May Day 2010

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May Day 2010 takes place amid unmistakable signs of the resurgence of the class struggle. In country after country, workers confront rising unemployment, the evisceration of essential services such as health and education, the erosion of working conditions and attacks on basic democratic rights. They are beginning to fight back.

With the manifest failure of capitalism, the essential message of May Day—for the international working class to unite in the struggle for world socialism—has become an urgent necessity. The global economic crisis that erupted in 2008 raises the spectre of the 1930s: permanent mass unemployment, the impoverishment of broad layers of working people and the drive towards new and ever more terrible wars.

The economic turmoil that broke out on Wall Street has entered a second, more virulent stage. The trillions of dollars pumped by administrations around the world into the major banks and corporations to prevent their collapse now appear on government books as massive sovereign debts. The universal response in ruling circles is that working people must be forced to pay for a crisis for which they bear no responsibility.

Initial attention is focused on Greece, where the Papandreou government is preparing to impose another, more severe, austerity package to cut wages, pensions and services and impose hefty tax rises. But with Spain and Portugal already under pressure from financial markets, economic commentators are nervously speculating where the "contagion" will spread next. No country is exempt: Britain, the US and Japan all sit precariously on huge mountains of debt. While superficially China appears as an exception, its feverish growth, artificially spurred on by stimulus spending, has created enormous speculative bubbles that will inevitably burst.

The size of the amounts to be clawed back from the working class is underscored by the scale of the financial collapse itself. In 2008-09, the estimated loss of global wealth was more than $25 trillion dollars, almost 45 percent of global GDP. Direct support from governments to prop up the financial system amounted to around one quarter of global GDP. In both the US and the UK it was close to three quarters of GDP. Greece is thus the test case for a global agenda.

The fundamental contradictions of capitalism—between socialised production and the private ownership of the means of production, and between the global economy and the outmoded capitalist nation state system—first identified by Karl Marx more than 150 years ago, have burst to the surface of economic and political life. The unprecedented internationalisation of production over the past 30 years has ensured that the crisis takes on a global character from the outset.

Class tensions are rapidly sharpening. The most telling signs appear at the very centre of global capitalism—in the United States—where the financial aristocracy continues to engorge itself through parasitic activities that have thrown millions of Americans out of their jobs, out of their homes and, in many cases, onto the streets. The exposure of the Obama administration as the political instrument of this grasping wealthy elite is setting the stage for explosive class battles.

At the same time, the economic crisis is exacerbating tensions between the major powers as each seeks to extricate itself at the expense of its rivals. The Greek crisis is already straining relations within Europe, raising a question mark over the viability of the euro and the entire project of European unity. Demands in the US for huge tariffs against China threaten to unleash a full-blown trade war. Everywhere the poisonous politics of nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism is being whipped up to divide working people and divert attention

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from the underlying class issues.

Inter-imperialist rivalries are fuelling the rise of militarism and war. The efforts of the US to counter its historic decline through the use of military force have already had a profoundly destabilising impact on world politics. Under the aegis of its bogus "war on terror", Washington is seeking to control the key strategic regions of the Middle East and Central Asia. The US makes menacing threats against Iran even as it continues its criminal wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Numerous regional flash points have the potential to trigger a catastrophic international conflagration.

Just as the contradictions of capitalism are driving the world towards depression and war, they have also created the objective conditions for a progressive solution. As Marx explained, in the very process of its development capitalism creates its gravedigger—the international working class—the bearer of a new and higher form of society, socialism. The globalisation of production during the past three decades has created an unprecedented degree of integration of the working class of all nations. Moreover, while the incorporation of hundreds of millions of Chinese and Indian workers into the circuits of capitalist exploitation boosted profits in the short term, it has immensely strengthened the social weight of the working class.

Workers in every country confront the same enemies—the globally organised corporations, banks and financial institutions. Workers in Portugal and Spain have already joined their Greek counterparts in battling the austerity agenda of their governments. In India, hundreds of thousands of workers have been engaged in struggles against the same program—privatisation, pay cuts and job losses. Smaller but no less significant battles have emerged in many other countries.

In every instance, workers have confronted similar political obstacles—the trade unions and Social Democratic and Stalinist parties, backed by their apologists in the various groups of ex-lefts and former radicals. All of them seek to subordinate the working class to the demands of the capitalist state under conditions where working people can defend their most basic rights only through a struggle for political power aimed at abolishing capitalism and refashioning society along socialist lines. This inevitably brings them into direct conflict with the old bureaucratic apparatuses and their "left" hangers-on.

In 1938, in the founding program of the Fourth International, Leon Trotsky answered those skeptics who questioned the revolutionary capacities of the working class: "The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second, by the treacherous politics of the old workers' organisations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus."

More than 70 years on, the various reformist and Stalinist apparatuses, which enjoyed a fresh lease of life during the economic boom that followed World War II, have either ceased to exist or stagger on in an advanced state of decay. But the road to socialism is neither inevitable nor automatic. Without a revolutionary program and leadership, even the most explosive social struggles will lack direction, dissipate, allow the class enemy to regroup and open the door to political reaction.

On May Day 2010, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) sends its fraternal greetings to workers and young people around the world struggling to defend their living standards and basic rights. The ICFI is the only political movement on the face of the planet that fights for the program of socialist internationalism and embodies the true principles of May Day. We call on workers and youth seeking a way out of the disasters produced by capitalism to join and build this international party as the vital revolutionary leadership for the revolutionary upheavals ahead.

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