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The Challenge of May Day 2022: For the International Unity of the Working Class against Capitalism, National Chauvinism and War!

The war that erupted on February 24, 2022 is an event of world historic significance. As in all major conflicts, the question of “who fired the first shot” is of entirely secondary significance. The reckless, incompetent and desperate character of the Russian invasion of Ukraine exposes the politically bankrupt and reactionary character of the Putin regime, but it does not explain the deeper causes of the war.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine has long been foreseen. The relentless expansion of NATO in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union has always been directed toward war with Russia. The overthrow in February 2014 of the government led by Viktor Yanukovich, in a coup organized and financed by the United States, was an undisguised attempt to bring Ukraine into the orbit of NATO and convert it into a launching pad for a future war against Russia. As the International Committee of the Fourth International explained at its May Day rally in 2014:

The purpose of this coup was to bring to power a regime that would place Ukraine under the direct control of US and German imperialism. The plotters in Washington and Berlin understood that this coup would lead to a confrontation with Russia. Indeed, far from seeking to avoid a confrontation, both Germany and the United States believe that a clash with Russia is required for the realization of their far-reaching geopolitical interests.

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This war, instigated by the US-NATO forces, has now begun. The overwhelming majority of those who have been rendered homeless, suffered injuries, or even been killed bear no responsibility for the policies and decisions that led to war. But the suffering of the innocent victims is being cynically exploited not only to block the exposure of the political and economic interests that led to war, but also to foment the required level of anti-Russia hatred that is necessary for the escalation of the conflict.

According to the propaganda organs of American and European imperialism, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has shocked the conscience of the world, which—so the story goes—had been living blissfully in peace until the Kremlin launched its entirely unprovoked attack against its blameless neighbor.

What a colossal and hypocritical lie! For the past thirty years, the United States has been continuously at war, instigating conflicts all over the world. The United States—often with the direct support of its NATO underlings—has bombed and/or invaded countries in Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans and, of course, the Caribbean.

Even if one were to accept as true all the claims made by the Biden administration and a corrupt American media that regurgitates the daily talking points with which it is fed by the Central Intelligence Agency, the Ukrainian loss of life, both civilian and military, is several orders of magnitude below the number of deaths attributable to the wars waged by the United States. According to *The United States of War*, by David Vine, a professor of anthropology at American University:

An estimated 755,000 to 786,000 civilians and combatants, on all sides, have died in just Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, and Yemen since U.S. forces began fighting in those countries. That figure is around fifty times larger than the number of U.S. dead.

But that's only the number of combatants and civilians who have died in combat. Many more have died as a result of disease, hunger, and malnutrition caused by the wars and the destruction of health care systems, employment, sanitation, and other local infrastructure. While these deaths are still being calculated and debated by researchers, the total could reach a minimum of 3 million – around two hundred times the number of U.S. dead. An estimate of 4 million deaths may be a more accurate, although still conservative, figure.

Meanwhile, entire neighborhoods, cities, and societies have been shattered by the U.S.-led wars. The total number of injured and traumatized extends into the tens of millions. In Afghanistan, surveys have indicated that two-thirds of the population may have mental health problems, with half suffering from anxiety and one in five from PTSD. By 2007 in Iraq, 28 percent of young people were malnourished, half living in Baghdad had witnessed a major traumatic event, and nearly one-third had PTSD diagnoses. As of 2019, more than 10 million have likely been displaced from their homes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya alone, becoming refugees abroad or internally displaced people within their countries.

Alongside the human damage, the financial costs of the post-2001 U.S.-led wars are so large, they're nearly incomprehensible. As of late 2020 U.S. taxpayers already have spent or should expect to eventually spend a minimum of \$6.4 trillion on the post-2001 wars, including future veterans' benefits and interest payments on the money borrowed to pay for the wars. The actual costs are likely to run hundreds of billions or trillions more, depending on when these seemingly endless wars actually end. [pp xvii-xix]

In fact, there is no end in sight. Biden's announcement in April 2021 that he was ending the "forever war" in Afghanistan was a cynical cover for the strategic redeployment of American military forces for direct conflict with Russia and China.

All the wars of the last three decades have been justified with blatant lies—of which the claim that Iraq possessed "weapons of mass destruction" is only the most notorious—and in direct violation of international law.

At the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial of 1946, the Nazi leaders were tried and convicted on the charge of "crimes against peace," which consisted of waging war as an instrument of state policy, rather than in response to an immediate or imminent threat of military attack. The wars of American imperialism fall within the criminal category of crimes against peace—that is, wars launched and waged in pursuit of political objectives.

