

Resolution of SEP (UK) Congress: “The SEP and the struggle against imperialist war”

8 January 2013

1. The Socialist Equality Party condemns the US-led campaign of military, political and economic destabilisation of Syria and Iran. Official claims, regurgitated by the media and the ex-left groups, that Syria has been targeted for its human rights abuses, or that Iran represents a nuclear danger to the world, are meant to conceal the predatory aims of the imperialist powers. The aim of this criminal conspiracy is to depose the Assad regime and install a friendly client as an antechamber to the advanced preparations for war against Tehran.

2. Not since 1945 has the world been as close to a major military conflagration. In its efforts to overcome its economic decline through military means, American imperialism is destabilising the planet. A general war in the Middle East is entirely possible. Sectarian, ethnic and communal divisions are being deliberately fostered, not only in Syria but also in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. They are now spilling over into Turkey, one of the main protagonists against Syria. Israel, riven with social and political divisions, has repeatedly insisted on its intention to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities. As the recent Israeli bombardment of Gaza demonstrates, the region has been turned into a tinderbox that any spark could set alight.

3. Aiding Washington in this drive to war are the former imperialist overlords of the region in London and Paris. The prize they all seek is the control of oil and gas supplies in the Middle East and Caspian region. Since 2001, the US, with the active collusion of Britain, has waged war in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. These wars were conducted in the aftermath of 9/11 on the pretext of the “war on terror”. Yet today the imperialist powers have allied themselves not only with autocratic Islamist regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, from which Al Qaeda sprang, but are colluding with militias linked directly to it. This takes place even as efforts to whip up anti-Muslim sentiment throughout Europe, to divide the working class and provide a justification for war, continue unabated.

4. The long-term strategic goal of regional hegemony was dramatically stepped up in response to the overthrow of Washington’s client regimes of Ben Ali and Mubarak in Tunisia and Egypt in spring 2011. Faced with the initial stirrings of a revolutionary movement of the working class throughout the Middle East, Washington and London organised a NATO intervention to depose the Gaddafi regime in Libya. After four years of rapprochement, epitomised by Tony Blair’s infamous “deal in the desert”, Gaddafi was declared a pariah. An opposition movement—made up of former regime stalwarts, Islamists and CIA assets—was then cultivated in Benghazi to provide a pretext for the bombardment of Tripoli. The brutal murder of Gaddafi at the end of the war was intended as a warning of the fate of anyone defying imperialist edicts. Libya is now in a perpetual state of factional warfare, presided over by an authoritarian regime totally beholden to Washington for its continued existence.

5. In Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, movements associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and funded by the Gulf States have been installed in order to suppress the workers and oppressed masses of these countries. The Libyan pattern is being repeated in Syria through the sponsoring of the pro-imperialist forces, first the Syrian National Council and now the

handpicked National Coalition of Forces of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition. Turkey and the Gulf States are presently waging a proxy campaign on behalf of Washington—a move made necessary by the deep hostility of the working class in America, Britain and internationally to another predatory war in the Middle East. But Washington cannot and will not hold back indefinitely from its goal of deposing the regimes in Damascus and Tehran. Preparations for direct military intervention are well advanced, with a major build-up of troops in the region.

6. Even greater dangers are posed. Central to the warmongering of the major powers are their efforts to exclude their main rivals, Russia and China, not only from the Middle East but from every strategic area of the globe. Washington saw the liquidation of the Soviet Union in 1991 as an opportunity to develop a “uni-polar” world and to inaugurate a new “American century”. It spent close to two decades seeking to isolate Russia through the cultivation and installation of pro-US regimes in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, often through what were cynically referred to as “colour revolutions”. The process is now being repeated in the Middle East.

7. The global financial crisis that began in 2007 revealed the sclerotic character of American capitalism. The response of the Obama administration was to redirect its efforts to secure America’s imperialist interests against China through a new “pivot to Asia”. Aimed at encircling Beijing, this has included stationing troops in Australia, strengthening military ties with Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines, and backing South Korea against China’s ally North Korea. The most explosive consequence of this provocative policy to date has been to encourage tensions between Japan and China over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Taken together with its backing of India against Pakistan, this means that US imperialism is recklessly planting the seeds for any number of nuclear conflagrations, with dire consequences for the whole of humanity.

8. The law of the jungle once again prevails in international relations. Not since the 1930s, a decade of triumphant fascist reaction and gathering storm clouds of war, have the imperialist powers conducted themselves with such a brazen disregard for legality. The crimes associated with Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya—wars of aggression, aerial bombardment of civilians, chemical weapons, internment without trial, rendition—have their historical antecedents in Nazi Germany. In the case of political assassinations, Washington has far surpassed even the fascists, through its use of drones in the “targeted killing” of thousands. By this same criterion, the UK stands condemned as a Quisling regime whose crimes are no less venal than those of their sponsor. British forces stand accused of murder and other abuses in Afghanistan and the systematic use of torture against detainees in Iraq.

9. British imperialism’s enthusiasm for war is rooted in its own precipitous historic decline. London is dependent on the vaunted “special relationship” with the US in order to punch above its weight on the world arena. While it has the second largest military in the European Union, the fourth largest defence budget in the world and is one of the leading arms

suppliers, Britain's defence capabilities are entirely dependent on US cooperation. That is why it acts at all times as the chief advocate for US militarism, on which it hopes to piggy-back. The deadly price is coined in the blood of the countless victims of war, including the sons and daughters of British families sent to die so that Western corporations can profit.

