

May Day 2025: Socialism Against Fascism and War

David North
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The WSWS is posting here both the video and text of the speech by World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board chairman David North, which opened the International May Day 2025 Online Rally.

As we begin this celebration of May Day 2025, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution, proclaims its solidarity with all those who are being deprived of their democratic right to freedom and even to life by capitalist states and their police agencies throughout the world.

The International Committee calls on workers and youth to expand the fight for the freedom of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who has been imprisoned for one year and is awaiting trial on charges of “treason” – that is, fighting for the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers and youth in opposition to the proxy war instigated by US and European imperialism and against the reactionary national chauvinism promoted by the regimes in Kiev and Moscow.

We declare our solidarity with the people of Gaza, who are being subjected to the campaign of genocidal violence launched by the criminal Israeli regime, which is acting with the support of all the imperialist governments.

The International Committee and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties pledge to continue the fight for the mobilization of the working class in support of the struggle of the Palestinian people against the Israeli capitalist state. We repeat our call for the working class and youth in Israel to repudiate the murderous ideology and political blind alley of Zionist chauvinism, and to unite with their Arab brothers and sisters in the struggle for a socialist Palestine and a socialist federation of the Middle East.

The Socialist Equality Party in the United States demands the immediate return of Mahmoud Khalil, Rûmeysa Öztürk and Leqaa Kordia—seized by the agents of Trump’s Gestapo—to their homes in the United States. We demand the immediate end to the persecution of all students and teachers who are exercising the right to freedom of speech guaranteed by the US Constitution to citizens and non-citizens alike.

We denounce the deportation of hundreds of migrants living in the United States—such as Andry Hernandez Romero and Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia—to a concentration camp in El Salvador. Twenty years ago, the world was shocked by the publication of photos that exposed the torture of Iraqis in the prisoner of war camp at Abu Ghraib. The Bush administration sought to evade direct responsibility for the sadistic abuse of Iraqi soldiers by attributing the crimes to the unauthorized acts of individual miscreants.

No such evasion of responsibility is even being attempted today. The Trump administration boasts of its plans to deport thousands of migrants now living in the United States to El Salvador’s notorious Terrorism Confinement Center, known as CECOT. This facility, designed to hold 40,000 human beings, is the equivalent of a concentration camp. The cells hold 65 to 156 prisoners, where they are confined for 23.5 hours each day under perpetual artificial lighting. They sleep on metal bunks without

mattresses, pillows or sheets. The inmates are subjected to beatings and deprived of adequate food and necessary medical care. They are systematically humiliated, and there have been reports of torture, including the use of electric shocks.

When the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, visited the White House in April, President Trump publicly declared his intention to deport “home grown” Americans—that is, US citizens—to CECOT; and stated that it would be necessary to build five more camps to accommodate the tens of thousands that Trump is threatening to deport.

Among the recent victims of Trump’s dragnet are three children, ages 2, 4 and 7, all American citizens, who have been deported to Honduras. One of the children is a 4-year-old who has been diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. The child was deported without medication and access to medical care.

As we observe May Day 2025, it is necessary to place unfolding events in the appropriate historical context. This May Day coincides with the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. On May 8, 1945 the Nazi regime capitulated. This was followed three months later by the surrender of Japan, which occurred after the incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic bombs dropped by the United States.

The six years of the Second World War, between 1939 and 1945, witnessed barbarism on a scale that surpassed anything that the world had previously experienced. The opening of the concentration camps in Europe exposed the enormity of fascist barbarism. The genocide of European Jewry—the implementation of a systematically planned campaign of industrial mass murder—was only one horrifying part of the global violence unleashed by capitalism.

The war claimed 70 to 85 million lives, approximately 3 percent of the world’s population. Military deaths are estimated at between 21 to 25 million; civilian deaths at between 50 to 55 million. In the aftermath of the war, the victors claimed that the horrors of that conflict could not be allowed to happen again. At the Nuremberg trial of 1945-46, the American prosecutors proclaimed that the new laws that held the Nazi leaders accountable for genocide and crimes against peace would be invoked in the future against leaders of any nation, including the United States, that committed similar acts.

