

Worldwide attendance at ICFI May Day online rally

A reporting team
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Workers and young people on six continents and from 84 countries attended the online May Day rally held by the International Committee of the Fourth International Sunday. They heard ten speakers who spoke to the worldwide audience from the United States, Britain, Germany, Sri Lanka and Australia.

The rally was the first of its kind for the international working class movement, bringing together a global audience in a common rally against war, inequality and dictatorship. It was organized through the *World Socialist Web Site*, the daily Internet publication of the ICFI.

Over two thousand people registered for the event, and more than 700 comments were posted during the two and a half hours that it was broadcast. The enormous response to the call for the rally is a reflection of growing popular opposition around the world to the policy of war and social counterrevolution, and the widespread hunger for political analysis and a political alternative.

Helen Halyard, a national committee member of the Socialist Equality Party (US), and a member of the Trotskyist movement for more than 40 years, served as chairman.

David North, chairman of the WSWs international editorial board and national chairman of the SEP (US) gave the opening report to the rally, outlining the basic historical and political conception on which the rally was based.

North said the broad cross-section of working people from all over the world attending the online rally had immense objective significance. "All the differences employed by the ruling elites to divide the masses--those of ethnicity, religion, nationality, language, gender and even that of age--dissolve in the face of the inescapable reality of the world capitalist crisis, the political imperatives of the class struggle, and the objectively revolutionary role of the international working class in modern society."

The political perspective of the ICFI, North declared, was based on a scientific understanding of the contradictions of global capitalism and the historical experiences of the international working class, as developed especially in the struggle led by Leon Trotsky against Stalinism and reformism.

"The bitter lessons of the class struggle in the twentieth century demonstrated again and again the decisive significance of an international strategy and program to guide the struggles of the working class in all countries," North said. "There is no other movement in the world today, outside the International Committee of the Fourth International, which can plausibly claim to advance the struggle for international socialism."

Nick Beams, national secretary of the SEP Australia, analyzed the source of the attacks on jobs, living standards and democratic rights in the global breakdown of world capitalism that erupted with the Wall

Street financial crash of 2008. (The speech by Beams, and those of all the other speakers, will be posted on the WSWs in the coming days).

Beams outlined the conditions of economic stagnation that now prevail in North America and Europe, and explained that the so-called "emerging markets" of Asia, Africa and Latin America could not provide an alternative.

The ruling class and its apologists could not provide a serious explanation for the crisis and sought to treat it as an unfortunate accident. "Marxists have a fundamentally opposed perspective," he said. "Crises and economic breakdown do not develop outside the capitalist system; they are rooted in its essential internal contradictions."

Wije Dias, general secretary of the SEP of Sri Lanka, explained that the ICFI continued the fight for world socialist revolution begun by the Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky, and embodied in Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution.

The Trotskyist movement fought for the perspective of the leading role of the working class in the socialist revolution, against all those who adapted to bourgeois nationalism and Stalinism. He reviewed the recent experiences in Egypt and South Africa, as well as the lessons of the working class struggle in Sri Lanka and the Indian Subcontinent.

"The ICFI continues the struggle waged by Trotsky to rearm the world working class with scientific socialist consciousness in order to undertake its historic task of world socialist revolution," he said. "That is the powerful revolutionary tradition that is being evoked in this rally."

Four speakers from the European sections of the ICFI discussed the threat of war posed by the crisis in Ukraine and the struggle by the working class throughout Europe against the policies of austerity, repression and militarism pursued by every government, whether led by right-wing or social-democratic parties.

Peter Schwarz, secretary of the ICFI, explained that the German section, the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, and the SEP of Britain were waging a joint campaign in the European elections to be held later this month, placing the fight against the danger of war at the forefront.

"The European Union does not represent the unity of the European peoples, but rather the dictatorship of the most powerful economic and financial interests over Europe," he said. Against the EU, the ICFI advances the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe.

Chris Marsden, national secretary of the SEP (UK), detailed the crimes committed by the right-wing regime in Ukraine, with the backing of the major imperialist powers. The United States and its European allies are stoking a conflict with Russia that threatens to erupt into a catastrophic world war.

He explained that from an historical standpoint, the crisis over

Ukraine demonstrates the far-reaching and reactionary consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, betrayed and destroyed by Stalinism.

“We are for the unification of the Ukrainian, Russian and European working class, for a combined offensive against the filthy attacks of fascists and oligarchs,” he concluded.

