

The May Day rally was the culmination of the first stage of a worldwide campaign to organize workers and young people against war, based on a socialist and revolutionary perspective. This has included meetings of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) throughout the world.

In carrying out this work, the ICFI is guided by the words of Trotsky on the eve of the Second World War, quoted by North in his speech:

The party of world socialist revolution seeks to implement its policies “not through the medium of bourgeois governments ... but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow.”

Such an approach “cannot give immediate miraculous results. But we do not pretend to be miracle workers. As things stand, we are a revolutionary minority. Our work must be directed so that the workers on whom we have influence should correctly appraise events, not permit themselves to be caught unawares, and prepare the general sentiment of their own class for the revolutionary solution of the tasks confronting us.”

All the texts of all of the speeches to the rally will be posted in the coming week. We call on all our readers to study them carefully, distribute them as widely as possible, discuss them with your coworkers, and take up the fight for the principles embodied in the rally by joining the fight for socialism.



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