The historical and global political context of the global rampage of American imperialism is profoundly relevant to an understanding of the present war.

The dissolution of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and, finally, the USSR between 1989 and 1991 removed even the limited restraints that had been placed on the exercise of American military power in the aftermath of World War II. As President George Herbert Walker Bush proclaimed as he launched the first war against Iraq in 1991—with the support of Mikhail Gorbachev as the Soviet Union entered the final stage of dissolution and capitalist restoration—the United States was determined to create a “new world order.”

This project was driven by powerful objective economic and geostrategic imperatives. Contrary to the post-1991 narratives, which portray the United States as the inevitable and triumphant victor in the Cold War, the decades that preceded the dissolution of the USSR had been a period of accelerating American decline.

The global economic supremacy exercised by the United States in 1945 had substantially deteriorated during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The foundation of American world economic dominance—the convertibility of the dollar into gold at the rate of \$35 to an ounce that had been established at the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944—became unsustainable as US trade balances deteriorated. It was repudiated unilaterally by the United States in August 1971.

The deterioration of the global economic position was exacerbated by militant eruptions of domestic class struggle, of which the mass movement of the black working class for civil rights was a powerful expression. At the same time, the bloody effort of American imperialism to suppress the anti-colonial movement of the masses throughout the world—most brutally in Vietnam—led to the radicalization of broad sections of student youth and the emergence of an immense anti-war movement.

The years between 1960 and 1990 in the United States were characterized by political instability and social polarization. Urban riots, mass protest movements, political assassinations and violent and protracted strikes were the major features of the American reality between 1960 and 1990.

Developing parallel to the crisis of American imperialism was that of the Stalinist regime within the USSR. There is no question but that the Soviet Union, having emerged victorious—albeit at a staggering human cost—over Nazi Germany, made substantial

advances in the aftermath of World War II. But the fundamental and inescapable paradox of the Soviet Union was that the growth and increasing complexity of its economy intensified the crisis of the entire Stalinist system, which was based on the nationalist program of “socialism in one country.”

Notwithstanding the impressive growth rates realized by the Soviet Union in the two decades following the war, the conception of a national path to socialism was contradicted by the objective reality of the world market and the international division of labor. The imbalances and low level of productivity that plagued the Soviet economy exemplified in the most extreme form the contradiction, affecting all countries, between the world economy and the nation-state system.

The development of the Soviet economy required access to the resources of the global economy. But access could be achieved only in one of two ways: 1) through the abandonment of the planning principle, the reintroduction of capitalism, and the dissolution of the USSR and integration of its component parts into the world capitalist system; or 2) the conquest of power by the working class, above all, in the advanced capitalist countries, and, on this basis, the tearing down of national borders and the development of scientifically guided democratic economic planning on a global scale.

The latter alternative was impossible within the framework of the Stalinist regime. The nationalist policy of the Soviet Union was inextricably rooted in the material interests of the Kremlin bureaucracy. Its systematic abuse of power was the means by which it maintained its privileged access to the resources of the Soviet Union. The Kremlin viewed with horror the emergence, within the USSR and internationally, of a revolutionary working class movement that threatened its hold on power.

Stalin’s death in 1953 generated illusions that the Kremlin regime would institute wide-ranging reforms that would realize the renewal of socialism in the USSR and its triumph internationally. This repudiation of Trotsky’s insistence on the counterrevolutionary character of Stalinism and the necessity of a political revolution was the theoretical and political hallmark of Pabliste revisionism.

But the brutal Soviet response to the uprising in East Germany in 1953 and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the massacre of workers in Novocherkassk in 1962, and the invasion

of Czechoslovakia in 1968 demonstrated in blood that the Kremlin bureaucracy would not tolerate a revolutionary socialist challenge to its rule.

When it became clear—especially in the course of the Polish solidarity movement in 1980-81 (which initially had genuine revolutionary potential)—that the movement against the bureaucracy could not be suppressed, the Kremlin began to actively pursue the counterrevolutionary solution to the systemic crisis of the Soviet economy: that is, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism.

The selection of Gorbachev as party leader in 1985 and the introduction of perestroika marked the beginning of the final climactic stage of the Stalinist counterrevolution against the October Revolution.