Of course, that pledge was forgotten. In the decades that followed World War II, the leaders of the imperialist powers waged wars that have resulted in the deaths of millions. But even taking into account the bloody record of imperialist crimes, it is clear that the present world order is undergoing a process of staggering political and moral regression. In the midst of the First World War, Lenin warned that the regime of imperialism tends toward the obliteration in practice of the distinction between absolutist and democratic regimes. The rule is “reaction all down the line.”

That rule is being substantiated by contemporary events. The crime of genocide is being implemented against the people of Gaza before the eyes of the entire world. The Nazi bombing of Guernica in 1937 and of

Rotterdam in 1940 were viewed as depraved acts that could be committed only by a criminal state. But now the systematic annihilation of Gaza, upon whose defenseless inhabitants 2,000-pound bombs are being dropped, is defended by the “democratic” governments of Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Far from condemning Israel, the imperialist powers—ignoring the findings of the International Court of Justice—denounce and criminalize the protests of students and workers against genocide. With a level of deceit and cynicism that was believed to be practiced only by totalitarian regimes, words are twisted and given a meaning that is the opposite of their original and objective connotation. And so the denunciation of genocide is now proclaimed to be “antisemitism,” and Jewish people who participate in demonstrations against the Nazi-like campaign of mass murder are denounced as antisemites.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Nazi regime, countless academics argued that the Third Reich was a bizarre historical event, something like an unforeseeable car accident, that defied logical explanation. Attempting to refute Marxism and absolve capitalism and its ruling elites of responsibility for the catastrophe, it was argued that the cause of fascism was not to be found in capitalist economics and imperialist geopolitics, but in psychology, that is, in the irrational character of human consciousness.

Such explanations provided no scientifically grounded insight into the real causes of the catastrophes of the 1930s and 1940s, and they are no less useless in explaining the events that are currently unfolding. Eighty years after the collapse of the Nazi regime and the end of World War II, constitutional democracy is breaking down, the influence and power of fascist politicians are growing. All the imperialist powers are massively increasing military expenditures. German political leaders speak of the need to prepare a new war with Russia before the end of the decade. Mankind stands closer to a nuclear world war than at any time since the end of World War II.

The essential causes of the descent into political barbarism and catastrophic global warfare are the same economic and social contradictions of the capitalist regime that resulted in war and fascism in the last century. These interrelated contradictions are, first, the incompatibility of the world economy with the capitalist nation-state system; and, second, the socially destructive character of capitalist private ownership of the productive forces, controlled by money-mad oligarchs, and social production involving the labor of the billions of people that comprise the international working class.

These contradictions operate today on a scale and intensity several orders of magnitude greater than those that led to the First and Second World Wars. The sovereignty of national economies has been dissolved by a vast global production network. The production of commodities involves a process that integrates the labor of workers from all over the world. Attempts to identify the specific national origin of a vast portion of commodities are all but absurd. While invoking the sanctity of the national economy and proclaiming nationally based production as its supreme ideal, the real goal of all the imperialist states is either control over, or, at least, a favorable position in world production networks and the global commodity chain. The struggle for dominance and even survival leads inevitably to bitter struggles over access to critical resources, including labor and world markets.

The United States is the chief protagonist in this world struggle. What imparts to its actions an especially ruthless and violent character is the fact that the American ruling class’s struggle for global hegemony is taking place within the context of the protracted decline of its real economic power. The halcyon days of American productive power, when its industries dominated the world, when the authority of the dollar was backed by gold and based on its real massive industrial base, authenticated by foreign trade surpluses, are long gone.

Over the past half-century, the real foundation of the American economy has been transformed from industrial production to financial parasitism. The wealth of the American ruling class has been based not on the growth of production, but on the limitless expansion of debt. American capitalism now consists of a vast edifice of *fictional capital*—legal claims to future income streams arising from loans and infinite forms of debt creation.

Gross US federal debt stood at \$371 billion in 1970. It rose to \$908 billion in 1980. By 2020 it had risen to \$26 trillion and by the beginning of this year had risen yet another \$10 trillion. The scale of parasitism is almost beyond comprehension. The fictional character of wealth is exemplified by the fact that only about 15 percent of the funds circulating through US financial institutions finances new business investment. The remaining 85 percent chases existing assets. Thus, the price of equities bought and sold on Wall Street and global financial markets bear little, and even no relationship whatsoever, to the generation of surplus value in a real production process involving the expenditure of labor power.

