

Greetings to Chinese workers and youth on the centenary of the May 4 movement

Peter Symonds
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On Saturday, May 4, the International Committee of the Fourth International held the 2019 International Online May Day Rally, the sixth annual online May Day Rally held by the ICFI, the world Trotskyist movement. The rally heard speeches on different aspects of the world crisis of capitalism and the struggles of the international working class from 12 leading members of the world party and its sections and sympathizing organizations around the world.

On successive days, the World Socialist Web Site is publishing the texts of the speeches delivered at the rally. Below is the speech delivered by Peter Symonds, national editor of the WSWs (Australia). On Monday, the WSWs published the opening report to the rally, given by David North, the chairman of the international editorial board of the WSWs and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US).

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On May Day 2019, the International Committee of the Fourth International sends its special greetings to Chinese workers and youth on the centenary of the May 4 movement in China. It marked a historic turning point in the struggle against imperialist oppression.

On May 4, one hundred years ago, thousands of students took to the streets in Beijing to protest against the outcome of the Versailles Peace Conference, which handed Shandong Province to Japan. The treaty ending World War I also maintained the colonial-style unequal treaties that subordinated China to the imperialist powers.

The protest triggered a nationwide movement of workers and youth, not only against imperialist domination, but also against its collaborators in the Beijing government. The protests continued for weeks in the face of police repression. It was part of a broader cultural revolt based on the ideals of the European Enlightenment against the stultifying Confucian traditions that underpinned the rigid hierarchy of Chinese society.

Inspired by the socialist internationalism that animated the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, a layer of students and intellectuals turned decisively toward Marxism and the Soviet Union. In July 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded.

The Communist Party today has repudiated all of the principles on which it was established. Internationalism was long ago replaced by the reactionary Stalinist theory of “Socialism in One Country.” The Chinese variant of Stalinism, Maoism, deformed the workers’ state established after the 1949 Chinese Revolution and proved to be an economic and political dead-end. Mao’s rapprochement with US President Nixon in 1972 laid the basis for capitalist restoration from 1978 onwards.

The Chinese Communist Party does not represent the working class, but the super-rich, who have accrued their obscene wealth through the plunder of state-owned property and the gross exploitation of the working class. Its rule rests ideologically not on socialism, but on Chinese nationalism. It is propped up by a vast police state apparatus to stamp out any signs of anti-government opposition.

President Xi used his speech this week to mark the May 4 movement to hail nationalism and patriotism. In contrast to the iconoclasm that marked the 1919 protests, he insisted that young people today had to avoid “mistaken thoughts” and “obey the party.” The Communist Party, which was formed in a rebellion against Confucianism, is promoting its return to reinforce the stifling intellectual climate in universities and society as a whole.

Capitalist restoration in China resulted in a flood of foreign investment, particularly after the 1989 crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protests signalled that the Stalinist apparatus would stop at nothing to discipline the working class. The Chinese economy has doubled in size every eight years, transforming it into the world’s second largest.

The working class, however, has paid a terrible price—jobs with low pay, unhealthy and dangerous conditions, and owners who pay wages late or not at all. There is no right to strike or protest. Millions of rural migrant workers have no residency rights or access to urban services.

Social inequality is staggering. China has gone from one of the most equal societies to one of the most unequal countries in the world. It is home to more dollar billionaires than any other country except the United States. While Chinese workers struggle to survive on \$370 a month, the wealthiest individual, Tencent Chairman Pony Ma, has a personal fortune of almost \$40 billion.

Moreover, China's economic growth has put it on a collision course with US imperialism that threatens a catastrophic war. The Communist Party has no answers. On the one hand, it kowtows to Washington in the hope that it will buy some time. On the other, it is engaged in an arms race with the US that can end only in conflict and a nuclear disaster for all of humanity.

The CCP defends the profit system and is thus incapable of making any appeal to the one social force able to halt the drive to war—the international working class. It requires a unified struggle of workers to abolish capitalism and restructure society along genuinely socialist lines.

There are growing signs of a resurgence of working class struggle in China, as is taking place internationally. Workers are courageously taking strike action and organising protests to fight for their democratic and social rights despite the repressive measures of the police, company thugs and state-sanctioned trade unions. In the traditions of the May 4 movement, university students have begun to collaborate with workers in their fight, and have been detained for months for doing so.

The critical question is: what political perspective and program will guide the emerging struggles? A fight for social equality and democratic rights means a struggle based on the working class for a socialist future. To clearly see the road forward, it is necessary to understand the past. But the Stalinist bureaucratic apparatus in Beijing has buried the revolutionary history of the Chinese and international working class under a mountain of lies and half-truths.

We say to Chinese workers and youth: You have to reclaim that history, for it is the only way that a genuinely revolutionary party can be built in China or any other part of the world. And there is only one source from which the

truth can be learned—the international Trotskyist movement, which has waged a decades-long struggle against all the crimes and betrayals of Stalinism.

Learn from the struggles of Chen Duxiu, the leading intellectual figure of the May 4 movement and founding chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, and the other Chinese Trotskyists who opposed Stalin's betrayal of the Chinese revolution of 1925-27. They were persecuted, detained and killed for warning workers that Mao Zedong and his fellow Stalinists would lead the 1949 Revolution into a blind alley.

President Xi and his fellow dark-suited bureaucrats have at their disposal a vast state apparatus of repression, which they will not hesitate to use. However, as Leon Trotsky explained in the Transitional Program, the founding document of the Fourth International in 1938, "The laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus."

The Chinese working class, which is the largest in the world, numbering in the hundreds of millions, will revolt against the oppressive rule of the Chinese Communist Party. But a revolutionary leadership must be built in advance as part of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

We call on Chinese workers and youth today—May Day 2019—to draw inspiration from the determination and courage of those who took part in the May 4 movement 100 years ago.

Read the *World Socialist Web Site*, carefully study the history and program of the ICFI, contact us, and begin the process of building a section of the Fourth International in China.



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