

A call to youth throughout the world: Build a mass movement to stop the Ukraine war!

Statement of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE)
3 November 2022

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality hosted an international online meeting on Saturday, December 10, for the building of a movement against the drive to war. Watch the rally here.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality—the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Parties, the national sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International—calls for the building of a mass global movement of young people to demand an immediate end to the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine and the reckless escalation toward World War III.

The war must be stopped before it results in a global catastrophe. The interaction of NATO’s imperialist militarism, recklessly pursuing its global geopolitical agenda whatever the consequences, and the increasing desperation of Russia’s oligarchic capitalist regime threatens to escalate into a nuclear conflagration.

The hope that “reason will prevail” and the war will soon be brought to a negotiated conclusion is a politically paralyzing and dangerous delusion. NATO does not want “peace.” It wants war. Having deliberately provoked the conflict through decades of NATO expansion toward Russia’s borders and the massive arming of its corrupt satellite regime in Kiev, the imperialist powers are determined to exploit the Kremlin’s miscalculated, politically reactionary and disastrous invasion of Ukraine to the hilt.

Believing that a military victory over Russia is possible, NATO is brushing aside all Russian “red lines.” For most of the post-World War II era—and particularly after the development of hydrogen bombs in the 1950s—the realization that nuclear war threatened the extinction of human civilization led to the political conclusion that nuclear weapons would never be used because there could be no winners in such a conflict. The doctrine of “Mutually Assured Destruction”—with the self-explanatory acronym MAD—was an operative military principle.

But the principle that a nuclear war is unwinnable and could be started only by madmen has been repudiated. Despite the probability that nuclear war will result in societal annihilation, MAD has been replaced by the criminally insane doctrine of “SO WHAT!” When the US and the NATO powers publicly broadcast that they will not be “intimidated” by the possibility of nuclear war, they mean that their policies and actions will not be restrained even by the danger of a nuclear catastrophe.

The lessons of history

To understand the scale of the present danger, the experiences of the past must be recalled. There is no barbarism of which the ruling class, in pursuit of global power, corporate profits, and personal wealth, is not fully capable.

Imperialism emerged in the early 20th century with the development of

massive industrial corporations and the gigantic growth of international banks and finance capital. Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America were subjected to the tyranny of colonialism. The major powers vied for a dominant position in the struggle for control of markets, raw materials and labor. The outcome of this struggle was global warfare on a scale, and with a level of violence, unprecedented in human history.

World War I, which erupted in 1914, resulted in the death of more than 20 million people. Imperialism introduced the world to the horrors of trench warfare and poison gas and the murderous technical innovations of aerial bombardments, submarines armed with torpedoes, and tanks.

But the horrors of that global conflict proved merely a prelude to the barbarism of World War II, which began in 1939, only 21 years after the end of the First World War. The Second World War witnessed, as a matter of official and deliberate policy, the mass extermination of civilian populations. This included the industrialized genocide of the Holocaust and the fire-bombing of major cities (Dresden and Hamburg in Germany, Tokyo in Japan), and culminated in the dropping of atomic bombs by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The scale of death virtually defied comprehension. The death toll is estimated at up to 85 million human beings, including 6 million Jews, an estimated 27 million citizens of the Soviet Union, and 20 million Chinese.

Now, in the third decade of the 21st century, there is a mad drive toward a third global conflagration, involving the use of nuclear weapons, which would lead to the deaths of not tens of millions, but hundreds of millions, and possibly even billions of people. The president of the United States, even as he acknowledged that the war could result in “Armageddon,” has continued and intensified the escalation of the conflict.

With the US-NATO war against Russia, imperialism has served notice that an even greater conflagration is being prepared. In documents published in October 2022, outlining the strategic aims of US imperialism, the Biden administration bluntly acknowledged that the conflict in Ukraine is merely a prelude to a confrontation with China.

Last August, when Biden announced the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, he said that it was the end of the “forever war.” Now, the US is engaged in a war that could end life forever.

Anyone who believes that the ruling class is not prepared to sacrifice tens of millions of lives in the pursuit of its geopolitical interests need only consider the experience of the past two and a half years. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the corporate and financial oligarchy rejected the most basic public health measures required to contain the spread of the virus because they impinged on profits. More than 20 million people died as a result, more than 1 million of them in the United States.