10. The US has so far been able to press its military advantage virtually unchallenged. But all of the major powers are being drawn inexorably into a struggle for global hegemony that brings with it the danger of a new world war. The European powers have been involved in every major US-led intervention, including the first Iraq war, the bombing of Yugoslavia, the war in Afghanistan, the second Iraq war, the war against Libya and now the preparation of wars against Syria and Iran. In order to extend their collective military reach and power, however, there have been repeated efforts towards the creation of a European armed capability. These have been thwarted mainly through London's insistence on the preservation of the US-dominated NATO command structures. Britain also signed a bilateral defence co-operation agreement with France, bypassing European Union structures and playing on conflicts between Germany and France. But Germany responded by reviving demands for the creation of a European army, in combination with ending Britain's veto on military, constitutional and economic integration.

11. National and regional tensions are also being deliberately fostered throughout the continent, as a weapon against a united movement of the working class. The growth of Catalan and Basque separatism in Spain, Flemish nationalism in Belgium and moves for the separation of Scotland from Britain have their social roots in the strivings of a privileged petty-bourgeois layer to build direct relations with international finance capital. This outbreak of fissiparous regionalism portends the Balkanisation of Europe. Under conditions in which the EU itself faces break-up as a result of mounting social and political tensions, Europe can once again become an arena for inter-imperialist conflicts that would surpass in their brutality even those of the last century.

12. At this critical juncture, the mass opposition of working people to war finds no outlet. In 2003, over 10 million people on virtually every continent marched against the Iraq war on a single day. Yet in a matter of months this movement was deliberately collapsed by its own leadership. The Stop the War Coalition brought together an alliance of the Liberal Democrats, the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party and the Muslim Association of Britain, along with representatives of the Church of England. But from its inception, these forces represented a mechanism for subordinating the working class to organisations that had declared themselves in favour of war. Their central demand was to support the supposed efforts of a dozen Labour MPs and trade union bureaucrats to block the war-mongering of the Blair-led Labour government through appeals to the United Nations and the supposedly pacifist German and French ruling class.

13. This appeal was bound to fall on deaf ears. From the time of the war in Bosnia, the vast majority of Labour MPs, trade union functionaries and their supporters in the nominally liberal intelligentsia had declared themselves for war in the name of humanitarianism. Iraq too was portrayed as an example of liberal interventionism and, as soon as war was declared, the Liberal Democrats and most dissident Labourites fell in line in the name of patriotism and support for "our boys". Today those who once made up the leadership of the anti-war movement are themselves advocates of imperialist militarism. The UN gave its imprimatur to the US-led Libyan adventure in the name of the "responsibility to protect" legislation, pioneered at the time of Bosnia and Kosovo. The Liberal Democrats sit in government and fully endorsed the attack on Libya, while the Scottish National Party has junked its long-standing opposition to NATO. As for Labour, it continues to be the most unalloyed party of war and imperialist reaction. The pacifist "left" rump that existed in 2003 has all but ceased to exist.

14. The ex-left groups function as the political agents of imperialism. Their ranks include those such as Gilbert Achcar of the Pabloite United Secretariat, who openly advocates military intervention. The SWP and others gave their full support to the Transitional National Council in Libya and the Syrian opposition, proclaiming these identikit coalitions of bourgeois figures and Al Qaeda elements as a popular revolutionary leadership and dismissing all evidence of imperialist manipulation. Condemning "knee-jerk anti-imperialism", they defend the Syrian National Council's "right" to seek aid from the major powers as they also did in Libya, up to the very day that this aid reduced the country to rubble. In this way they legitimise the installation of pro-Western clients who are committed to neo-liberal free market policies, aimed at opening semi-autarkic economies to the imperialist transnationals.

15. Explaining why the parties of the Second International lined up behind their own ruling classes in the First World War, Lenin insisted that the social impulse for the development of opportunism and its transformation into naked social chauvinism had to be understood if the working class was to be rearmed with a revolutionary internationalist programme and leadership. No less is required today in politically reorienting the working class and breaking the stranglehold of the old and degenerate organisations. The growth of opportunism was rooted in the ability of the imperialist powers to utilise the fruits of empire to cultivate a privileged stratum of workers—an aristocracy of labour—which found its political expression in the development of a leadership that abandoned socialism in favour of class collaboration. Today, however, war is the twin of austerity policies that are impoverishing the working class in every country. But this is not so for the upper middle class layer of liberal imperialists, whose warmongering has earned them a respected place in bourgeois circles and a share of the spoils.

16. The International Committee of the Fourth International is alone in advancing a revolutionary internationalist opposition to war. But this situation too has an historical analogy. In 1915, the Zimmerwald Left was made up of a handful of delegates that represented only a small minority internationally who had stood out against the tidal wave of reaction. Within two years, the main leaders of this tendency present in Switzerland became the leaders of the Russian Revolution and the founders of the world's first workers' state. A similar political realignment is presently underway, in which the ICFI must provide the revolutionary orientation and leadership needed by the working class in Britain, Europe and throughout the world.

17. A genuine anti-war movement can only be developed based on the recognition that war is rooted in the inherent contradictions of the capitalist system—between a globally integrated world economy and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states. This can only be overcome through socialist revolution and the development of planned production on a world scale to meet social need, not private profit. The working class is the only social force that can accomplish this historic task. The Socialist Equality Party in Britain, together with our co-thinkers in the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, calls on the workers of Europe to take forward the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe. We insist, with Lenin, that the real enemy is at home. The interests of workers in Britain depend upon the unconditional defence of the workers and oppressed masses in the Middle East and internationally from the depredations visited upon them by the imperialist powers.



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