

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

# The working class and the struggle against European imperialism's drive to war

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*These remarks were delivered by Alex Lantier to the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), held from September 24 to 27, 2022. Lantier is the national secretary of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (Socialist Equality Party), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.*

It is an honor to bring the revolutionary greetings of the Socialist Equality Party of France to your very important congress. The resolutions presented to this congress on imperialist war, the COVID pandemic, the defense of Julian Assange, and on the IWA-RFC are a testimonial to the fact that the ICFI [International Committee of the Fourth International] bases its work in every country on a unified, international perspective.

The work of this congress substantiates the analysis made by David North at the 2019 school of the American SEP, that we have entered a new, fifth period in the history of Trotskyism. This is a period, on the one hand, of a mortal global crisis of capitalism, and on the other, of the emergence of the ICFI as the leadership of the international working class.

This congress takes place, of course, under the shadow of the escalating NATO war with Russia in Ukraine and advanced preparations for imperialist war with China. The events that took place in the days immediately preceding this congress strikingly confirmed the warning made in your resolution on a movement of the international working class against imperialist war. The imperialist powers, as the resolution states, are “plunging the world headlong into a global conflict between nuclear armed powers that threatens the very existence of humanity.”

Washington and its European imperialist allies are plunging tens of billions of dollars into arming Ukraine with high-tech weapons for long-range strikes on Russia. They have thrust aside warnings from top Russian officials, including Putin and Medvedev, that Russia may respond to NATO attacks on its soil by using strategic nuclear weapons. While Berlin and Paris reacted by pledging to further arm Ukraine's far-right militias against Russia, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte dismissed the danger of nuclear war, saying it left him “cold.”

World War III has in fact already begun. The task facing the international working class is to stop it before it escalates into the nuclear annihilation of humanity. The only way for workers to stop this war, moreover, is to initiate a struggle based on the

perspectives of the ICFI and under its leadership.

No imperialist power or establishment party has been able to resist the mad rush to nuclear war. This includes countries that, like Australia or France, previously postured as having a kinder, gentler form of capitalism than their American cousin.

In 2019, a few weeks before COVID was identified in Wuhan, French President Emmanuel Macron criticized US policy on Russia. He did not, to be sure, speak openly to the workers of France and of the world. He hid his remarks behind a pay wall in the *Economist*, which is hardly the publication with the largest working class readership in France. Nonetheless, it is worth examining the message he was trying to send behind the backs of the workers.

NATO, Macron declared, is “brain-dead.” Macron said that its policy of stoking a direct war in Syria between Russia and Turkey, a NATO member state, was “an enormous problem for NATO.” US policy towards Russia, he added, was completely unhinged. “When the United States is very harsh with Russia,” the president of France declared, “it is a form of governmental, political, and historical hysteria.”

Calling to “reconsider our position towards Russia,” Macron told the *Economist* that France can “talk to everyone and so build relations to prevent the world from going up in a conflagration.”

Macron's remarks, delivered in such a way as to avoid alerting masses of workers to the war danger, were not a peace policy. They reflected longstanding trends in French imperialist foreign policy. In the 1960s, amid conflicts with the United States over the US dollar and the French war in Algeria, French President Charles de Gaulle had insisted that good relations with Moscow were key to balancing relations with America and preventing nuclear war in Europe.

Yet Macron's remarks, bankrupt as they were, made clear the consciousness in ruling circles that they stand on the verge of annihilating humanity. What, it must be asked, is left today of Macron's timid appeals to reason? He is now one of the world's leading pyromaniacs, shipping French heavy artillery to Ukraine to shell Russia and risking nuclear war. Moreover, the entire media-political establishment is covering up his earlier remarks.

We are seeing a striking confirmation of the perspectives the ICFI developed after the 1985 split with the WRP and the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the USSR. The ICFI stressed that 1991 did

not mark the End of History and the final triumph of capitalism over socialism. None of the basic contradictions of capitalism that led to revolutionary struggles in the 20th century—war, social inequality, fascistic reaction—had been resolved. Moreover, in an era of economic globalization, none of the old national labor bureaucracies could retain a base in the working class.

