

Chris Marsden: Ukraine crisis—A turning point in world history

Chris Marsden
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We are publishing here the text of the speech given by Chris Marsden, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), to the International Online May Day Rally hosted by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the World Socialist Web Site on Sunday, May 4.

Comrades and friends,

You will all know that this May Day rally takes place just days after the mass murder of dozens in Odessa by the fascist supporters of the Kiev regime, and in the midst of the military assault on Slavyansk, Kramatorsk and other cities.

These are horrible crimes. And most of you will have seen the sickening video footage of people jumping from the burning trade union building, only to be beaten by Right Sector Nazis, or read the reports of peaceful protesters being fired upon.

Blame for all of this rests squarely on the Obama administration and its allies. They have deliberately created the conditions for a civil war to erupt in order to provide a pretext for military intervention in the region and against Russia. This is what accounts for President Obama's Orwellian praise for the "remarkable restraint" shown by the "duly elected government in Kiev."

Every day brings further news of the buildup of NATO forces on Ukraine's borders, coupled with bellicose threats against Moscow.

Three NATO warships have been stationed in the Black Sea. In addition, Obama has ordered the Pentagon to increase the number of American ground forces supporting NATO and to send extra jet fighters to Lithuania and Poland. Roughly 600 infantry troops from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team are being stationed in Poland and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Moreover, insane as this might seem, Washington has fully revived the Reagan-era fantasy of the "winnable" nuclear war.

Billions of dollars are being expended in creating a missile defence network designed explicitly to negate Russia's own nuclear capability, with plans for sites to be operational in Romania by 2015 and Poland by 2018.

In the face of all this, no one can any longer seriously assert that the present situation is an improvised response by the Western powers to the Russian annexation of Crimea, let alone to the anti-Kiev demonstrations in Russian-speaking areas of

Ukraine.

Rather, the Maidan protests were a political operation planned and orchestrated by Washington, Berlin and an alliance of oligarchs and fascists the US helped fund to the tune of \$5 billion.

The staging of this coup d'état was done with the aim of provoking Moscow into a response, to provide the necessary excuse for a predetermined policy of pushing for NATO expansion to Russia's very borders.

The US ruling class is no longer prepared to tolerate even the truncated independence presently enjoyed by the Russian and Chinese bourgeoisie, which is seen as an unacceptable obstacle to its unchallenged global hegemony.

Moreover, all the European powers are intent on following America's lead--fearful of being excluded from a re-division of global markets and resources, beginning with those of Russia and China.

The common aim is to encircle and isolate Russia economically, politically and militarily, to destabilise the Putin regime, and install one similar in all respects to that imposed on Kiev.

It is the working class in Ukraine and in Russia that is paying and will pay the most terrible price for these intrigues. Everything now depends on the workers formulating their own political response.

To do so means reconnecting with the profound revolutionary traditions that have shaped the history of both peoples, and which found expression in the creation of the Soviet Union following the October 1917 Russian Revolution.

At the moment, the opposition that exists to the Kiev regime appears regionally based and in support of some form of autonomy or affiliation to Russia, as with Crimea. But neither the Russian oligarchs represented by Putin nor their local supporters can be entrusted with the task of opposing the Kiev regime, let alone its Western sponsors.

Fundamentally, in Ukraine we are witnessing the terrible consequences of the destruction of the Soviet Union.

The dissolution of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and of the Soviet Union itself between 1989 and 1991 was the culmination of the Stalinist bureaucracy's historic betrayal of the internationalist perspective of world socialist revolution on

which the October Revolution was based.

And it is this that has laid the basis for the present encirclement of Russia.

Remember, it was Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev who at that time boasted of his “new thinking”—thinking based on the claim that “imperialism” was a fiction invented by Lenin and that capitalist restoration would mean Russia developing as a valued member of a world family of democratic nations.

What blind stupidity this was.

As with so much else, it is Leon Trotsky, Ukraine’s greatest son, who stands vindicated by events, when he warned that the dissolution of the Soviet Union would result in Russia becoming a semi-colony of the major imperialist powers.

It is to Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement that the workers of Russia and Ukraine must now turn in order to defeat the predatory schemes of Washington, Berlin, London and Paris.

The ICFI embodies in its programme all of the historic lessons to be drawn from the struggle waged by the Left Opposition against Stalin’s reactionary nationalist programme of “socialism in one country,” through which the Soviet and international working class were made subordinate to the interests of the bureaucracy and the defence of its privileged position within the USSR.

We uphold the spotless banner under which the Fourth International was founded in 1938 to fight for the overthrow of the profit system and to create a socialist world.

Putin’s regime is the degenerate end product of the restoration of capitalism. It represents nothing except a venal gang of oligarchs that have grown immensely wealthy through theft, plunder and a ruthless assault on the working class.

To support Putin and a Russian nationalist agenda is only to help pave the way for the type of ethno-linguistic civil war that ripped apart the former Yugoslavia, and which is the desired outcome of Washington and its cohorts.

Against such a disastrous course, we are for the unification of the Ukrainian, Russian and international working class in the struggle for socialism.

We make this appeal for unity—for a combined offensive of the working class against the filthy alliance of fascists, oligarchs and imperialist predators--confident that this will find powerful support.

The situation in Ukraine, as elsewhere, is pregnant with revolutionary possibilities that will pitch the working class against the oligarchs that have until now dictated political life.

There undoubtedly exists profound concern among Ukrainian-speaking workers that an unholy alliance of gangster capitalists and fascist thugs has been installed as their government, and anger at seeing their brothers and sisters in the east subjected to such brutal repression.

Moreover, the US and its European allies are insisting on policies that will destroy the living standards of workers, who are already barely subsisting.

Ukraine is the 80th poorest country in the world, thanks to the

scorched earth policies that followed capitalist restoration. More than one quarter of its population--11 million people--live below the official poverty line set at just \$127 per month.

Now the International Monetary Fund and European Union are demanding Ukraine pay off debts estimated at \$80 billion in return for a “rescue” package of just \$15 billion that will all go to pay off international creditors.

This demands further huge cuts to public spending such as vital fuel subsidies. No wonder that Ukraine’s puppet prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, called his a “kamikaze government.”

In the next period, the class struggle will explode. And it will cut across all attempts to subordinate the working class to one or another section of the bourgeoisie. In this struggle, the workers of Ukraine and of Russia must look to the working class of Europe and of America as their allies.

To make such an orientation become a reality depends upon the essential and indeed decisive role played by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

We base ourselves on something immensely powerful—the anti-war sentiment that exists in the working class in every country, but which finds absolutely no political expression in parties that—regardless of their formal coloration—are all the instruments of the ruling elite.

Everywhere, there is mass social and political discontent directed against the twin policies of savage austerity and imperialist militarism. The fight against both must now become the basis for the revolutionary mobilisation of the working class to end capitalism once and for all.

We are seeking to give voice to the voiceless, and to unleash the social power of those that at present appear powerless only because no party represents them.

Those of you participating in this May Day meeting from all over the world represent the advanced detachments of the working class. You are the ones who, through varied personal experiences, have come to understand that the way forward proceeds through the construction of the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution.

But you are all the representatives of a class that has passed through similar, in reality world historic experiences. And many, many more will draw the same conclusion in the coming period.

Thank you.



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