

The meaning of the May Day 2021 Online Rally

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On Saturday, May 1, the International Committee of the Fourth International held its eighth annual International May Day Online Rally. The rally motivated and concretized the ICFI's decision to initiate the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The May Day rally both reflected and anticipated changes in the world situation produced by the coronavirus pandemic. The ICFI has defined the pandemic as a "trigger event" analogous to World War I, which is accelerating all the underlying contradictions of the world capitalist system. This includes, above all, the growth of the class struggle, of which the ICFI and its May Day rally are the most conscious expression.

In both its form and content, the rally was a global event. There was a significant international response to the call for the rally. More than 2,500 viewed the event from more than 75 different countries on every continent, including Antarctica. The fourteen speakers consisted of leading members of the ICFI from 10 countries, speaking in seven different languages—English, German, French, Tamil, Sinhalese, Turkish and Portuguese.

While addressing the specific situation in different countries, the speakers presented a unified global perspective.

The rally was dominated by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, which has profoundly impacted workers in every part of the globe, from the centers of capitalism in the US and Europe to the former colonial countries. One year ago, on May 1, 2020, the global death toll had just reached 240,000. Now, it stands at nearly 3.2 million—an increase of more than 13 times. This includes 590,000 victims in the United States, more than one million in Europe, 520,000 in Asia, 670,000 in South America, and 122,000 in Africa.

Nearly a year and a half after the beginning of the pandemic, new cases are at record levels, fueled by the horrific spread of the disease in India, which is reporting nearly 400,000 new cases every day. According to official figures, which vastly underestimate reality, more than 13,000 people are dying globally each day, a rate of nearly 5 million a year.

What is happening now in South Asia will spread to other countries, including parts of Africa that have at this point had limited exposure to the pandemic. Even in the advanced countries, politicians and the media are now talking about the

pandemic becoming endemic—that is, never fully eradicated, something that workers will just have to "live with."

The speakers indicted the ruling class and the capitalist system for the catastrophic impact of the virus. "It is an indisputable fact," WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman David North stated in introducing the rally, "that the subordination of human lives to financial interests is responsible for millions of untimely deaths. The overwhelming majority of COVID-19 deaths should have been prevented. The devastating impact of the pandemic is due far more to the economic interests of the capitalist class than to the biological structure of the virus."

In his remarks, Nick Beams, a longtime leader of the ICFI, reviewed the orgy of speculation that has taken place over the past year, fueled by the endless printing of money by the US Federal Reserve and other global central banks. The growth in the wealth of the ruling class, Beams said, is "an expression of what Trotsky rightly described as the death agony of capitalism, a coterie of oligarchs raking billions of dollars while millions die."

The pandemic has enormously accelerated the political crisis in countries throughout the world, accelerating the ever more open turn by the ruling class to dictatorial forms of rule. Alex Lantier, the national secretary of the *Partie de l'égalité socialiste* in France, explained that a letter from French generals threatening a military coup is part of a global trend, including Trump's January 6 fascistic insurrection, the exposure of neo-Nazi networks in the German military and state apparatus, and threats of a coup by the neo-fascist Vox Party and retired army officers in Spain.

SEP (Sri Lanka) Assistant National Secretary Deepal Jayasekera explained that the Sri Lankan government responded to a wave of strikes over the past several months by moving toward military-police dictatorial rule. He cited the comments of the Transport Minister, who called on Sri Lankan President Rajapakse to act "like a Hitler."

And even amidst mass death and social misery, the ruling class is intensifying its drive to war. Peter Symonds, the national editor of the WSWs in Australia, exposed the propaganda against China by US imperialism and its hypocritical posturing over "human rights." It is essential, he

said, “for workers to reject the poisonous nationalism that is being whipped up around the world as the ruling classes seek to divide the working class and turn the immense social tensions generated by the pandemic outwards against an external enemy.”

The speakers reviewed the role of all the parties of the ruling class for the catastrophic impact of the pandemic, from Boris Johnson’s Conservative Party government in the UK, to the fascistic governments of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Narendra Modi in India, to the pseudo-left Podemos party in Spain and the Left Party in Germany. In the US, the Trump administration spearheaded the back-to-work campaign, but the same basic policy is now being overseen by Biden.

A central theme in all the speeches was the universal effort of the ruling class to further integrate the official national and pro-capitalist trade unions into a corporatist framework—that is, the amalgamation of corporate management, the unions and the state in a structure directed at suppressing the growth of social opposition in the working class.

In his opening report, North examined in detail the aggressive efforts of the Biden administration to promote the AFL-CIO trade unions in the United States, including through the establishment of a “White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment” that includes Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Treasury Secretary and former Federal Reserve Chairman Janet Yellen, and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

For more than four decades, North noted, the AFL-CIO and the wealthy executives who control it have suppressed all resistance in the working class. Strikes have virtually disappeared. North stated:

Within this context, Biden’s call for the strengthening of the existing unions is aimed not at promoting working-class militancy, but at preempting its development and ensuring its continued suppression.

Moreover, the obliteration of any form of independent working-class organization in a government-sponsored labor movement—completely integrated into the capitalist state along corporatist lines—is a strategic imperative for American imperialism as it prepares, under conditions of profound economic crisis, for what is seen in ruling circles as an inevitable confrontation with China.

The tendency toward the corporatist suppression of the working class, however, is an international phenomenon. Speakers reviewed the analogous role of the Ceylon Workers Congress in Sri Lanka; the CUT and Força Sindical, now merged in IndustriAll, in Brazil; the TUC in the UK; IG Metall and Verdi in Germany; the CGT in France; and the ACTU in

Australia.

It is in this context that the ICFI has initiated the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). North explained:

The aim of this global initiative is to develop a genuine broad-based movement of the international working class, and to encourage workers in all countries to break out of the prison-like shackles in which they are confined by the existing state-controlled and antidemocratic unions, staffed by right-wing pro-capitalist executives...

The IWA-RFC will strive to break down national barriers, oppose all efforts to undermine class unity through the promotion of racial, ethnic and related forms of reactionary, middle-class identity politics, and facilitate the coordination of class struggle on an international scale.

In assisting workers in building the IWA-RFC, the International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties will seek to impart to the development of the global class struggle a conscious, socialist strategy. The logic of the struggles of workers at every point raises the necessity for the working class to take political power, expropriate the capitalist oligarchs, and establish a globally planned economy based on social need, not private profit.

The 2021 International Online May Day Rally was the product of a significant growth in the Trotskyist movement and its political influence in the working class. At the same time, it anticipates an enormous political development to come. The worldwide revolutionary movement for socialism will be developed under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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