The International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the fight against war

David North
11 December 2022

The following are the concluding remarks by WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North 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.

The rally was addressed by members of the IYSSE and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) from throughout the world. For more information on joining the IYSSE, visit iysse.com.

Today's online rally marks a milestone in the building of an international movement of the working class against the war in Ukraine. The speakers have not only explained the historical origins, present-day aims and potential consequences of the war. They have also exposed the criminal character of this war, and presented an indictment of all the governments responsible for its planning, instigation and execution. The speakers have refuted the lies that form the substance of the propaganda with which governments and the media seek to numb public consciousness and manufacture support for the war.

Taken as a whole, today's speeches lead to definite conclusions about the nature of the US-NATO war in Ukraine and what must be done to stop it. These conclusions may be summed up as follows:

• The war in Ukraine is, in its socioeconomic and political essence, an imperialist war instigated by the United States and the other major capitalist powers that are part of the NATO alliance.

• NATO's aim, led by the United States, is to inflict a military defeat on Russia that will lead to the breakup of the Russian Federation, the division of that vast country and the distribution of its immense natural resources among the imperialist powers.

• The elimination of Russia as a barrier to NATO's Eastern military expansion into Eurasia will, the imperialists believe, result in the encirclement of China, and force the latter country's submission to the dictates of imperialism—either as a result of war or, as in the case of the Chinese regime's abandonment of its Zero-COVID policy, concessions in the face of relentless global capitalist economic pressure.

• In the final analysis, the political aim of the war—like the two world wars of the 20th century—is a new redivision of the world among the imperialist powers. The logic of this process extends beyond even the conflict with Russia and China. The NATO alliance and the ancillary military pacts that include countries in Asia and the Asia-Pacific comprise not a "Band of Brothers" but a den of imperialist thieves and cut-throats. The logic of inter-imperialist rivalries will lead in the not too distant future to bitter conflicts among the temporary allies of today. The enmities of the past, as for example between the United States and Germany, will inevitably reemerge.

• The outcome of this process, unless stopped by the working class, will be a global cataclysm on a scale that dwarfs the violence of the past. Since the outbreak of the war, the potential use of nuclear weapons has been normalized in political discourse.

• Notwithstanding the central responsibility of the US-NATO alliance in the instigation of the war, the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 was a reactionary and desperate action undertaken by the Putin regime, acting on behalf of the ruling capitalist oligarchy that came to power in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

• The Putin regime's efforts to justify the war by invoking the reactionary heritage of tsarism and neo-Stalinist national chauvinism represent a despicable historical regression. The provocations of NATO would not have been successful were it not for the fact that the Putin regime is the outcome of the total repudiation of the far-sighted democratic principles upon which the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was founded in 1922, five years after the October Revolution. The Bolshevik government, led by Lenin and Trotsky, founded the USSR as a *voluntary* union, and was constitutionally committed to the democratic equality of all the national and ethnic groups. The deliberate encouragement of national chauvinism in Russia—which finds its openly fascistic counterpart in Ukraine—created the ideological prerequisites for the fratricidal conflict between the masses of both victimized countries.

• When examined in its essential historical perspective, the US-NATO war in Ukraine proves again the necessity for ending capitalism and the nation-state system in which it is embedded. The war is, in fact, only one manifestation of the fatal incompatibility of capitalist private ownership of the means of production and the division of the world into hostile

© World Socialist Web Site

nation states with the progressive development, and even survival, of mankind.

• From all these antecedent points flow the final conclusions: the struggle against war proceeds through the forging of the unity of the international working class and the ending of capitalist rule through world socialist revolution.

• For the achievement of this world historic task, it is necessary to develop within the working class a new revolutionary party. But this task need not be undertaken from scratch. The foundations of this revolutionary party already exist in the Fourth International, founded by Trotsky, led by the International Committee today, whose work is based on the immense historical experience, spanning a century, of the Trotskyist movement.

Today's international rally has advanced the perspective and program of socialist revolution and working class power. But it has been directed primarily to the youth of the world. This does not contradict our program. Rather, it is a critical and indispensable element of the perspective of world socialism. The youth cannot change the world without and apart from the powerful and socially decisive action of the working class. But there has never been, nor can there ever be, a genuine revolutionary movement without the fighting energy, enthusiasm and idealism of young people.

The population of the world has just passed 8 billion. The vast majority of these billions are young people, most of whom are in their teens and twenties. What has capitalism to offer them but exploitation, poverty, disease, fascism and war?

Many speakers today have said that youth must fight for their future. This is true in the most literal sense. Because war, pandemic and climate change all signify the absolute negation of the right to a future. Without life there is no future.

But in order to deprive youth of their right to a future, the ruling class must first deprive them of their hope. That is, the capitalist elites—controlling governments and the media—do all that they can to convince the youth that there is nothing they can do to change the world, that the injustices that exist today will exist forever, that the causes of human misery are rooted in the very nature of human beings and their somehow mystical psyche, rather than in the economic interests and relations that really determine the course of society.

The opponents of the Trotskyist movement and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality—especially among the parties and organizations of the affluent middle class pseudo-left—will claim that the IYSSE conducts its work at too high a theoretical level. It is, they claim, better to confine oneself to radical-sounding phrases and slogans, without complex historical references.

We reject such criticisms—which are motivated by cynicism and an unstated but reactionary agenda—with contempt.

If young people are to change the world, they must understand it. Nearly a century ago, in 1924, Leon Trotsky wrote, in an essay titled "Young People, Study Politics!" the following:

> Young people live in society, they are born into definite conditions, they step forward into life's arena in particular historical circumstances, and the sooner these young people open their eyes to the world around them, the better and more profoundly they grasp the conditions in which they live, the easier their push through life will prove to be.

These words resonate in the present situation. To shift the world from its present-day reactionary trajectory, to the trajectory of socialism, is an immense historical undertaking. Its achievement requires the serious study of politics—specifically, politics that is based on the Marxist materialist conception of history, which makes possible a scientific study of the laws that govern the capitalist system and the class struggle.

Fearing the revolutionary enlightenment of youth, the ruling class does all in its power to keep young people away from any contact with Marxism and Trotskyism. It promotes ignorance of history, hostility to science, contempt for objective truth, and countless forms of cultural backwardness. They know very well that the glorification of imperialist militarism is undermined by socially critical thought. The reduction of youth to cannon-fodder for imperialist wars requires blind obedience, based on the old militarist precept, yours "is not to reason why … but to do and die."

But the International Youth and Students for Social Equality is determined to provide young people with the political education that they require in the fight for their future and the future of working people throughout the world.

In concluding this rally, we call on you to make the decision to join the IYSSE, build a mass movement to end the Ukraine war, and take forward the struggle for World Socialist Revolution.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site