

Greetings from the ICFI to the SEP (Australia) 2022 Congress

The US-NATO war against Russia and the revolutionary role of the American working class

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26 October 2022

These remarks were delivered by Joseph Kishore to the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), held from September 24 to 27, 2022. Kishore is the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (US).

I am very pleased to bring the greetings of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States to this Congress.

A Congress of a section of ICFI [International Committee of the Fourth International] is always an international event, and certainly this Congress is no exception. The issues that this Congress is addressing—the Covid-19 pandemic, world war, the growth of authoritarianism and dictatorship—are global questions that can only be resolved through the intervention of the international working class and on the basis of the perspective of our international movement.

I would like to focus on two central elements and inter-related elements of the world crisis—the escalating US-NATO war against Russia, the subject of today’s discussion, and the growth of the class struggle in the United States.

Today marks exactly seven months since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24. The International Committee of the Fourth International condemned the invasion in its statement published the same day. “The catastrophe that was set in motion by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991,” we wrote, “cannot be averted on the basis of Russian nationalism, a thoroughly reactionary ideology that serves the interests of the capitalist ruling class.”

At the same time, we explained that the war was instigated by imperialist powers, above all the United States, which used Ukraine as bait, arming it to the teeth over the preceding decade while relentlessly expanding NATO up to the border of Russia. The Biden administration, we warned, “incited the invasion, which will now be used as a pretext for escalating confrontation with Russia.”

This is precisely what has happened over the past seven months. At every stage in the conflict, American imperialism, along with its allies in NATO, has worked to escalate it further, funneling tens of billions of dollars in the most advanced weaponry. The Ukrainian military has become a wholly owned subsidiary of the Pentagon, to the extent that military planners are beginning to worry about the depletion of the fighting capacity of the US itself. The formal status of Ukraine as outside of NATO is a legal fiction.

This Congress is being held as the war enters a new and dangerous phase. The Putin government, cornered by imperialism and in the

aftermath of the military debacle in Kharkiv, is raising the prospect of nuclear war. In the American media, columnists are “pondering,” in the words of the *New York Times*’ Ross Douthat this morning, the “problem,” of how a decision to use nuclear weapons is made, because “the world is probably now closer to the use of nuclear weapons than at any point in decades.”

Two elements are universally accepted as true in the American media and political establishment.

The first is that responsibility for the war is to be lain entirely at the feet of one man, Vladimir Putin. At the United Nations, Biden sanctimoniously bemoans the violation of the “core tenets” of the Charter of the United Nations, speaking as a head of government that has invaded and devastated entire societies—Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yugoslavia, among others. The more reckless American imperialism, the more sickening is its hypocrisy.

The media, of course, treats the war in Ukraine as if it had no relationship to the three decades of unending war carried out by the United States in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, or the strategy documents drawn up over the past decades to prepare for the transition from the “war on terror” to “great power conflict.”

The second is that the threat of nuclear war, and all that it entails, shall have no impact on the further escalation of the war over Ukraine and the achievement of its ultimate aim: the military defeat of Russia—bringing with it either regime change, the fracturing of the country, or both. The insistence that the US must not be “cowed,” that it must not be “deterred,” means that the possibility of a civilization-ending war will not affect policy in any way.

There are two interrelated factors fueling the war frenzy of the ruling class. There is, first of all, the geopolitical ambitions of American imperialism. We noted at the time of the Iraq War in 1990/91, on the eve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that the invasion marked the beginning of the imperialist redivision of the world. “The end of the postwar era means the end of the postcolonial era,” Comrade David North wrote in a statement in August of 1990. “As it proclaims the ‘failure of socialism,’ the imperialist bourgeoisie, in deeds if not yet in words, proclaims the failure of independence.”

The logic of the US drive for global hegemony, as Comrade North noted in the introduction to *A Quarter Century of War* more than six years ago, “extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle

East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China.” Indeed, the conflict with Russia over Ukraine is combined, as the resolution before this Congress notes, with ever more bellicose threats against China, with the full support of the Labor Party government in Australia. Indeed, as explained in the report on your resolution on war today, China is seen as the major threat, with the war against Russia seen as a necessary precursor—and this was at the center of the Democrats’ opposition to Trump—to war with China.

