

Imperialist war and the attack on democratic rights

WSWS Editorial Board

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The escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia and the massive attack on democratic rights—epitomized in the US Supreme Court decision abolishing the right to an abortion—are two sides of the same process.

In his seminal 1916 work *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, Vladimir Lenin defined imperialism as “reaction all down the line.” In both war and domestic policy, he explained, “finance capital strives for domination, not freedom.” Lenin wrote, “The difference between the democratic-republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie is obliterated precisely because they are both rotting alive.”

Lenin’s words aptly characterize the present crisis of the world capitalist system.

At this weekend’s G7 summit, the leaders of the major imperialist powers met in the Bavarian Alps to plan the next stage of the war. Behind the backs of the population, with no public discussion and no formal declaration, the conflict has developed into a de facto war against Russia in Ukraine.

The extent of NATO involvement was revealed in a *New York Times* article published Saturday titled “Commando network coordinates flow of weapons in Ukraine, officials say.” The article explains that the US and NATO have organized “a stealthy network of commandos and spies” who are “rushing to provide weapons, intelligence and training.”

The article cites US and European officials who confirmed that the NATO powers have deployed advisers within Ukraine to train Ukrainian soldiers, while the US military directly trains soldiers at bases in Germany. This is the product of a years-long plan, dating back to the 2014 Ukrainian elections and the Maidan putsch, to transform Ukraine into a staging ground for a war against Russia. The *Times* article states, “From 2015 to early this year, American Special Forces and National Guard instructors trained more than 27,000 Ukrainian soldiers at the Yavoriv Combat Training Center in western Ukraine near the city of Lviv, Pentagon officials said.”

In both their choice of planning location as well as in their

war aims, the leaders of the world’s self-proclaimed “democracies” emulated Hitler, the last capitalist politician who attempted the colonization of Russia through military means. The very castle where the G7 leaders met in the Bavarian town of Schloss Elmau had been a Nazi military vacation camp during World War Two.

A communiqué issued by the G7 group after the meeting in Schloss Elmau states that it is prepared to carry on the war “as long as it takes.” This means there is no limit to the number of lives the governments are willing to sacrifice to accomplish their geostrategic goals.

The first point on the agenda at the G7 summit—on the cost-of-living and food crisis—makes clear that the ruling class is aware the war is paving the way for a colossal confrontation with the working class.

Under these conditions, the ruling class of each imperialist power views the most basic democratic rights as obstacles in the pursuit of its war aims. Even as the war propagandists in the corporate media justify war on the grounds that Putin is a “fascist,” the logic of the development of the war in the imperialist countries necessitates “reaction all down the line.”

The decision by six unelected judges on the Supreme Court to strip hundreds of millions of Americans of the right to abortion must be seen in this context.

In issuing its decision, the court announced that it was launching an assault on all basic democratic rights. While Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas explicitly referenced contraceptives and same-sex marriage as the next targets, he made clear that all cases involving substantive due process must now be revisited. This includes fundamental rights related to searches and seizures, free speech and assembly, labor regulations and other civil rights.

The Democratic Party and Biden administration have facilitated the Supreme Court’s attack on democratic rights with constant efforts to appeal to and appease the far right. When Biden speaks of his “Republican friends,” he is appealing for bipartisan unity in the pursuit of imperialist war aims against Russia. This bipartisanship only legitimizes

the extreme right and strengthens the increasingly fascist Republican Party, which attempted to prevent Biden from taking office less than two years ago.

The intensification of the war and the abortion ban are inextricably related and underscore the basic truth that democracy is incompatible with imperialism. In his 1948 book *The American Political Tradition*, the historian Richard Hofstadter references publisher Frank Cobb's recollection of a discussion with then-President Woodrow Wilson on the eve of Wilson's 1917 decision to enter World War One.

According to Cobb, Wilson "said when a war got going it was just war and there weren't two things about it. It required illiberalism at home to reinforce the men at the front. We couldn't fight Germany and maintain the ideals of Government that all thinking men shared." Cobb quoted Wilson as saying, "To fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat..."

This is the case in every imperialist center, where three decades of nonstop imperialist war have asphyxiated democracy and nourished the forces of extreme political reaction. In Britain, Boris Johnson is perhaps the most hated prime minister in history for his naked corruption and slovenly subservience to the London banks. The Johnson government is attempting to deport asylum seekers from countries devastated by imperialist war to Rwanda in a move that even the European Court of Human Rights ruled is blatantly illegal.

In France, where Emmanuel Macron is reviled as the "president of the rich," the fascist far right won more votes than in any previous presidential election. An unelected administrative court just banned Muslim women from wearing bathing suits that comport with their religious beliefs in a blatant act of cruel discrimination against the country's large immigrant population.

The war will be conducted on the basis of a massive assault on the economic and social rights of the working class in every country. Government after government is pouring billions of dollars into arming Ukraine without ever asking the public. Calls are growing for balancing budgets to pave the way for further military spending. To pay for war, health and welfare programs will be gutted, even as the pandemic spreads and as governments enact fiscal policies aimed at increasing unemployment and lowering wages.

The war has exacerbated a cost-of-living crisis that is forcing billions of workers to confront unprecedented levels of economic hardship. The imperialist governments are sacrificing the lives of millions in Asia and Africa who face varying degrees of starvation in an attempt to weaken the

Russian government's ties to the global economy. In Europe and North America, the cost of food, gas, energy, rent and basic services is skyrocketing because of the war, while the corporatist trade union bureaucracies suppress wages.

Conditions are emerging for a revolutionary explosion throughout the world. Protests against the rising cost of living are suppressed with deadly brutality in countries like Peru, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, and elsewhere.

In Europe, strikes are growing across the transport industries, including among British rail workers, dockworkers in Germany and Greece, airport workers in France, Denmark and the Netherlands, and pilots and flight attendants across the continent at Easy Jet, Ryanair, British Airways and SAS. A series of powerful strikes has taken place in heavy industry in the United States, where strikes are threatened by tens of thousands of dock and rail workers.

The ruling class has responded by banning strikes and blaming workers for undermining the war effort. In Britain, the Tories are denouncing striking rail workers as "Putin's agents" while the courts in the US have barred rail workers from striking on national security grounds. This is the modern version of Hitler's "stab-in-the-back" narrative, which blamed German workers and the revolution of 1918 for German imperialism's defeat in World War One. In Spain, the "democratic" government of the PSOE and Podemos banned airport workers from joining a European-wide strike for similar reasons.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its national sections, the Socialist Equality Parties, call for the development of a powerful movement of the international working class against imperialist war. The fight against war must be connected to the defense of democratic rights, rooted in the growing struggles of workers throughout the world and based on a socialist program in opposition to the capitalist profit system.



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