

For a socialist movement against war throughout the Asia-Pacific region

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The following speech was delivered to the ICFI's May Day 2018 International Online Rally by James Cogan, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia).

Over the past year, the prospect of a war on the Korean Peninsula, involving nuclear weapons and inflicting millions of casualties, has existed as a terrible, but all too real possibility.

We have witnessed US President Donald Trump standing before the United Nations and threatening to “totally destroy” the isolated state of North Korea, on the pretext it has assembled a small nuclear arsenal. The North Korean regime has responded with threats that it could retaliate by firing nuclear weapons at West Coast American cities or Japan.

Talks are now scheduled to be held in the coming weeks between Trump and North Korean head Kim Jong-un. However, any conception that such talks will result in “peace in our time” are just as naïve as similar claims in 1938, when British and German imperialism negotiated the Nazi annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia.

Like Hitler's regime, US imperialism has signaled that it will accept only complete submission to its demands, which essentially amount to North Korea being transformed into a US client state. If the Pyongyang regime refuses, the prospect of war will return with renewed intensity.

The situation on the Korean Peninsula is only one, particularly acute, expression of the tremendous threat posed to the international working class by the ever sharpening strategic, economic and military competition, and resulting tensions, between the United States and China.

US imperialism, acting in the interests of the Wall Street banks and conglomerates, is not prepared to

accept the supplanting of its dominance, in the economically crucial Asia-Pacific region, by the Chinese capitalist state that has developed over the past three decades or more, and China emerging as a rival centre of global power.

Through the Obama administration's “pivot to Asia,” a web of alliances and partnerships has been developed by the US, centrally involving its main regional imperialist allies, Japan and Australia, to seek to militarily pressure China and undermine its attempts to forge greater influence in the region.

The inexorable drive toward war was made explicit in the new US National Defense Strategy, adopted by the Trump administration in January 2018.

The document bluntly accused China of seeking “Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future.” It asserted that the United States must “prioritize preparedness for war,” including through a massive upgrading of its nuclear arsenal, which is already capable of destroying the entire planet several times over.

As before World War I and World War II, what is unfolding is a struggle between rival great powers for domination over markets, resources, spheres of influence and, above all, share of global profits. It arises not out of the irrationality of political leaders, but out of the irrationality of the division of a globally integrated economy into competing capitalist states; and the irrationality of vast social production, set in motion by the collective labour power of billions of workers, being subordinated to the generation of private profit for a capitalist handful.

By flipping North Korea into their sphere of influence, the US and its allies are seeking to weaken China and intensify pressure upon it.

Far from any agreement on the Korean Peninsula lessening the danger of war between the major powers, the risks will only increase. It is just one of a range of provocations underway against Beijing that threaten to trigger open conflict.

Others include the rejection of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea; the development of the de facto anti-China Quadrilateral alliance between the US, Japan, Australia and India; discussion on establishing closer US and Japanese military ties with Taiwan; hysterical campaigns in Australia, New Zealand and, increasingly in the US, against alleged "Chinese interference" and spying; the blocking of Chinese investment in various countries on "national security" grounds; and moves toward wholesale trade war to undermine major Chinese-based corporations.

This May Day we are commemorating 200 years since the birth of Karl Marx and his development of philosophical and historical materialism, the basis of our scientific socialist and internationalist perspective.

Our response to the danger of world war flows from this perspective. There is only one social force that can prevent war and that is the unified strength of the international working class, the sole revolutionary class, which has now re-entered mass social struggles.

War cannot be prevented by pacifist appeals to the ruling classes, let alone to the impotent United Nations.

It will certainly not be prevented by the sordid diplomatic intrigues of US imperialism, other powers, or the Chinese capitalist state.

What is necessary is the unification of the working class into a mass international anti-war movement, under the banner of World Socialist Revolution, the perspective fought for only by the world Trotskyist movement.

The crucial task, which cannot be delayed, is the establishment of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International across the Indo-Pacific region: in New Zealand, in the Pacific states, across SE Asia, in Taiwan, in Korea, Japan and China, in India, Pakistan and South Asia.

The fight to build the Fourth International and unify the international working class will require a conscious fight against the efforts of the ruling classes of all countries to divide workers and tie them to decaying capitalism through nationalism, religious sectarianism and racism.

It will require creative and determined efforts to overcome efforts to censor and suppress the spread of socialist ideas. It is not only American imperialism and its allies that are working with the Internet conglomerates to censor working-class opposition, and the *World Socialist Web Site* in particular.

The Chinese capitalist regime, which emerged out of the Maoist-Stalinist apparatus that betrayed the Chinese revolution, is so fearful of renewed socialist struggle by the Chinese working class that it is now using its firewalls to block the WSWS in mainland China.

Eighty years ago, in the founding document of the Fourth International, Leon Trotsky wrote that its cadres were "pledges for the future."

"Outside these cadres," he continued, "there does not exist a single revolutionary current on this planet really meriting the name."

The strategic experiences of the past 80 years have proven the truth of those words. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is the only revolutionary movement.

To all supporters of the ICFI and readers of the WSWS in the Indo-Pacific, I urge you to make May Day 2018 the day you commit yourself to joining our ranks.



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