

Hands off Mali!

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The *World Socialist Web Site* denounces France's war in Mali as an act of imperialist piracy. After mass bombings of cities in northern Mali that killed and wounded hundreds of civilians, French tank columns crossed into Mali yesterday from the Ivory Coast.

Mali is the fourth country attacked by France in two years, after Libya, the Ivory Coast and Syria. Of these countries, all but Libya were former French colonies. Explanations for this war given by President François Hollande and other French officials—that France aims to defend Mali's "democracy" from Al Qaeda, and not what Hollande called France's "fundamental interests"—are cynical lies.

French imperialism is setting out to reestablish a dominant position in West Africa, using military force to assert its interests.

The war in Mali emerges directly out of the 2011 war in Libya. The rebel forces in northern Mali that France is fighting include fighters allied to the Al Qaeda-affiliated forces who helped NATO overthrow and murder Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, as well as ethnic Tuareg soldiers who served in the Libyan army and fled to Mali after the NATO victory. They also include Malian army deserters who joined the revolt against the unpopular coup regime in the capital Bamako.

French imperialism is pressing the advantages opened up to it by Gaddafi's defeat. With the Gaddafi regime destroyed and hundreds of billions of dollars of Libyan oil money seized by Western banks, African regional organizations funded by Gaddafi have collapsed and the US and France are rapidly setting up military bases throughout Africa. France's NATO allies are promising to assist in Mali, hoping to get their share of the spoils.

Paris is also exploiting the rottenness of the West African national bourgeois regimes, which are lining up to provide cannon fodder for its wars. Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara, installed by means of the 2011 French war in the Ivory Coast, is backing Paris in Mali. Senegalese President Macky Sall, who came to power last year after US- and French-backed protests against

President Abdoulaye Wade, will also send troops to Mali, along with Nigeria, Niger and Ghana.

In this submission to neo-colonial rule by the West African bourgeoisies, the Algerian regime plays a key role. Fearing Al Qaeda-linked forces against whom it fought the 1990s Algerian civil war, or an upsurge of the working class like those that toppled the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents in 2011, it is seeking to reach an accommodation with its former colonial master. Last month, Algiers signed multi-billion-euro contracts with France during Hollande's state visit. Now it has thrown open its airspace to French warplanes bombing Mali.

Sitting on its \$200 billion cash hoard of proceeds from energy sales, the Algerian ruling elite is offering Paris a deal. If French imperialism safeguards its privileges, Paris will receive new markets in Algeria to replace French consumer markets, which are collapsing as Hollande intensifies his anti-worker austerity policies.

The reactionary role of the African bourgeois regimes once again demonstrates the impossibility of liberating the African countries from imperialism outside of the struggle for socialist revolution across the continent and internationally.

Hollande's Socialist Party has collapsed in the polls due to its austerity policies and its decision to continue the wars of the preceding president, the widely despised Nicolas Sarkozy. Now it has launched its own bloody imperialist war.

The petty-bourgeois parties that called for an unconditional vote for Hollande in last year's elections, the Left Front and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), bear political responsibility for the war in Mali. The brief, perfunctory criticism of the war posted by the NPA on its web site does not alter its continuing support for Hollande. In the course of several decades, these forces and the Third World bourgeois nationalists have shifted so far to the right that they now support imperialist war.

It is increasingly clear that the period of decolonization was merely a historical interlude, bound up with the political aftershocks of the Russian Revolution, which

produced a powerful wave of anti-imperialist struggles. The post-Soviet period has seen a wave of imperialist wars—from Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and the Balkans in the 1990s and 2000s to the explosion of wars following the working class overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 in the so-called “Arab Spring.”

As the International Committee of the Fourth International foresaw in 1991, against the backdrop of the collapse of the USSR, “The ongoing and de facto partition of Iraq signals the start of a new division of the world by the imperialists. The colonies of yesterday are again to be subjugated. The conquests and annexations which, according to the opportunist apologists of imperialism belonged to a bygone era, are once again on the order of the day.”

Now, in the approach to the 100th anniversary of World War I, the world is witnessing a new eruption of French and world imperialism. However, Paris’ ultimate ambition—a return to its heyday in the early twentieth century, when it reigned over 100 million colonial slaves, stretching from West Africa to the Middle East and East Asia—is a reactionary illusion.

Paris’ support for the unpopular Malian regime, whose army is dissolving in the field against the Islamists, and its broader offensive to restore French influence throughout North and West Africa will only sink it deeper into the quagmire.

French imperialism cannot re-impose colonial shackles on the workers and oppressed masses of Africa, nor can it tie the working class in Europe to a policy of endless austerity to pay for war. By launching its aggression against Mali, it has set the course for a rendezvous with disaster. The watchword of politically conscious workers will be: French troops out of Africa!



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