An essential element of Gorbachev's policy was the explicit repudiation of even formal identification of the Soviet Union with the class struggle and opposition to imperialism. In 1989, in a book titled *Perestroika versus Socialism*, the International Committee explained:

The distinctive features of the new Soviet foreign policy are the unconditional repudiation of international socialism as a long-term goal of Soviet policy, the renunciation of any political solidarity between the Soviet Union and anti-imperialist struggles throughout the world, and the explicit rejection of the class struggle as a relevant factor in the formulation of foreign policy. The changes in Soviet foreign policy are inseparably bound up with the on-going integration of the economy into the structure of world capitalism. The economic goals of the Kremlin require that the Soviet Union emphatically and unconditionally renounce any lingering association between its foreign policy and the class struggle and anti-imperialism in any form. It was for this reason that Gorbachev chose the United Nations as the forum for his declaration, in December 1988, that the October Revolution of 1917, like the French Revolution of 1789, belongs to another historical era and is irrelevant to the modern world.

Articles appear regularly in the Soviet press denouncing the foreign policy of previous Kremlin leaders, not for their betrayal of the interests of the international proletariat, but for having been far too hostile to the United States. To the extent that Soviet foreign policy reflected any antagonism toward imperialism, it is ridiculed as a form of political

irrationalism. The outbreak of the Cold War is now attributed not to imperialist aggression, but to the USSR's adherence to a dogmatic anti-capitalist ideology.

The fundamental counterrevolutionary Stalinist revision of Marxism—the claim that socialism could be constructed within a national framework—was replaced by the Gorbachev regime with the no less fraudulent and ignorant argument that Russia, once it had abandoned its socialist pretensions, would be showered with riches and peacefully integrated into the structures of the world capitalist system. Russia had nothing to fear from imperialism, which was dismissed as an ideological concoction of Marxism. Among those who argued most vociferously along these lines was a young apparatchik in the Soviet bureaucracy, Andrei Kozyrev. He wrote in 1989:

If one takes a look at the United States' monopolist bourgeoisie as a whole, very few of its groups, and none of the main ones, are connected with militarism. There is no longer any need to talk, for instance, about a military struggle for markets or raw materials, or for the division and redivision of the world.

Rereading these words today, amidst the catastrophe of the US-NATO war against Russia, one cannot help but be astonished by the level of deceit and self-delusion that reigned within the Soviet bureaucracy and nomenklatura as they recklessly smashed up the USSR. But the deceit and self-delusion arose from the material interests of the bureaucracy as it sought to transform itself from a *privileged caste* into a *ruling class*. As for Kozyrev, he went on to become Minister of Foreign Affairs under Yeltsin, functioning as an agent *ex officio* of American imperialism.

The United States viewed the dissolution of the Soviet Union as an historic opportunity to exploit its undoubted military supremacy to offset its protracted economic decline. It would utilize the “unipolar moment”—the absence of any credible military competitor—to establish the unchallengeable global hegemony of the United States.

But this project has proven more difficult than the White House and Pentagon strategists expected. The wars instigated by the United States have met with humiliating failure. None of the strategic objectives of the United States were achieved by the bloody conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia. Moreover, while the US was bogged down in its

“forever wars,” China emerged as a major economic and potentially military competitor of the United States.

The striving for hegemony has been further undermined by a series of devastating economic crises. The Wall Street crash of 2008 brought the entire world capitalist system to the brink of collapse, prevented only by a desperate bailout requiring the injection of trillions of dollars into the financial system. But without solving the underlying problems that led to the 2008 crash, an even greater bailout was required in 2020 to stop yet another market crash that had been triggered by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic, which has resulted in one million deaths in the United States and approximately 20 million worldwide, has exposed the dysfunctionality of the capitalist system, which is incapable of responding in any progressive way to a major social crisis. In this respect, there is no fundamental difference between the regimes in Washington and Moscow. The gangrenous ulcers in American society—the most unequal in the world—have brought the entire political system to the point of breakdown. On January 6, 2021, the existing constitutional structure of the United States was nearly overthrown in a fascistic putsch organized by the president of the United States. While it arrogantly postures as the leader of the “Free World,” the survival of even the pretense of democracy in the United States is, as Biden himself recently admitted, in doubt.

Far from retreating, in the face of past failures, from its campaign for global hegemony, the United States is being driven to ever more extreme and dangerous actions. In fact, the severity of its internal maladies has become a major factor impelling the United States toward measures that were previously ruled out as unthinkable, including the use of nuclear weapons.

