

Speech to the December 10 IYSSE anti-war rally

# The social crisis facing youth in the United States

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*The following are the remarks by Genevieve Leigh to the December 10 rally, “For a Mass Movement of Students and Youth to Stop the War in Ukraine!” organized by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.*

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The escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia raises before young people the need to fight for the most basic right: The right to a future.

Not only nuclear war, but the reality of climate change, an ongoing pandemic, the catastrophic conditions of inequality and poverty, the growth of fascism and dictatorship: All make clear that if young people are to have a future, we must fight for it.

The youth of today have not lived a day of their lives when the United States has not been at war. The consequences have been devastating.

In the period between 2010 and 2019 almost 100,000 children were killed or maimed in military conflicts that destroyed entire societies. Nearly 33,000 children have been killed and injured in the 20-year war in Afghanistan alone, an average of one child every five hours.

The impact of war on young people in the US is far reaching. Thousands of young US military recruits join purely out of economic distress. That is, they see the military as the only way out of their poverty, as the only option for affording an education. Many of those who have not died or been injured are forever scarred from their experience. In 2019, 5,861 veterans killed themselves in the United States. Youth have seen their friends and family members sent off to kill or be killed

to advance the aims of the American ruling class for world conquest.

The war abroad has also meant a war at home. The American government never tires of claiming that its wars are being waged for “human rights.” In justifying the war in Ukraine, Biden has spoken about “a battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression.”

But what is the reality of social life in America? They talk of the “American dream,” but workers and particularly young people in the US confront the American nightmare.

The diversion of unlimited resources to the American war machine is accompanied by the slashing of every social program that benefits masses of people. Funding for public education has been cut to the bone, and students are graduating from college with immense levels of debt. More than 26,000 American workers die prematurely every year due to lack of health care.

The youth of today have come of age during the COVID-19 pandemic, the worst global health crisis in over a century. They watched and suffered as over 21 million people worldwide, including more than 1 million in the United States, died from the criminal policies of the ruling classes of nearly every country.

Millions of youth are now suffering from Long COVID, which can damage the brain, heart, lungs and other vital organs.

More than 200,000 American children lost a parent or primary caregiver to COVID-19. Such a staggering loss will have a devastating and lifelong impact.

Over 30 years of militarist violence abroad has penetrated into every aspect of society. It can be seen in the epidemic of school shootings—46 this year alone—a

product of extreme social distress and the consequences of a culture of violence that permeates American society.

Videos of the police maiming and murdering workers and young people in the streets are a regular occurrence. Any youth in America can recall the violent scenes of the police murdering George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Jayland Walker and countless other victims.

The US has built up the world's largest network of prisons and jails, with over 2 million people now confined in horrifying conditions across the country.

The US has the highest drug overdose rate of any wealthy country. Between 2015 and 2019 alone, children and young adults in the US lost approximately 1.2 million years of life due to unintentional drug overdoses.

Youth should be a time filled with hope, optimism and idealism. Young people have the right to a promising future. The reckless drive towards war must be understood as an attack on this right—war is the cancellation of all future.

There is no shortage of opposition to the abhorrent conditions in America, particularly among youth. The question is, what is the political perspective that must animate the fight against war?

It is not through futile appeals to the political parties and governments responsible for war that the slaughter will be stopped. In the US, the Democrats no less than the Republicans support the operations of American imperialism.

Young people have already gone through the experience of Obama, the candidate of “hope and change” who became the drone bomber and deporter-in-chief. They have also had the experience of Bernie Sanders, who leveraged his call for a “political revolution” into a top position within the political establishment, where he has supported the US-NATO war against Russia.

The youth want to fight, but they can't do so on their own. The turn must be to the working class and the development of the class struggle. It is the working class, whose exploitation is the source of all profit and which constitutes the vast majority of humanity, that is the social base for a new movement against war.

To develop a fight in the present to secure our future, we must be grounded in the lessons of the past. The

ruling class dedicates enormous resources to cutting off youth from history, from the long tradition of revolution and working class struggles, in the United States and throughout the world.

No effort is spared on the part of the American ruling class to pollute the consciousness of young people with propaganda that argues against the basic truth of Marxism: that the history of mankind is the history of class struggle.

An entirely false narrative, the “1619 Project,” was developed to convince us that the history of the United States is one of ubiquitous racial conflict and division, the better to divide us against each other and block a unified movement of all workers.

The history of socialist politics in the 20th and 21st centuries is the history of the Trotskyist movement, the continuation of the internationalist principles expressed in the 1917 Russian Revolution, in the fight against Stalinism, nationalism and all forms of anti-Marxism that sought to deny the revolutionary role of the working class.

The IYSSE upholds this legacy and fights to educate young people on the foundations of Marxism and Trotskyism. As Trotsky explained in the founding document of the Fourth International, “The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.” This, the building of a revolutionary leadership, is the great task that confronts us today.

There are many challenges and obstacles that confront young people today. But the IYSSE is animated by optimism, an optimism that is based on an understanding of the revolutionary potential of the working class and on the lessons and experiences of history.

I call on all of you listening to this meeting today and in the weeks and months ahead to make the decision to join the IYSSE, join the fight for the future, join the fight for socialism.



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