

The class struggle in the United States and the fight against war

Niles Niemuth
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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 Niles Niemuth, Socialist Equality Party Candidate for Michigan's 12th Congressional District (2018) and US Vice Presidential Candidate (2016). 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).

One hundred years ago, the great American socialist and revolutionary Eugene Debs was thrown into a federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia for denouncing the imperialists' bloody effort to re-divide the world in World War One. Debs was legendary for his opposition to imperialism, and uncompromising in his view of the class struggle, winning him the support and admiration of millions of workers across the world.

Debs declared in 1915: "I have no country to fight for; my country is the earth; and I am a citizen of the world. I am not a capitalist soldier; I am a proletarian revolutionist. ... I refuse to obey any command to fight from the ruling class, but I will not wait to be commanded to fight for the working class."

A century later, as the US wages war all over the world and prepares ever greater wars, WikiLeaks publisher and journalist Julian Assange has been thrown into a British jail cell for telling the truth about American war crimes.

He potentially faces charges in the US for violating the Espionage Act, the very same law used against Debs.

The "war to end war," World War I, in which millions of young workers were sent to their deaths, set the stage for an even bloodier imperialist conflict in World War II, in another bid to re-divide the world amongst competing capitalist cliques.

The founder of our movement, Leon Trotsky wrote in 1928 that, "In the period of crisis the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom ... " This has been borne out as the American ruling class has seen the dominant economic position it held in the aftermath of World War II slip away.

The US has waged a series of wars and military interventions in the nearly 75 years since the end of World War II. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union nearly three decades ago, it has instigated an unending and expanding bloodbath, beginning with the First Gulf War in Iraq in 1990–91 and the war in Yugoslavia.

For two decades, in what Bush called the "wars of the twenty-first century," the US invaded and occupied Afghanistan in 2001, followed by Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia. Entire societies have been destroyed and at least one million people killed, with millions more transformed into refugees seeking safe haven for themselves and their families.

Now, the so-called "war on terror" is being transformed into a new great power conflict. "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security," Pentagon war planners declared in last year's National Defense Strategy document.

China and Russia, nuclear armed powers, are squarely in the cross-hairs of the United States and its imperialist allies in Europe, Japan and Australia, threatening a catastrophe for humanity. The Trump administration's reckless imperialist provocation in Venezuela,

spearheaded by the mad war hawk John Bolton, has been used to ratchet up tensions with Russia, China and Iran. The historic conflict between the US and Europe, particularly Germany, is again re-emerging.

This new global conflict is being prepared with a massive military build-up around the world. Global military spending topped \$1.8 trillion last year, the highest since the end of the Cold War.

The US once again led the way in 2018, spending \$649 billion on its military, as much as the next eight countries combined, accounting for more than a third of the world's military spending.

This trend is set to continue. Trump has signed a \$686 billion budget for 2019 and is requesting \$718 billion for the Pentagon in 2020. The Congressional Budget Office projects that if current funding trends continue, the US will spend \$7 trillion on its military over the next decade, equivalent to the amount that will be spent on education, infrastructure and public health programs combined.

Education, health care, and social security are being starved of funding, and wages suppressed, so that resources can be poured into the machines of death and destruction. Trillions are to be squandered on aircraft carriers, fighter jets, hypersonic missiles and nuclear bombs, while we are told there is no money to provide teachers with a high standard of living or provide every student with a free high-quality education.

This immense military build-up is being carried out with the support of all factions of the political establishment, without even a whiff of protest. In fact, the Democratic Party's main critique of Trump has been from the right, demanding an even greater military build-up and a more aggressive posture toward Russia.

In the American working class, there is broad and overwhelming opposition to war. Sixteen years ago, there were mass demonstrations in the US and around the world over the bloody, illegal operation in Iraq. Pseudo-left forces worked might and main to channel opposition to war behind the Democratic Party. And what was the outcome?

Former President Obama, the pioneer of drone assassinations, including of American citizens, spent every day of his administration at war. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laughed with glee at the murder of Libyan leader Muammar Ghaddafi in 2011, and helped fuel the devastating regime change war in Syria.

Self-proclaimed democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, currently running to be the Democrats' presidential candidate in 2020, promised a foreign policy of "drones,

all that and more" when he ran for president in 2016.

Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning are being persecuted while those who committed war crimes remain in positions of power, free to plan and carry out new wars.

But today there is growing working-class opposition all over the world, from the mass protests in Algeria and Sudan, to the yellow vests in France and teachers' strikes across the United States. American workers watched as their brothers and sisters across the border in Matamoros, Mexico rose up in a powerful strike movement earlier this year. All around the world workers are fighting over the same issues against the same transnational corporations.

Last week 20,000 teachers marched in the southern state of North Carolina in defence of public education. One teacher told us that money was needed for minds, not land mines. There is immense anger over the wars that are being carried out in the name of the American people.

The emergence of the international class struggle is breaking up all the efforts of the trade unions, Trump and the Democrats to whip up American nationalism. This is the objective force that will break down the efforts to throw workers into war with each other.

This movement, still in its initial phases, must be armed with an international socialist program.

The fight to put an end to war is impossible without fighting for socialism, and the fight to establish socialism is not possible without opposing war. Above all, the fight against imperialism must be rooted in the struggles of the working class.

Criminality and gangsterism in foreign policy are the flip side of parasitism and speculation in economic life. The international working class must, and will, take up on its banner the fight against imperialist war, as part of the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system and establish a socialist society based on equality, international unity, and peace.



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