Playing reckless politics on the rim of a volcano

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On July 23, 1939, Leon Trotsky, exiled in Mexico, met with journalists and gave his appraisal of the international situation. Though confined within the walls of a villa in Coyoacan, Trotsky's grasp of world politics was unequaled.

Speaking in English, Trotsky told the assembled reporters: "The capitalist system is in a state of impasse. From my side, I do not see any normal, legal, peaceful outcome of this impasse. The outcome can only be created by a tremendous historic explosion.

"Historic explosions are of two kinds—wars and revolutions. I believe we will have both." All governments and the established mass parties were being overwhelmed by events. In a striking metaphor, Trotsky compared their actions to "child's play on the sloping side of a volcano before an eruption."

Trotsky's analysis was soon vindicated. The volcano of the second imperialist world war erupted just five weeks later.

Trotsky's description of the world on the very eve of World War II acquires extraordinary relevance in the present situation. All the governments are behaving with staggering recklessness.

But the most reckless of all the governments is that of the United States. Its leaders have climbed up the volcano's side all the way to its rim and are dropping explosives into the red hot and bubbling core.

Having driven Russian President Vladimir Putin into a corner with the intention of leaving him with no choice except a disastrous invasion of Ukraine, US President Joe Biden has set into motion military, economic, political and social processes that he cannot control and the outcome of which he cannot foresee.

This level of recklessness can only be explained as the action of a regime that is resorting to war as a means of diverting attention from and counteracting the buildup of extreme social tensions within the US itself.

The United States has been in the throes of a domestic crisis that is without parallel since the era of the Civil War. There are four principal elements of this crisis.

1) The COVID-19 pandemic, which ravaged the country, with the official death toll approaching one million.

2) A political crisis of a magnitude equaled only by the Civil War. On January 6, 2021, an attempt was made by the sitting president to violently overthrow the Constitution and prevent the accession of the new duly elected president.

3) The increasing fragility of an economic system that is sustained by parasitic speculation, fueled by the unlimited infusion of liquidity by the Federal Reserve. In the beginning of 2022, price inflation could no longer be contained.

4) After four decades of its suppression, the class struggle reemerged in 2021. Major industrial strikes broke out which assumed the form of an insurrection against the bureaucratic and pro-corporate unions. It is evident that the working class is becoming radicalized.

The interaction of these crises has produced a high level of anxiety and disorientation within the ruling elite. This is a major factor in the decision of the Biden administration to provoke the Ukraine-Russian War, hoping that it will generate a sense of "national unity."

But the incitement of war will have precisely the opposite effect. It will intensify all elements of the US crisis and, above all, accelerate and expand the class struggle. The relentless war propaganda has had little effect upon the working class, which—in the midst of a social crisis within the United States—is opposed to the diversion of social resources and expenditure of lives in yet another military crusade.

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The anti-Russian hysteria is not an accurate barometer of social sentiment in the United States. It is, rather, a thermometric measurement of the war fever gripping the affluent and reactionary upper middle class.

The basic tendencies of social life will assert themselves as workers are driven into open struggle in defense of their own interests. These struggles will take on an international character, and they form the social foundation of an anti-war movement.

This is the analysis upon which the Socialist Equality Party bases its opposition to war.

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