All the justifications given by the imperialist governments prosecuting this war stink of lies and hypocrisy.

The causes and interests that led to the outbreak of war in Ukraine cannot be understood if the conflict is viewed as an isolated episode, unrelated to events that preceded the date of the Russian invasion and apart from a broader historical context. Responsibility for war cannot be

determined by identifying who “fired the first shot.” Even more absurd are attempts to explain war as the outcome of the actions of single individuals. All the wars waged by the United States over the last three decades have been justified as moral crusades against one or another “monster”: Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, etc. The latest “monster” is Vladimir Putin, and new devils will be found as the geopolitical need arises. The demonization of China’s Xi Jinping is already well underway.

The United States and its NATO allies are waging an imperialist war

The propaganda campaigns against one or another individual political leader explain nothing about the origins of wars waged by imperialism, let alone the cause of the present conflict in Ukraine.

The proxy war being waged by the United States and its NATO allies is, in its economic and geopolitical essence, imperialist. The United States and NATO could not care less about democracy in Ukraine or the fate of the Ukrainian people, who are being used as cannon fodder. Like World War I and World War II, the fundamental purpose of the war is to reorganize the globe and redistribute its resources among the imperialist powers.

The US-NATO war in Ukraine is the continuation and escalation to a new and more dangerous level of the wars instigated by the United States over the last three decades. Seeking to reverse American capitalism’s long-term economic decline and suppress mounting internal tensions, the US ruling class views war and the achievement of global hegemony as the only solution to its problems. Its militaristic rampage is vindicating Leon Trotsky’s prophetic analysis on the eve of World War II of the historic trajectory of American imperialism:

The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of “organizing Europe.” The United States must “organize” the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States has viewed the incorporation of Ukraine into NATO’s sphere of influence as an essential element of its long-term objectives of dismantling Russia, gaining unrestricted access to the country’s vast supply of strategic resources, obtaining decisive control over the Eurasian landmass, and, on this basis, eventually destroying China’s ability to challenge the global hegemony of American imperialism. There are countless US government documents and strategic analyses by imperialist think tanks, accessible online, in which these criminal objectives are bluntly stated.

The US and the NATO powers provoked the invasion by the massive military armament of Ukraine, which has been transformed into a virtual protectorate of the US, a member of NATO in all but name. This is part of a decades-long expansion of the NATO military alliance into Eastern Europe, up to the very borders of Russia.

In denouncing Russia, the US and NATO issue many solemn declarations about the sanctity of state borders, the charter of the United Nations and Ukraine’s right to “self-determination.” No such concerns were raised when the US and European powers dismembered Yugoslavia in the 1990s, culminating in the war against Serbia in 1999. The United States is the world’s foremost violator of the principle of “self-determination,” intervening in, bombing and invading countries as

required by its own geopolitical and economic interests.

The US military pioneered the use of the term “shock and awe” to describe the second war against Iraq, in 2003, launched on the basis of lies, which killed hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed an entire society.

In the wars of American imperialism—including Afghanistan (2001), Libya (2011) and Syria (2011), in addition to Yugoslavia and Iraq—more than 1 million people have been killed and tens of millions have become refugees. As part of the “war on terror,” terms such as “enhanced interrogation,” “Abu Ghraib,” “rendition,” “waterboarding,” “Guantanamo Bay,” “drone assassination” and “Terror Tuesdays” entered the global lexicon. As a US senator, the current occupant of the White House, Biden, voted for all of these wars.

Washington’s professed concern for “democracy” is no less hypocritical and deceitful. The government in Kiev was installed by a US-backed regime-change operation in 2014 and represents a Ukrainian oligarchy that is trampling on the rights of the working class. It is allied with and promotes far-right and fascist organizations, including the Azov Battalion, which trace its origins to the mass murderer Stepan Bandera and the Nazi collaborators in Ukraine during World War II.