Uli Rippert, national secretary of the PSG in Germany, spoke on the revival of German militarism by all the major parties, and the avalanche of pro-war propaganda in the German media, using the crisis in Ukraine as the pretext.

He focused particularly on the role of the Greens, the pacifists and the Left Party, which all at one time or another claimed to oppose militarism, only to move sharply to the right.

“The Left Party was only pacifist as long as German imperialism behaved in a pacifist manner,” he said. “At the very moment in which German militarism is preparing to return to the world stage, the Left Party has cast off its pacifist garb...”

Julie Hyland, assistant national secretary of the SEP (UK), spoke on the conditions of life facing hundreds of millions in Europe, amidst continent-wide policies of austerity, cuts in social spending, and destruction of jobs.

Officially, she said, 120 million in Europe are living in poverty, but the toll of the crisis is much worse. She discussed the tragic impact of the cuts in Greece, where hospitals have even withheld newborn babies from their mothers in order to extract payment.

“The reality of this new international situation must determine the orientation of the working class,” she said, and cause workers to return to the revolutionary traditions on which May Day was first established.

James Cogan, assistant national secretary of the SEP Australia, spoke on the growing danger of war in the Asia-Pacific region, sparked by the US administration’s aggressive “pivot” to Asia, illustrated by Obama’s recent trip to Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia.

The US military has acquired new bases in Australia, Singapore and the Philippines, to prepare for military action directed against China. At the same time, he said, through economic agreements like the Trans Pacific Partnership, “US imperialism wants the total subordination of the entire region to the corporate oligarchy that rules America.”

Andre Damon, national secretary of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality in the United States, declared that “One of the most visible manifestations of the crisis of capitalism is the terrible social conditions facing youth all over the world, from the US and Europe to Latin America, Asia and Africa. This is a generation without a future, facing record unemployment, mass poverty, perpetual indebtedness and a ceaseless attack on democratic rights.”

The only real future for young people lay in the struggle for socialism, he said. There is no shortage of hostility to the present conditions, but young people needed to gain historical and political knowledge and an understanding of the revolutionary tasks facing the working class, he said.

Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the SEP (US), gave closing remarks. “This rally is itself a refutation of those who proclaim the end of history,” he said, “because today history is being made.”

The role of American imperialism was a central focus of many of the speeches to the rally, he said, and rightly so, because any revolutionary movement on the world scale would have to confront the power and violence of the American ruling class.

“American imperialism may be strong,” he said, “but the contradictions of world capitalism are stronger, contradictions that, precisely because of its global role, find their most concentrated expression within the United States itself. The apparent strength of the American ruling class lies on thoroughly rotten foundations.”

He traced the decline of American capitalism over the past four decades, with the collapse of its industrial base, culminating in the bankruptcy of Detroit, once the Motor City.

“Those who are enamored of the apparent strength of American imperialism ignore its economic decline,” he continued. “They also miss out on what is the greatest revolutionary factor in the world today, the American working class.

“The American working class is the sleeping giant of world politics. The financial aristocrats confront no more powerful adversary than the workers of this country. Even the first stirrings of this colossal social force will upend the calculations of all the political puppets of Wall Street that occupy the government buildings in Washington.”

Kishore explained that May Day itself originates in the international response to one of the first great struggles of the American working class, the Haymarket massacre of 1886, 128 years ago on the day of the ICFI rally.

The speaker argued that the American working class now had to overcome its principal weakness, the failure to build an independent mass political organization to defend its interests

He concluded: “We say to our comrades all over the world, always remember: there are two Americas. There is the America of Wall Street, the Pentagon, the CIA, the plutocracy, which lies, threatens and bullies. And there is the America of the working class, the bearer of all that is progressive, the true hope for the future.”

During these speeches, comments were posted on the rally’s Internet page, from throughout the United States, as well as Canada, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, Chile and Brazil. From Europe, there was discussion posted from Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Belgium, Poland, Romania, Norway, Ukraine and Russia. From Asia came comments from China, India, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, the Philippines, Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates. Dozens of participants commented from Australia and New Zealand, and greetings were sent to the rally by supporters of the ICFI in South Africa and Turkey.

The reports were translated for simultaneous broadcast in German, Sinhalese and Tamil, and there was translation into French for a group of supporters gathered in Paris. Online conversations continued in the comments in Spanish, Tagalog, Turkish, Italian, Russian and French, among other languages.



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