

Against imperialism, counterrevolution and war! For a socialist Middle East!

Johannes Stern
8 May 2018

The following speech was delivered to the ICFI's International Online Rally by Johannes Stern, a leading member of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, the German section of the ICFI, and the World Socialist Web Site editorial board in Germany.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* send greetings to all workers, youth and progressive intellectuals in the Middle East. There is hardly another region in the world where the necessity of uniting the working class, on the basis of a socialist perspective against imperialist exploitation and war, is as sharply posed as here.

In the past 25 years, the imperialist powers have been continuously at war to subdue, exploit and essentially recolonize this resource-rich and geo-strategically important region. In the course of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria, entire countries have been destroyed, and millions have been killed or turned into refugees.

Now the next illegal war of aggression has begun. A few days ago, numerous Iranian citizens were killed in military strikes by Israeli F-15 fighters on Syrian military bases. This is the fifth Israeli military strike against Iranian positions in Syria in recent months. It comes after US, British and French air strikes against Syria last month. A comprehensive war against Damascus and Tehran would not only spark a conflagration throughout the entire region, it could also trigger a direct military confrontation with the nuclear-armed powers, Russia and China.

The imperialist wars and rape of the Middle East mark only the first bloody stage of the new imperialist re-division of the world, which was initiated after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As far back as August 1990, when the US launched the first Gulf war, the

International Committee analysed the far-reaching historical and political implications of this process. In a statement written at that time and republished in his book *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony*, Comrade David North explained:

The end of the postwar era means the end of the postcolonial era. As it proclaims the “failure of socialism,” the imperialist bourgeoisie, in deeds if not yet in words, proclaims the failure of independence. The deepening crisis confronting all the major imperialist powers compels them to secure control over strategic resources and markets. Former colonies, which had achieved a degree of political independence, must be re-subjugated. In its brutal assault against Iraq, imperialism is giving notice that it intends to restore the type of unrestrained domination of the backward countries that existed prior to World War II.

The greater and more violent the wars in this process, the more brazen the falsifications and lies with which they are prepared. The staged presentation by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, eclipsed even Colin Powell's false allegations about weapons of mass destruction 15 years ago, which prepared the invasion of Iraq. Netanyahu did not provide a shred of evidence for his provocative claim that Iran maintains a secret nuclear weapons programme and is violating the de-nuclearisation deal.

The European powers are currently struggling to save the deal as they fear that an all-out regional war would have dramatic consequences, destabilize class relations in Europe and disrupt their own imperialist interests. But there is no doubt whose side they would take in case of an Israeli or American attack. Precisely because of the growing political and economic conflicts with Washington, the European elites want to secure their own share of the spoils when US imperialism plunders

the Middle East, and the world is divided up anew.

The ICFI treats with contempt the various pseudo-left organizations who promote, sponsor and legitimize the imperialist war drive as a struggle for “democracy” and “human rights.” Their support for the US-allied Islamic and Kurdish nationalist militias in Syria is a mockery of the most elementary principles of Marxism. The fight against the bourgeois regimes in Syria, Turkey or Iran, and the building of democratic and equal societies throughout the Middle East, is not the task of imperialism and its local proxies—who bring only death and destruction—but the task of an independent, revolutionary movement of the working class.

Maintaining the oppression of the working class plays a central role in the calculations of the imperialist powers and their pseudo-left supporters. Seven years ago, when the revolutionary masses in Tunisia and Egypt brought down two brutal lackeys of imperialism, Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, the imperialist powers intervened in Libya and Syria to install pro-Western puppet regimes and divide the working class along religious and ethnic lines. In Egypt and Tunisia, at every stage of the revolution, the pseudo-left organisations played the role of subordinating the working class to one or another faction of the bourgeoisie. The so called Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt went so far as to hail the 2013 military coup, which laid the foundation for al-Sisi’s bloody military dictatorship, as a “second revolution.”

Five years later, despite counterrevolution and war, the Middle East and North Africa are experiencing a revival of the class struggle. At the beginning of the year, mass protests took place in Iran, Tunisia and Morocco. In Turkey, the employers’ organization MESS was forced to increase the wages of 130,000 metalworkers by 24 percent, in order to prevent the renewed outbreak of wildcat strikes. In Israel, a one-day general strike had already paralysed the country at the end of last year.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians are currently protesting at the Israeli border for their right to return to their homes and villages, from which they were forcibly evicted 70 years ago. The Israeli government, supported by Washington and the European powers, is responding with deadly force. Since the protests began in late March, at least 43 Palestinians have been shot dead and thousands seriously injured.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and the *Web Site* condemn this massacre. It is a cruel mockery that imperialism has turned people, who were themselves victims of the most horrific crimes in history, into persecutors. 70 years after its founding, the Zionist myth that the violent carving out of a Jewish state in Palestine would bring peace and security for the Jewish people, after the horrors of the Holocaust, is unravelling. With the working class in Israel trapped in one of the most unequal societies, the only policy of the Israeli bourgeoisie is the creation of a garrison state at home, and the endless expansion of war abroad.

There is only one way out of the maelstrom of imperialist warmongering, violence and the general bankruptcy of a nationalist perspective in the Middle East: the unification of workers in Israel, Palestine and throughout the region on the basis of an international socialist program.

The fate of the Egyptian revolution, and the devastating historical experiences of the Arab, Turkish, Kurdish, Iranian and Jewish masses with Stalinism and the different forms of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism, have fully confirmed Leon Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution. In countries with belated capitalist development, only the working class can successfully wage the struggle for democracy and against imperialism, and this struggle can only be achieved through the overthrow of the capitalist system as part of the world socialist revolution.

The objective conditions for the proletarian revolution have “ripened” in the Middle East over many years. The central historical task, which is becoming ever more urgent in the face of the danger of another devastating war, is the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership. We appeal to all our listeners and readers from the region to join the International Committee of the Fourth International and actively build Socialist Equality Parties and chapters of the International Youth and Students for Socialist Equality in your countries.



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