And while the Biden administration justifies its wars abroad by invoking a global struggle for “democracy” against dictatorship, a war against democracy is being waged by the US ruling class at home. The democratic system within the United States is teetering on the brink of collapse. Biden himself has publicly warned it is possible that the existing constitutional system will not survive the decade. Fascism has infected American politics. It is just under two years since Trump’s attempt, on January 6, 2021, to establish a presidential dictatorship came very close to succeeding.

The transformation of the Republican Party into a semi-fascist organization is bound up with a global growth of the far right, from the government headed by Giorgia Meloni, an admirer of Mussolini, in Italy, to the Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen in France, to the party of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Along with the breakdown of democracy and the resurgence of fascism, there is an open glorification of militarism and war. Trillions of dollars are being poured into rearmament programs. The German ruling class, which twice invaded Ukraine in the 20th century and murdered millions of its citizens, now exploits the Ukraine war as a pretext to triple its military budget. The same diversion of resources from social needs to war making is sweeping all the imperialist countries.

The UK, France and all of the NATO powers have flooded Ukraine with weaponry. The Canadian government, whose deputy prime minister, Chrystia Freeland, has direct family ties to the Ukrainian far right, is at the forefront of demands that Ukraine be formally admitted to NATO. Australia, which is fully supporting the war against Russia, is preparing to be on the front lines of any conflict with China.

Through aggression and intrigue, the imperialist powers are seeking to harness and subordinate states all around the world to their strategic offensives against Russia and China. In the process, they are inciting and enflaming innumerable regional conflicts that themselves threaten to become triggers for world war. Washington’s drive to transform India into a frontline state against China, to give but one example, has resulted in the Indo-Pakistani conflict becoming inextricably entwined with that between the US and China, adding a new explosive charge to both.

Russia’s reactionary intervention in Ukraine

The blatantly imperialist character of the US-NATO proxy war does not

legitimize in any way the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which the IYSSE opposes and condemns. But ours is the opposition of the working class and socialist left, not the pro-imperialist right. There are sufficient grounds, based on socialist principles, to condemn the invasion without capitulating to the reactionary and deceitful narrative concocted by NATO and the Western corporate media.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is yet another disastrous consequence of the Stalinist betrayal of the socialist revolution of October 1917, which culminated in the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union) in 1991, the restoration of capitalism, and the creation of an oligarchic regime of corrupt ex-bureaucrats who enriched themselves by stealing assets previously owned by the Soviet state. Putin is the representative of this reactionary capitalist mafia.

When the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the USSR, the workers and youth of Russia and Eastern Europe were told that this would usher in a new period of prosperity and peace. Nothing of the sort occurred. Not only did the looting of state assets by the apparatchiks-turned-oligarchs lead to a massive decline in living standards and life expectancy, but Russia now finds itself encircled by imperialism. The invasion of Ukraine was a desperate and disastrously miscalculated effort to pressure the United States to make concessions to the “security interests” of Russia—that is, to the right of the oligarchs to plunder the vast resources of the country without excessive interference by the imperialist powers.

It is no doubt true that Russia confronts an existential threat from the US and NATO. But it was the dissolution of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism that placed Russia on the imperialist chopping block. Putin seeks to counter this threat by invoking the reactionary, mystical nationalism of tsarist “Holy Russia.” In vain. Statecraft and diplomacy inspired by tsarist Russia, overthrown in 1917, can hardly serve as a model for foreign policy in 2022.

Putin has explicitly and repeatedly blamed the October Revolution and the Bolshevik regime led by Lenin and Trotsky for creating the foundations of a modern Ukraine independent of Russia. What Putin, a Russian chauvinist and anti-socialist, despises is that the USSR was founded in 1922, five years after the revolution, as a *voluntary* union of socialist republics. The Soviet Union, based on workers’ power, was deeply committed to the defense of the democratic and national rights of all the nationalities that had been oppressed by the tsarist regime. The bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union, personified in Stalin’s rise to power, found particularly acute expression in the violation and suppression of the legitimate democratic aspirations of the national minorities within the USSR. The national chauvinism of the present Russian government is rooted historically not only in the reactionary traditions of tsarism, but in those of Stalinism as well.

