

May Day 2023 and the struggle against war

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The following speech was delivered by Andre Damon, a writer and editor for the World Socialist Web Site and member of the Socialist Equality Party (US) Political Committee, to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International on April 30.

Dear Friends and Comrades,

As we meet to celebrate May Day, the world is at war.

The former Soviet Union has become a battlefield. Hundreds of thousands are dead or wounded on both sides, with young recruits and old men sent to their deaths over a few meters of land. The war in Ukraine has displaced millions of people and has had devastating cultural and social consequences.

But in the plans of the imperialists, this is just an opening skirmish.

Masses of troops are on the move around the world. Throughout Europe, new battle lines are being formed, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. While over 150 active-duty NATO troops are already inside Ukraine, tens of thousands more have been deployed to Russia's borders, ready, in the words of one commander, to "fight tonight."

In the Pacific, the chain of islands surrounding the Chinese mainland, one of the most populous and economically vital areas of the world, is being transformed into a militarized bastion for war with China.

At this very moment, war planners at the Pentagon are discussing and preparing for scenarios in which large portions of humanity are killed in a strategic nuclear exchange, and human civilization collapses in the ensuing nuclear winter.

The war in Ukraine was provoked, instigated and prolonged by the United States. The global eruption of American imperialism after the dissolution of the

USSR has transformed into a war against Russia and active preparations for war with China.

The United States proclaims that this is an age of "great power conflict" as it prepares, in the words of last year's NATO statement, for "warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors."

Twenty years ago, the Bush administration launched the invasion of Iraq, a brutal, illegal and criminal war that killed over 1 million people and destroyed an entire society.

It was a war promoted through lies. The White House conspired with the media to propagate a blatant falsehood: the claim that Iraq was creating weapons of mass destruction to justify the occupation and pillage of the country.

Today, the lies that led to the invasion of Iraq are seen not as a horrible aberration but as a model to be followed in the accomplishment of the ruling class's goals.

The media-orchestrated lie pioneered by "weapons of mass destruction" has become a permanent state of affairs. The financial system is sound. COVID-19 is "mild." Children don't get COVID-19. The pandemic is over. Masks don't work. The lies pile one on top of the other until it's almost impossible to distinguish truth from falsehood.

Everything about the war was sold to the public through lies. "It is not a proxy war ... NATO is not involved," said the White House. "I will not send American servicemen to fight in Ukraine," Biden declared. All of these lies have fallen, one by one, like dominoes, until all that is left is the reality that two nuclear-armed powers are at war with one another.

The struggle against war requires not just the refutation of the blatant falsehoods with which the imperialists justify their crimes but a serious explanation.

"What was the imperialist war?" asked Leon Trotsky

of World War I.

It was the revolt of the productive forces not only against the bourgeois forms of property but also against the boundaries of capitalist states. The imperialist war expressed the fact that the productive forces are unbearably constrained within the confines of national states. We have always maintained that capitalism is incapable of controlling the productive forces it itself develops and that only socialism is capable of incorporating the productive forces which have outgrown the boundaries of capitalist states within a higher economic entity.

These words, written to describe the 20th century, apply with even greater validity to the 21st, which is reliving the industrial barbarism of Verdun and the Somme, but fought with drones and AI-powered weaponry.

Everywhere, the old, reactionary social order is violently straining against the globalized productive forces; to combat the progressive power of artificial intelligence and global communications networks, the sludge of the Dark Ages is being dredged up and spewed into public consciousness, to corrupt public opinion and condition the people for a new world war.

Russian musicians are not allowed to perform in America unless they swear allegiance to the war effort. American scientists, who advocate open scientific collaboration with their Chinese colleagues, are accused of creating COVID-19.

The racist libel has reared its hideous head once again. Anti-scientific bigotry is everywhere promoted, with the ruling class straining to re-litigate the Scopes trial and finally put the scientists in their place.

No one should underestimate the threat posed by the war plans of the imperialists—armed with 21st century weapons and 21st century propaganda methods. After all, there has never been a world war where multiple combatants possessed nuclear weapons.

But it would be a far greater mistake to underestimate the forces that will be brought into struggle against this war. Because for all the destruction unleashed by the modern instruments of war, the creative and

progressive forces forged by the modern world are stronger.

The working class, united in a global productive process, interconnected through global communication mechanisms, is immeasurably more powerful than the forces of reaction.

But mobilizing this great force requires perspective and leadership. We gather today to build this leadership: to unite the forces of the Trotskyist movement, from Australia to Sri Lanka, the entire Eurasian landmass and the Americas, to proclaim the struggle for the birth of a new, socialist society from the agonies of the old.

Will it be possible to build a revolutionary leadership to stop a Third World War and save human civilization? That question will be determined through struggle—through the actions of those gathered here today and those they will inspire and educate.

I urge all participants in this year's May Day: Do your part to take forward the struggle against war as the struggle for socialism.



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