

Speech to the December 10 IYSSE anti-war rally

The young generation holds the fate of humanity in its hands

Barbara Slaughter
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The following are the remarks by Barbara Slaughter 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.

Slaughter is a member of the Socialist Equality Party in the UK. At 95 years old, she is the longest active member of the Fourth International. For more information on joining the IYSSE, visit iysse.com.

I am 95 years of age. I was born in August 1927, nine years after the end of the First World War. It was a war in which, as the IYSEE statement said, “Imperialism introduced the world to the horrors of trench warfare, poisoned gas and the murderous technical innovations of aerial bombardments, submarines armed with torpedoes and tanks. It was a war that killed 20 million people and injured 21 million more.”

For my parents’ generation, this was supposed to be “the war to end all wars.” But my childhood was lived against a background of a slow build-up to a Second World War. I was six years old when the Nazis took power in Germany and nine when the combined fascist forces of Germany, Italy and Spain, assisted by the treachery of the Stalinists, drowned Spain’s working class revolution in blood.

When I was 12, the world was engulfed in an even more bloody conflict, described as “total war.” It was an industrialised slaughter on an unimaginable scale, which resulted in the deaths of more than 70 million people—3.5 percent of the world’s population.

The crimes of German imperialism are immense. The War of Annihilation against the Soviet Union was at the centre of Hitler’s “racial war.” The Holocaust—six million Jews systematically murdered in the

extermination camps at Auschwitz-Burkenau, Treblinka and elsewhere.

But this was a war of universal barbarism. From 1942 to 1945 a campaign of indiscriminate “terror bombing” by the US and Britain destroyed most of the cities in Germany and killed 600,000 people, most of them women and children.

The final act of utter criminality was the dropping of atom bombs by the United States on Japan. On August 1945, one atom bomb, dropped on Hiroshima, killed 80,000 people. Tens of thousands more would die of radiation exposure. A second bomb, two days later, was dropped on Nagasaki, killing more than 40,000.

The crimes of the imperialist powers committed in the two world wars and in all the other conflicts of the last hundred years, in Korea, in Vietnam, the Falklands, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and elsewhere have all been justified with hypocritical invocations of the defence of freedom and democracy—all a tissue of lies.

Today the world once again stands on the brink of an abyss. The US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine is escalating towards a Third World War—a catastrophe that would threaten the very existence of humanity. Such a war would begin where the Second World War ended, with the use of nuclear weapons. But the destructive capacity of these weapons has increased to an unimaginable degree. One nuclear bomb with a yield of one megaton could totally destroy an area of 80 square miles. And yet Biden’s recent use of the threat of Armageddon against Putin, makes clear that the plans for nuclear war are not only contemplated but have already been made.

This must be stopped! Only the international working class can stop this madness. The working class is the

most powerful force on the planet. The development of technology, which has made world war ever more deadly, has also expanded and unified the working class on a world scale.

I have spoken of a century of bloody wars. But I have lived my life within the mass socialist movement of the working class that sought an end to war, and an end to capitalism.

The horrors of world war led me to become a socialist. I was inspired by the October 1917 Revolution—the historic event that ended World War I and opened up the possibility of a better world.

But the fate of my generation and others in the Twentieth Century was determined by the domination of Stalinism and social democracy, which held the allegiance of millions. They were instrumental in defending capitalism from the massive revolutionary struggles that erupted after both world wars, at immense cost to humanity.

The exposure of the crimes of Stalinism led me to become a member of the Trotskyist movement, dedicating my life to building a genuine socialist leadership for the world working class.

From the vantage point of a life that has spanned nearly a century—eight decades of which has been devoted to the decades-long struggle for socialism—I can say to the young people attending this meeting that though the dangers we all face are immense, the conditions for overcoming them have never been more favourable.

Today, Stalinism and social democracy have been discredited in the eyes of millions. Leon Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism to defend the perspective of world socialism has proved to be the only basis on which war can be overcome.

These are the days when that perspective can win the allegiance of the working class far, far bigger than when I first became politically active, and objectively unified by global productive processes and extraordinary technological developments, including instantaneous communication, that show the vast potential to build a unified world.

But this must be fought for. I appeal to the young people at this meeting: Your generation now holds the fate of humanity in its hands. Take up this challenge. Join and build the IYSSE! Stop the reckless drive towards nuclear war! Fight for a socialist future without

poverty, exploitation, war and all forms of oppression!



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