The IYSSE, true to the traditions of revolutionary Marxism and socialist internationalism, rejects all justifications for war based on the obsolete concept of “national defense.” Our position applies to both Russia and Ukraine. We are for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the war policies of Putin and Zelensky. In opposing the reactionary chauvinism of both regimes, we draw attention to the words of Trotsky:

Were the present national state to represent a progressive factor, it would have to be defended irrespective of its political form and, of course, regardless of who “started” the war first. It is absurd to confuse the question of the historic function of the national state with the question of the “guilt” of a given government. Can one refuse to save a house suited for habitation just because the fire started through carelessness or through evil intent of the owner? But here it is precisely a case of the given house being *fit not for living but merely for dying*. To enable the peoples to live, the structure of the national state must be razed to its foundations.

A “socialist” who preaches national defence is a petty-bourgeois reactionary at the service of decaying capitalism. 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. Only by realizing fully the objectively reactionary role of the imperialist state can the proletarian vanguard become invulnerable to all types of social patriotism. This means that a real break with the ideology and policy of “national defence” is possible only from the standpoint of the *international proletarian revolution*. [War and the Fourth International, 1934]

Young people must fight for the future!

Young people embody and represent the hope and promise of the future. But in reckless pursuit of economic and geopolitical objectives, capitalism is placing the very survival of humanity at risk. Four hundred years ago, Shakespeare’s Hamlet posed the fundamental existential question: “To be or not to be?” In the present-day world, this question is raised not as a matter of philosophical speculation, but rather as the supreme political challenge confronting mankind. In addition to the danger of nuclear war, climate change and future pandemics threaten the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the coming decades. The working class must put an end to capitalism before capitalism puts an end to the world.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality advances the following strategic principles as the basis for building a powerful movement against the war in Ukraine and its escalation toward a nuclear Third World War.

War will be stopped not by appeals and protests directed to the ruling class and its governments, but through the political mobilization of the international working class. The working class, whose exploitation is the source of all profit, constitutes the vast majority of the world’s people. It has no interest in war. It is workers, and particularly young workers, who will serve as the cannon fodder in a new world war.

The war has already produced a massive decline in the living standards of workers throughout the world, contributing to soaring inflation, which is leaving workers unable to pay for basic necessities. The crisis created by the collapse in living standards has led to a global surge of the class struggle—in the US, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.

While it spends trillions of dollars every year on the instruments of war, the ruling class claims that no money is available to fund social programs critical to the working class, including public education, or to pay decent wages and provide health care. The escalation of war is inevitably accompanied by the impoverishment of ever broader layers of the working class.

The IYSSE denounces all those organizations that fraudulently claim to be socialist while serving as the most adamant supporters of US and NATO imperialism, from the Democratic Socialists of America in the US, to the Greens and Left Party in Germany, to Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

Under the false and reactionary slogan of defending “Ukrainian sovereignty,” these groups have criticized the US and NATO powers not for arming Ukraine to the teeth and fighting a proxy war against Russia, but for not providing enough arms. For decades, the organizations of the pseudo-left have promoted the politics of racial and gender division, particularly on the campuses, to divide the working class while aiding the upper-middle-class social layers for which they speak in their scramble to secure positions and wealth. Now they are exposing themselves as open supporters of imperialism.

As for the trade union bureaucracies, the so-called “labor movement,” staffed by thousands of upper-middle-class functionaries, their support for war is the flip side of their hostility to the working class and their role as instruments of corporate management.

The IYSSE rejects the reactionary program of “national defense” for two fundamental reasons.

First, the national state is an historical anachronism, incompatible with the development of an integrated and interdependent global economy. It places a straitjacket on the development of the productive forces and their peaceful and productive utilization by all humanity.

Second, appeals to “national unity” are based on the denial that all national states are wracked by class conflict, with all power in the hands of the capitalist elites who control governments and utilize state power to advance their economic interests. The foreign policy pursued by the imperialist states—the relentless and violent drive for control over the world’s resources—is the extension on a global scale of the drive for profits and wealth of the capitalists within “their own” countries.

The opposition of the working class to national chauvinism and the wars waged under the banner of the “national interest” and other hypocritical slogans (such as “democracy” and “human rights”) is not simply based on moral considerations. Rather, the masses of working people comprise an international class, whose common interests transcend national states. In the most profound historical and economic sense, the working class has no country.

