

May Day 2018

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On May Day, the day of international working-class solidarity, the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* extend our greetings to workers engaged in struggles all over the world.

Representing the world Trotskyist movement, we also send our fraternal greetings to all the victims of ruling-class injustice, and especially to the cruelly victimized workers of Maruti Suzuki in India, to the dispossessed refugees of the Middle East who are subject to brutal persecution by hostile imperialist and capitalist governments that deny their basic rights as human beings, to the victims in Gaza of the homicidal violence of the Israeli regime, and to immigrants within the United States, who are being hunted down in Gestapo-like raids and deported from the country. The International Committee also salutes Julian Assange, who continues his valiant struggle to expose imperialist criminality, and pledges to redouble its efforts to secure his freedom.

The International Committee and the *World Socialist Web Site* also declare on May Day 2018 that we shall spare no effort to rally the international working class and youth all over the world in the fight against the escalating attacks on democratic rights, the growing threat of right-wing and state-sponsored authoritarianism, and the mounting danger of catastrophic wars.

This year's May Day is invested with exceptional historical significance. It is being celebrated as we approach the 200th anniversary of the birth of the greatest materialist philosopher and revolutionary thinker of the modern world, Karl Marx, on May 5, 1818. The tocsin sounded by Marx and his decades-long comrade and friend, Friedrich Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*—"Workers of the world, Unite!"—powerfully resonates today as the class struggle is once again bursting into the open.

In the United States, the center of world capitalism, the working class—after decades of betrayals by the corporatist trade unions—is beginning to flex its muscles. Tens of thousands of teachers throughout the country are fighting against declining wages, rising health care costs and the consequences of decades of budget cuts and austerity overseen by the Democrats and Republicans. In Europe, workers in France are opposing the austerity measures and dictatorial decrees of President Emmanuel Macron, while lecturers in the UK and hundreds of thousands of industrial workers in Germany launched major strikes earlier this year. In January, workers in Greece shut down shipping and public transport in opposition to austerity measures rammed through by the capitalist Syriza government, led by the reactionary political imposter, Alexis Tsipras.

The first four months of 2018 have seen strikes and demonstrations throughout the world—including the mass

demonstrations against austerity in Iran in January; strikes by teachers and lecturers in Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe; a nationwide strike by teachers in Tunisia; strikes by teachers in Mexico, Brazil and Puerto Rico; a three-week strike by technology workers in China; a strike by autoworkers in Windsor, Canada and many more.

These developments represent only the initial stage of an international process of expanding and explosive class struggle. They refute the reactionary nostrums of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left, which wrote off the working class as a revolutionary social force and claimed that the struggles in modern society would be centered on race, gender and sexual orientation.

Those who rejected the revolutionary role of the working class did so to justify their alliance with and allegiance to the reactionary bureaucracies of the trade unions. No position of the International Committee of the Fourth International has been more bitterly attacked by the pseudo-left than its exposure of the right-wing role and anti-working-class character of the trade unions. Yet the conflict between workers and the unions is a defining feature of the growth of the class struggle in 2018.

"The role of these bureaucratic apparatuses in every country," the Workers League, predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, wrote in 1993, "has been transformed from pressuring the employers and the state for concessions to the workers, to pressuring the workers for concessions to the employers so as to attract capital." The development of the class struggle, it insisted, would bring workers into ever more direct conflict with these organizations.

This analysis has been confirmed in the experiences of millions. For more than a quarter-century, the trade unions have worked to suppress all opposition to a redistribution of wealth to the rich without historical precedent. This vast transfer of wealth has reached the point where the richest one percent of the world's population controls more than half of the world's wealth. It is expected to control two-thirds by 2030.

As opposition to inequality and austerity grows, the unions are redoubling their efforts to isolate and shut down any open resistance to the dictates of the corporate elite. In the US, only 25,000 workers were involved in major work stoppages last year, the second lowest number since 1947, even though every poll shows immense social anger and opposition to capitalism. In the UK, the number of working days lost to strikes stood at 322,000 in 2016 and 170,000 in 2015, compared to 27 million in 1984, the year of the miners' strike.

The efforts of workers—and, in particular, teachers in the US—to organize strikes outside of and in opposition to the unions have

struck terror in the hearts of the ruling elite. It is responding to workers' use of social media platforms to communicate and coordinate opposition by intensifying the campaign for Internet censorship that began with Google's manipulation of its search algorithms last year. A central target has been the *World Socialist Web Site*, which fights indefatigably for the independent organization and mobilization of the working class.

The efforts of the capitalist parties, the trade unions and their upper-middle-class appendages to prevent the class struggle will fail, and indeed are already failing. "The orientation of the masses," Leon Trotsky wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International, "is determined first and foremost by the conditions of decaying capitalism, and second, by the treacherous politics of the old workers' organizations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus."

The laws of history and the contradictions of capitalism have created a social force—the international working class—that, as it enters into struggle, is upending all the calculations of the capitalist ruling elites.

The globalization of capitalist production, which undercut the national reformist perspective of the old labor organizations and social democratic parties, has at the same time immensely strengthened the international working class, with the addition of hundreds of millions of workers in China, India and other oppressed countries. The changes in the forms of communication associated with the Internet allow workers all over the world to share information and organize instantaneously. The extreme growth of social inequality has created an immense reservoir of social anger while undermining the credibility and authority of all the institutions of the ruling class.

The consequences are revolutionary. The class struggles in their initial form are centered on wages, the attack on health care, the working conditions of different sections of workers. However, the right to a living wage, health care, public education, and a secure retirement are class, not sectional, issues. That is, they pose at every point the need to unify all workers, in all countries, in a common movement. As Marx and Engels insisted, every class struggle is a political struggle—it is a struggle for power. Not a single pressing social need can be met without a frontal assault on the wealth and privileges of capitalist oligarchies that control the state and all its auxiliary bodies.

Moreover, workers face not only the consequences of exploitation and inequality but, inextricably connected with this, the danger of world war and authoritarianism. Facing intractable crises at every turn, and beset by ferocious internal conflicts and social tensions, the ruling classes are preparing for a level of militarist violence and domestic repression that will recall the worst horrors of the 20th century.

However significant the initial expressions of working-class resistance, they will not resolve the historic tasks facing the international working class. The program of the working class is not the reform of capitalism, but its overthrow. As Marx wrote in 1865:

The working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerrilla fights incessantly springing up from the never ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economic reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto: "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: "Abolition of the wages system!" [*Value, Price and Profit*]

The abolition of the wages system, that is, capitalism, is the burning political question. Mass opposition to war, inequality and dictatorship, the growing struggles of workers and young people all over the world, must be transformed into a conscious political movement to take power and reconstruct economic life on the basis of rational control, international coordination and social equality.

The essential instrument in carrying out this task is the revolutionary leadership, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement. In celebration of May Day and the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, we call on all our readers to make the decision to join and build the ICFI, comprised of Socialist Equality Parties throughout the world, and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.

This Saturday, May 5, at 5:30 pm EDT, on the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth, the ICFI is holding its annual International May Day Online Rally, which will be broadcast live throughout the world at wsws.org/mayday. We urge all our readers and all workers throughout the world to register and attend May Day 2018.



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