A study of international finance published in 2021 by the McKinsey Global Institute reported: “From 2000 to 2020, financial assets such as equities, bonds, and derivatives grew from 8.5 to 12 times GDP. As asset prices rose, almost \$2 in debt and about \$4 in total liabilities including debt was created for every \$1 in net new investment.”

In recent months there has been a great deal of material written about the growing crisis of confidence in the US dollar, which has led to several sharp sell-offs on Wall Street, and the rise of the price of gold to a record \$3,500 an ounce. This is 100 times more than the official price of gold in August 1971, when President Richard Nixon ended the convertibility of the dollar into gold at the rate of \$35 per ounce.

The objective significance of the “loss of confidence” is that the unsustainable character of the United States’ massive trade deficits and related mountain of debt is now recognized by global investors. Stated bluntly, it is feared that the United States is approaching bankruptcy.

Herein lies the key to understanding the policies of the Trump administration. However crazed and reckless his policies may appear, they are all, in the final analysis, desperate responses to a real crisis of American imperialism. Lacking any humane response to problems that are insoluble on the basis of capitalism, the actions taken by Trump only deepen the crisis and make matters worse.

Multi-trillion-dollar trade deficits will be slashed by imposing tariffs. Massive budget deficits will be cut by a savage assault on critical social programs. Incapable of creating wealth through production, Trump is openly planning to plunder the resources of other countries. In perhaps the only truthful statement that Trump has made since taking office, he bluntly stated that the fate of Ukraine is of interest to the United States only as a source of trillions of dollars’ worth of strategic minerals.

Emulating Hitler’s annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938, Trump is threatening to seize Canada and Greenland. He has declared his intention to reestablish American control over the Panama Canal.

There is a distinct similarity between Hitler and Trump in their objective motivations and decision-making processes. The late British historian Tim Mason described Hitler’s government as “a regime whose leadership was increasingly entrapped in economic and political contradictions largely of its own making and that sought escape or resolution or maintenance of its distinctive identity through a series of sudden lurches in policy and ever more explosive risk-taking.” With the proviso that the underlying crisis has been developing in the United States over decades, the historian’s description of Hitler’s policy making applies as well to the current American president.

Trump’s policies, when examined not as the mental spasms of an evil imbecile but as the response of the American ruling class to a crisis for which there exists no progressive or peaceful answer, vindicates Trotsky’s insight into the reactionary and violent essence of the United

States’ “will to power.” Trotsky wrote in 1928:

In the period of crisis, the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom. The United States will seek to overcome and extricate herself from her difficulties and maladies primarily at the expense of Europe, regardless of whether this occurs in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia, or Europe itself, or whether this takes place peacefully or through war.

Six years later, in 1934, he made yet another chilling prediction:

The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of “organizing Europe.” The United States must “organize” the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.

That eruption is now underway. But the preparation for global war requires the escalation of war at home. Since the start of his second term, Trump has been using the office of the presidency as the cockpit of a military-police state dictatorship. He makes no pretense of his contempt for the Constitution and legal conventions. Trump’s repeated use of executive orders, rather than seeking congressional approval, is intended as a demonstration of his unlimited powers. An executive order signed by Trump and issued on April 28 authorizes the use of military and police power, without legal restraints. Section 4 of the order is titled, “Using National Security Assets for Law and Order.” It declares:

Within 90 days of the date of this order, the Attorney General and the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and the heads of agencies as appropriate, shall increase the provision of excess military and national security assets in local jurisdictions to assist State and local law enforcement.

The section then states:

the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Attorney General, shall determine how military and national security assets, training, non-lethal capabilities, and personnel can most effectively be utilized to prevent crime.

This order, without precedent in American history, abolishes—under the transparently fraudulent guise of “fighting crime”—the Bill of Rights. Underscoring the dictatorial character of this executive order, Section 6 declares:

The Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security shall utilize the Homeland Security Task Forces (HSTFs) formed in accordance with Executive Order 14159 of January 20, 2025 (Protecting the American People Against Invasion) to coordinate and advance the objectives of this order.

As in his international policies, Trump is acting not merely on the basis of his individual whims, but as the representative of the oligarchy that rules the United States.

The Trump administration is not an aberration; it is, rather, the political expression of the incompatibility of massive social inequality with democracy. Choosing Elon Musk as his principal adviser, the world’s richest man, and staffing his cabinet with mega-millionaires and billionaires, Trump hardly bothers to conceal the fact that his is a government of, by, and for the oligarchy. But Trump did not create the oligarchy. It is the product of the process of financialization and the accumulation of fictitious capital.