What accounts for the shift of Macron—and, as the WSWs has documented, the Stalinist CGT union bureaucracy and the entire pseudo-left Pabloite milieu—into the camp of nuclear pyromania?

The geopolitical crisis of world imperialism and of the US dollar flowing from the 30 years of war that have unfolded since 1991 plays a central role. The resolution against war before this congress shows very clearly how NATO plans to destroy and partition Russia are part of a broader imperialist strategy for the encirclement and partition of China and the plundering of all of Eurasia. No imperialist power can afford to stand back from the drive for plunder.

French imperialism's decision to abandon even its tepid criticisms of US war policies is driven above all by the resurgence of the international class struggle.

A few weeks after Macron warned the *Economist* about war with Russia, the EU initiated a deliberate policy of mass infection with COVID-19 that left two million in Europe dead. The multi-trillion-euro bank bailouts used to rescue the super-rich during the pandemic completed the economic devastation caused by the virus. Combined with EU countries' refusal to pay for Russian natural gas imports, they are driving a devastating surge of prices for food and energy that has set the stage for an explosive confrontation between the EU and the European working class.

The mass mobilization of Sri Lankan workers against Rajapakse and the wave of strikes in America and Britain are the initial foreshocks in a massive global eruption of the class struggle that is being prepared. Masses of workers in Europe wonder how they will eat and heat their homes this winter, with 8 in 10 French people now cutting back on food and heating expenses. Even bourgeois think tanks admit that they expect mass social protests across Europe this winter.

These struggles will bring the working class into direct confrontation with the pseudo-left parties and union bureaucracies who work to contain and defuse left-wing opposition among workers. In this year's French presidential election, pseudo-left politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon won 8 million votes, carrying most of France's major cities, as workers sought to register left-wing opposition to Macron and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen. Mélenchon only fell narrowly short of beating Le Pen and reaching the run-off against Macron.

Yet despite having won 20 percent of the vote, Mélenchon called no strikes or protests and, since May, has done nothing to mobilize his supporters against inflation and war. Instead, he has aligned his party with the anti-Russian media propaganda. This is closely related to the fact that the funds used to bail out the rich and finance imperialist wars also serve to finance France's union bureaucracies and academic research programs.

To understand the class interests served by Mélenchon, it is worth examining the policies this year of his allies across the Pyrenees, the pseudo-left Podemos government in Spain. While it

sent anti-tank weapons to the neo-Nazi Azov battalion in Ukraine, it sent armored cars against striking metalworkers in Cadiz and a nationwide truckers strike. Naturally, Podemos coordinated repression of the strikes with Stalinist and social-democratic trade union bureaucrats who worked to shut them down.

Your resolution on building the IWA-RFC is vital. The only way forward for workers is an insurrection against the dictates of national union bureaucracies over their struggles. Will Lehman's campaign in the UAW and the SEP's intervention to fight for a US rail strike, like the Sri Lankan SEP's struggle for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses, or also the growth of rank-and-file committees in Germany and Britain show the way.

In this explosive context, it is worth recalling the words Leon Trotsky wrote in 1934, in *War and the Fourth International*, on a Marxist policy if a second world war broke out. The task, he memorably wrote, was to "follow not the war map, but the map of the class struggle." In this work, he brilliantly anticipated both the counterrevolutionary role Stalinism would play in the struggles of the working class, and the insurrections that in fact occurred in 1944, as workers rose up in Warsaw, Belgrade, Paris, Florence, Marseille and beyond against Nazism. Trotsky wrote:

"Even if at the beginning of a new war the true revolutionists should again find themselves in a small minority, we cannot doubt for a single moment that this time the shift of the masses to the road of revolution will occur much faster, more decisively and relentlessly than during the first imperialist war. A new wave of insurrections can and must become victorious in the whole capitalist world."

The struggle of the ICFI to rally the international working class against World War III and the danger of nuclear war invest these lines with renewed political significance.



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