The globalization of production has led to a rapid growth of the working class throughout the world, including not only the hundreds of millions of new workers in Asia, Latin America and Africa, but also broad sections of the population, including young people, who have been proletarianized in the major capitalist countries. At the same time, the extraordinary advances in telecommunications over the past three decades have allowed workers and young people to communicate with each other across national boundaries and organize their struggles based on a common program and a common plan of action.

In recognition of this global reality, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality fights to unite young people and students around the world in a common struggle to turn to the working class and build a movement to abolish capitalism.

No to war! Build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality!

Three decades ago, in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ideologists of the ruling class proclaimed “The End of History.” The meaning of this slogan was that the supposed “victory” of imperialism in the Cold War proved there could not be an alternative to capitalism. The national state system, private ownership of the means of production, the profit system and bourgeois democracy marked the highest and final stage of social development.

The “End of History” thesis was the capitalist actualization of Dante’s terrifying vision of Hell: “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.” Mankind was trapped in a capitalist dystopia from which there could be no escape. Social inequality, poverty, exploitation and the perpetual debasement of culture was the fate to which humanity was condemned.

Embraced and amplified by the media and preached by countless academics, the “End of History” narrative was aimed at sowing discouragement, demoralization and political apathy. But it was a false narrative. History has returned with a vengeance. The economic, political and social foundations of capitalism are crumbling. The class struggle—the great motor force of historical progress—is breaking through all the

institutional mechanisms of social control.

While the development of the war raises great dangers for young people and for all of mankind, the IYSSE bases its program not on despair, but on confidence that we can fight and win the future.

The fatalism of the pessimists expresses an outlook that remains trapped within the confines of what is possible within the capitalist world order. Optimism arises out of an understanding that the same capitalist crisis that produces war, dictatorship, climate change and social reaction also produces the growth of international working class struggle.

We must turn out to the factories and workplaces, where workers are struggling against inequality and exploitation. They are the great power capable of overthrowing capitalism and forging a way forward for humanity. The IYSSE does not only seek the support of workers in the struggle against war. We recognize that the defeat of imperialism depends upon the emergence of the working class, armed with a socialist program, as the leading and decisive revolutionary force in the fight against the world capitalist system.

Just as it was the Russian Revolution, the greatest intervention of the working class in world history, that brought an end to the first global carnage of World War I, it will be the intervention of the international working class that will today stop the escalation toward World War III.

The IYSSE bases its perspective on the history of the socialist movement, above all the history of the Fourth International, the Trotskyist movement, which maintained the continuity of Marxism through the fight against Stalinism. Young people have been largely cut off from this history and the entire history of working class struggle by the attacks of the ruling class on Marxism and the promotion of all kinds of reactionary ideologies and historical falsifications.

In its work among students, the IYSSE opposes all forms of anti-Marxist theories, particularly those associated with the reactionary Frankfurt School and the doubly reactionary irrationalism of postmodernism, that deny the revolutionary role of the working class and oppose the political struggle for socialism.

Moreover, the IYSSE exposes the drive to subordinate science and scholarship to imperialist militarism. It has consistently opposed attacks on historical truth and democratic rights, resisting all attempts to suppress the growing opposition to fascism and war.

The IYSSE will set into motion a movement that unites young people in a common fight, directed to the working class, against war. We say to students and youth throughout the world: If we are to have a future, we must fight for it! We cannot stand on the sidelines while the ruling classes plot to turn the entire world into a nuclear inferno!

This campaign will be launched through a global webinar on December 10, titled “Stop the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine,” which will be streamed live at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (US). The webinar will be combined with a coordinated series of meetings and other activities in countries throughout the world. This meeting will explain the historical origins of the war and expose the real political and economic interests that are driving its escalation. Above all, the webinar will present a revolutionary strategy and explain what must be done to stop the war.

We call on all those who wish to participate to register for the webinar and contact the IYSSE.

Join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality! Stop the reckless drive toward nuclear war! Take up the fight for a socialist future without poverty, exploitation, war and all forms of oppression!

For more information and to join the IYSSE, visit wsws.org/iysse.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