The economically pathological focus on increasing shareholder value—that is, the income stream of the oligarchs—legitimizes an inherently corrupt system in which profits are generated not from productive activity but from the manipulation of financial assets, exemplified by stock buybacks, mergers and leveraged acquisitions.

In absolute terms, even when adjusted for inflation, the personal wealth of the multi-billionaire oligarchs surpasses that of the robber barons of the late 19th and early 20th century. The scale of wealth concentrated in an infinitesimal section of the population all but defies comprehension. A recently published analysis of wealth distribution in the United States reported that in 2024 alone \$1 trillion in additional wealth was generated for the 19 richest American households. This 0.00001% of the population—one in ten million—accounts for almost 2 percent of total US household wealth.

The process of social polarization is growing like a malignant tumor. In 2021 there were 1,370 billionaires. By the end of 2024, the number had risen to 1,990, an increase of 45 percent. The richest 1 percent owns 31 percent of the wealth of the United States. Collectively, the wealthiest 10 percent owns 67 percent of the nation’s wealth. By way of comparison, the bottom 50 percent owns just 3 percent.

This staggering level of social inequality cannot be sustained democratically. It must be emphasized that the oligarchs depend upon the continuous supply and injection of credit into the financial markets, especially in situations—as in 2008 and 2020—when the entire fraudulent system is confronted with the danger of collapse.

This process was exemplified by the response of the Federal Reserve and Central Banks to the COVID-19 pandemic. The principal concern of governments was not saving lives but, rather, saving the financial markets and their ruling class investors.

As my comrade Nick Beams, who will be delivering greetings to this rally, has explained:

The wealth of the financial oligarchy is underpinned not by the creation of value through production, but by the continuous injection of fictitious capital into financial markets by the state.

In objective terms, the Trump administration’s assault on democracy signifies the violent realignment of political forms of rule in accordance with the class relations that exist in society. The White House floats atop a smelly dung heap of fraud. Trump, the crude huckster and maestro of swindle, is nothing but the personification of a criminal oligarchy.

But the American experience is not entirely unique. It is the most pronounced expression of the wave of political and social counterrevolution that is sweeping across all the major capitalist countries. Eighty years after the corpse of Mussolini was hung from his heels in Milano and Hitler ended his life by firing a bullet into his mouth, fascist parties and politicians are gaining strength in virtually all the advanced countries. This dangerous fact must be confronted. Any softening of reality, accompanied by a reassuring self-deception that the danger will

somehow pass and all will return to normal, serves only to clear the path for political catastrophe.

But acknowledging the fascist danger and the threat of world war does not mean accepting either as the inevitable outcome of the crisis of world capitalism. A very different outcome is possible. One should not underestimate the danger of fascism. But nor should one exaggerate it. Trump, in his intentions and personality, is a fascist. But he does not yet command, as Hitler did, a mass fascist movement. History teaches that the development and victory of such a mass reactionary movement depends upon the demoralization of the working class. But that is not the situation that prevails today.

It is true that during the first five years of this decade capitalist politics has acquired a ferociously reactionary character.

But alongside the growth of capitalist-imperialist reaction another countervailing process is underway—that of the growing social and political radicalization of the working class. This movement is strengthening on a world scale.

The same economic, social and political contradictions that drive the ruling elites toward fascism and war provide the impulse for the intensification of class struggle and social revolution. Remember, the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 was followed in February 1917 by the eruption of the Russian Revolution, which led to the conquest of power by the Bolsheviks in October 1917 and the establishment of the world's first workers' state. The Second World War unleashed the floodgates of mass revolutionary struggles by the working class and colonial masses that spread across the globe.

The same historical dialectic is at work today. The global crisis, developing on the basis of an obsolete capitalist system, allows for two potential resolutions—either the end of human society as a consequence of fascism and war or its renewal through socialist revolution.

Notwithstanding all the dangers that presently exist, and without underestimating the immense destructive resources and capabilities of the ruling class, the potential for social revolution is greater today than at any time in history. The power of the working class, in an objective sense, is at its apogee. The disintegration of the nation-state system has drastically eroded the historical foundation of capitalist rule. But the globalization of production has vastly expanded the physical size and potential economic power of the international working class.