The second factor is the internal crisis within the United States and all the major capitalist powers. The American political system is breaking apart. Biden himself acknowledged only three weeks ago that, essentially, American democracy is at death’s door, with one of the principal parties of the ruling class controlled by fascists, though he avoided using this term. The events of January 6 were a political turning point. A substantial section of the ruling class actively favors the overthrow of the Constitution and a rapid and violent shift to dictatorship.

The political crisis within the United States is fueled by the impact of the pandemic, which the ICFI has correctly called a “trigger event.” More than one million people have died in the United States alone, with untold millions more suffering from the consequences of Long COVID. With the virus still spreading and evolving, the Biden administration is now leading the campaign of all capitalist governments to remove whatever limited mitigation measures remain. “The pandemic is over,” Biden blurted out last weekend, summing up the homicidal myopia of the ruling class as a whole.

The pandemic has accelerated underlying processes—the extreme financial instability of Wall Street, fueled by trillions of dollars from the Federal Reserve, the growth of inflation, massive disruptions in the supply chain, and, most concerning of all for the American ruling elite, the growth of the class struggle.

The ruling class is waging a policy of class war. The Fed policy of raising interests rates, is aimed specifically and explicitly at increasing unemployment in order to reduce pressure for wage raises, even under conditions in which real wages are declining at a rate of nearly three percent a year. The Fed’s economic projections anticipate a surge in unemployment to as high as five percent, officially, next year, which would mean 2.2 million jobs wiped out. This is under conditions of already catastrophic understaffing and overexploitation in schools, hospitals, transportation and other sectors.

The emergence of the class struggle within the United States, and our relationship to it, is of global significance. Comrade Tomas, in his greetings to the SEP (US) Congress in early August, made a critical point. “The Democrats think that they can win a two-front war against Russia and China,” he said, “but they have just lost a critical battle to the Socialist Equality Party in their domestic war.”

This was in the aftermath of the victory of Comrade Will Lehman’s campaign at the UAW Convention, where we succeeded in getting official nomination to run for UAW president. That was, indeed, a major defeat for the ruling class, the consequences of which we have seen over the past six weeks.

The campaign is winning a powerful response among workers. In August, we had the tour of US auto plants and the enormously enthusiastic response from workers. And this past Thursday, Will participated in the presidential debate, confronting the apparatus and its candidates with a program that articulates and speaks to rank-and-file workers. The debate clearly exposed the vast social gulf between the bureaucracy and the workers, while advancing at the same time a

socialist and internationalist perspective for the working class.

The campaign is giving voice to a powerful objective movement. Just a week before the debate, we held our meeting of rail workers, attended by more than 500 workers and supporters. There is a definite shift taking place. The working class is looking to fight. The trade union apparatus, which has served the ruling class for so long as a means of suppressing the class struggle, is universally despised. Workers are responding to our call for the building of rank-and-file committees. We are finding in our discussions with workers a powerful attraction to socialism and internationalism. As Comrade North noted at the time of the Volvo Trucks strike last year, “The American working class is not frightened of revolution. Nor is it opposed to socialism. It just needs to understand what it offers as a solution and how it can be realized.”

It is beginning, through the intervention of the party, to develop this understanding. We have remarked before that the American working class is the “sleeping giant of world politics,” which when driven into action as part of a movement of the international working class, is the essential social force capable of opposing the global plunder of American imperialism. This is now beginning to happen.

In conclusion, I would like again to cite the statement by Trotsky in 1934: “Not to bind itself to the national state in time of war, to follow not the war map but the map of the class struggle, is possible only for that party that has already declared irreconcilable war on the national state in time of peace.”

Irreconcilable war on the national state system is embedded in the entire history of our movement, and, in particular, in the theoretical and political development of the ICFI in the aftermath of the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party. The development of capitalist globalization, and the enormous advances in communications and the internet, have powerfully integrated the international working class.

The initiative taken by the ICFI for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is of enormous significance. It is the means through which the movement will assist in the organization of a powerful counter-offensive of the working class on a world scale. This must be combined with the active and determined struggle to build a socialist and revolutionary leadership in the working class through the building of the ICFI and its national sections throughout the world.



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