

To stop war, students must unite with the working class

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The following speech was given by Andy Thompson, an IYSSE member in the US, at the International May Day 2024 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 4.

I am honored to address this May Day rally on behalf of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the student and youth movement of the Fourth International. I am speaking from Chicago, the birthplace of May Day exactly 138 years ago. At its founding conference, the Second International declared May Day to be International Workers' Day following the frame-up of the Haymarket Martyrs who were sentenced to death in a sham trial.

The Martyrs, who included George Engel, Adolph Fischer, Albert Parsons and August Spies, had committed no crime. They were working class leaders who had led massive strikes in Chicago demanding an eight-hour workday. If they were guilty of anything it was only that they possessed an unwavering commitment to the liberation of the working class from capitalist exploitation. This terrified the ruling classes who saw to it that they be put to death.

In that era workers were denied their basic democratic rights. When they gathered together to strike or to publicly assemble for meeting and rallies, they would be openly attacked by the police acting on behalf of the capitalist class of industrialists and factory owners who were responsible for the impoverishment of millions.

Today, we see how democratic rights that were hard won in decades of struggle are being stripped away as the ruling class has embarked on a new imperialist world war.

In New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago, at Harvard, Yale and Emerson, in Germany, England, France, Italy, Australia and Japan, hundreds of thousands, if not millions have joined protests calling

for an immediate end to the genocide in Gaza and the occupation of Palestine by the US-backed Zionist state of Israel.

Everywhere the protests have been met with open police violence and repression. Millions of people have now seen videos of police in riot gear charging protesters, attacking them with clubs, throwing people to the ground, tasing them, young and old carried off in handcuffs. At Ohio State University, police deployed snipers trained on demonstrators, creating the conditions for a repeat of the 1970 Kent State Massacre. In the US alone over 1,000 anti-genocide protesters have now been arrested.

These attacks have the full sanction of US President "Genocide Joe" Biden and all the members of both the Democrats and Republicans. Biden has condemned the protests, slandering them as "antisemitic," and has created a new police agency to monitor and attack the protests. He promised to put "the full force of the federal government behind protecting the Jewish community," by which he means Israel and its right-wing Zionist allies in the US.

Biden's phony concern over antisemitism is exposed by the fact that, in smashing opposition to Israel's genocide, the White House works hand-in-glove with actual antisemites of the Republican Party, including those who advocate the "Great Replacement Theory," which holds that there is a Jewish plot to eliminate white Christians from America.

In addition, Biden has transferred endless billions of dollars' worth of tanks and bombs to a government in Ukraine that celebrates as its greatest national hero Stepan Bandera, whose followers enlisted in Hitler's mass murder of eastern European Jews during the Holocaust.

A special role in facilitating Biden's genocide and

the war in Ukraine is being played by the Democratic Socialists of America, who include among their members Congressional representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. AOC recently appeared at the protest encampment at Columbia University in New York to feign support for the protests.

Just days before, she and Bernie Sanders joined Biden at a campaign event where they doubled down on their endorsement of his reelection. AOC held hands with Biden, the lead organizer of the Gaza genocide and the war against Russia, and called for votes to support him.

AOC and the DSA, which is a faction of the Democratic Party, are working to deceive you. They want to lead your movement against war to a dead-end trap inside the Democratic Party.

Make no concessions to these figures! They are not for you!

To all those protesting now, we also say clearly: Students and young people cannot stop the genocide or imperialism alone, and through appeals to their campus administrations to divest from the US and Israeli war machines. The fight against imperialist war and the genocide in Gaza can only be advanced through the mobilization of the international working class, the principal revolutionary force in society, which has the power to stop all weapons production and shipments.

The explosion of militarism abroad is incompatible with the right to free speech at home. The aim of this state campaign is to abolish free speech, not only on the campuses but in all areas of social and political life, in the US and internationally.

As student protesters in the US were being brutally attacked by police, in Ukraine, our Comrade Bogdan Syrotyuk of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, which is affiliated with the IYSSE, was arrested by the fascist-infested Ukrainian secret service. Just 25 years old, he is now being framed because of his principled, internationalist opposition to the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. While it is the Zelensky regime that arrested him, political responsibility for his persecution lies with the NATO governments that back it, and above all the Biden administration.

The arrest of Comrade Bogdan and the mass arrests of youth protesting against the genocide in Gaza are interconnected developments. The fight against the Gaza genocide is a fight against imperialism, which, as

Lenin stated, represents “political reaction all along the line.” The war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza mark the opening stages of World War III. As with World Wars I and II, this new imperialist redivision of the world is being accompanied by a relentless assault on democratic rights and socialist and left-wing politics.

The IYSSE in the US and internationally calls for the immediate release of Comrade Bogdan and we pledge our full support for the campaign in his defense. This campaign must now be advanced forcefully as a central component of the building of a powerful, socialist anti-war movement in the working class!

That program is expressed clearly at this May Day rally of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Take the lessons you learn here today into your protests. The necessary strategy is to mobilize the working class against war and against capitalism. Nothing less will do. And nothing less will be tolerated.

Send delegations from your encampments to the factories. Talk with workers about their struggles. Link up with them in a joint fight!

And workers: Take up the defense of the students! The attack on their democratic rights is an attack on your entire class.

Mobilize independently of the union bureaucracies and both parties of the ruling class to immediately stop weapons deliveries and arms production for the genocide in Gaza and the war in Ukraine!

Everything now depends on merging the fight against genocide, imperialist war and the attack on democratic rights with the development of the class struggle and the building of revolutionary Marxist leadership in the working class. The IYSSE and the ICFI alone fight for this perspective.



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