In just the last 30 years, the global proletariat has grown by more than 1 billion people. The size of the proletariat has surged in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the advanced countries the process of proletarianization has absorbed occupations that were previously defined as petty bourgeois, or middle class. Over 60 percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, including many in formerly middle-class roles. Even higher-paid workers now derive virtually all income from wages. In the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt remarked cynically that he would prevent revolution by making the United States a nation of homeowners. But during the past 45 years, working class home ownership has declined precipitously, from 65 percent to 35 percent.

The once-fabled “Land of Unlimited Opportunity” has become the land of unpayable debt. US household debt now stands at \$17.5 trillion, of which mortgages account for \$12.4 trillion, car loans \$1.6 trillion, credit card debt \$1.1 trillion and personal loans \$600 billion. As for students, just starting out in life, they carry a debt burden of \$1.7 trillion. On average, 43 million present or former students owe \$37,000. Many graduate students owe much more.

But these statistics, however significant as indicators of social distress, are not by themselves the decisive propellant of socialist revolution. The process of globalization, ruinous for the nation-state system, unifies the working class. The global commodity chains can be transformed into global networks for consciously directed revolutionary action.

Moreover, we are presently living amid one of one of the greatest

scientific revolutions in history. The advances in communications, a by-product of this revolution, has placed at the disposal of the working class extraordinary means for planning, organizing and directing its struggles on a global scale.

Yet another powerful weapon is now available for utilization by the working class. The development of the artificial intelligence technologies make possible an exponential increase in the ability of the working class to access information and knowledge. Of course, the ruling elites seek to use these technologies in the interest of the profit system.

But AI opens up hitherto unimaginable possibilities for the education and political enlightenment of the masses. The appeal to workers in the historic anthem of the socialist movement, “The Internationale,”—“Away with all your superstitions”—has acquired a powerful means for its realization. When he observed the first detonation of an atomic bomb in July 1945, the physicist Robert Oppenheimer recalled a passage from Hindu scripture, “Now I am become death, the destroyer of Worlds.” With the development of AI, which can be more aptly characterized as “Exponentially Expanded Human Intelligence” technology—to the extent that it penetrates and influences the political practice of the masses—becomes an ally of the working class in the destruction of capitalism.

But technology by itself cannot bring about the socialist revolution. For the working class to impose its socialist solution to the crisis of world capitalism, it must solve the crisis of revolutionary leadership. It must break free from the control of pro-capitalist political parties and trade union bureaucracies that do everything in their power to suppress the class struggle.

Above all, the working class must repudiate all varieties of reactionary nationalism. The call for the unity of the international working class is not a utopian pipedream. It is the essential and only realistic foundation of revolutionary strategy in the modern world.

Fifty years ago this month, the Vietnamese workers and peasants celebrated May Day 1975 by entering Saigon and overthrowing the puppet government of the United States. It was a massive defeat for American imperialism. But the revolution was isolated by the nationalist policies of the Stalinist bureaucracies in Moscow and Beijing. Despite all the sacrifices of 30 years of struggle, the national isolation led to the restoration of capitalism and the degradation of Vietnam into a source of cheap labor.

This historical experience is yet another demonstration that there are for the working class no national solutions to the global contradictions of imperialism. The claim that a multi-polar alliance of national states represents an alternative to the hegemony of US imperialism is a delusion. What is required is not a new strategic alliance of national states arrayed against the US and Western Europe, but the abolition of the nation-state system and capitalist ownership of the means of production.

We have entered a period of the greatest revolutionary struggles in world history, upon which the fate of humanity depends. There is no point wasting time speculating as to whether the working class is revolutionary or whether socialism is possible. Marx wrote in his *Theses on Feuerbach* that debates over the reality or non-reality of thinking, apart from practice, are meaningless. Debates over the possibility of stopping war, defeating fascism and establishing socialism, separated from participation in the class struggle, are utterly useless. The attainability of socialism will be shown in practice.

The history of the last century demonstrated the possibility of socialist revolution. But it also proved that victory depends upon the building of a Marxist-Trotskyist leadership in the working class. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties are dedicated to the fulfillment of this task.

On this critical May Day, we call upon all those who are participating in this world-wide rally to join our world party and fight for the victory of

socialism.



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