Why has the United States, using Ukraine as a proxy, instigated this war against Russia? Lenin analyzed the First World War as an attempt of the imperialist powers to redivide the world. This definition is a basic starting point for understanding why the United States, leading an alliance of NATO imperialist powers, is waging war against Russia. In the present context, the redivision of the world means placing the vast expanse of Russia, the largest country, under direct imperialist control.

To the extent that the Soviet Union retained even formal identification with socialism and opposition to imperialism, its dissolution removed what was viewed as a challenge to the ideological and economic legitimacy of the world capitalist system dominated by the United States. The post-1991 regime opened the Russian economy to foreign capitalist investment. But the Russian state still sprawled over the globally strategic expanse of Eurasia. Moreover, the Russian oligarchs who acquired control over the national economy were able to limit the access of US and European imperialism to the resources of Russia.

For the project of US hegemony to be achieved, unlimited access to the strategic resources of Russia and control of its territory are critical aims in two respects.

First, the actual wealth of Russia's resources is estimated in the tens of trillions of dollars. In addition to the monetary value of these metals and minerals, many of these resources are classified as strategic materials, essential to advanced twenty-first century industrial economies.

Russia is a virtual treasure trove of valuable natural resources, with vast—and in some cases among the largest—reserves of oil, natural gas, timber, copper, diamonds, gold, silver, platinum, zinc, bauxite, nickel, tin, mercury, manganese, chromium, tungsten, titanium, and phosphates. Approximately one-sixth of the world's iron ore deposits are located in the Kursk Magnetic Anomaly, close to the border of Ukraine. Other rare metals that exist in substantial quantities in Russia are cobalt, molybdenum, palladium, rhodium, ruthenium, iridium and osmium. Russia is also a major source of uranium and rare earths. The latter have become a major source of global geopolitical competition.

The fact that there is an intense conflict over access to these critical resources is well known to experts in global geostrategy. But discussion of raw materials and control over the wealth of Russia does not make its way into the mass broadcast, online and print media, which prefer to have the public believe that American and European imperialism are waging a noble and disinterested struggle on behalf of Ukrainian democracy, even if that requires, however regrettably, arming the fascists of the Azov Battalion.

Second, physical control of Russian territory is vital for what Washington views as the inevitable showdown with China. When the time for open warfare comes, the defense of

the Uighurs against China's "genocidal" persecution will be invoked as the allegation of Russia's "genocide" of Ukrainians is invoked today.

No doubt, emphasis on the significance of raw materials as a major factor in the instigation of war against Russia will be derided as an example of "vulgar Marxism." Be that as it may, in his study of imperialism Lenin placed immense emphasis on the struggle of imperialist powers to secure control of sources of raw material. He wrote: "The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate the struggle for the acquisition of colonies."

Lenin connected the drive to obtain access and control of raw materials to the seizure of territory and stressed, as an essential element of imperialism, the significance of annexations.

Of course, there are many forms in which territorial control can be secured, short of open annexation, which may allow the imperialists to sustain the mirage of independence of the subjected country. But the mirage will not be the reality. US imperialism and its NATO allies expect that the ultimate outcome of the conflict—however protracted—will be the destruction of Russia in its present form.

The shift to a highly aggressive policy was reported by the *Washington Post* on April 16:

Nearly two months into Vladimir Putin's brutal assault on Ukraine, the Biden administration and its European allies have begun planning for a far different world, in which they no longer try to coexist and cooperate with Russia, but actively seek to isolate and weaken it as a matter of long-term strategy.

At NATO and the European Union, and at the State Department, the Pentagon and allied ministries, blueprints are being drawn up to enshrine new policies across virtually every aspect of the West's posture toward Moscow, from defense and finance to trade and international diplomacy. ("U.S., allies plan for long-term isolation of Russia")

What are the strategic implications of abandoning efforts "to coexist and cooperate with Russia"? If the United States and its NATO allies believe that it is not possible to "coexist" with Russia, the conclusion that follows is that they are determined to destroy it.

The “different world” that the imperialist powers envision—and for which they are prepared to risk nuclear war and the lives of hundreds of millions in the process—is one in which Russia does not exist in its present form.

The war in Ukraine now fully reveals the catastrophic consequences of the Stalinist betrayal of the October Revolution. This betrayal began with the repudiation of the program of socialist internationalism upon which Lenin and Trotsky based the conquest of power by the working class in October 1917 and the subsequent establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922. The anti-Marxist program of “socialism in one country,” unveiled by Stalin in 1924, fomented the resurgence of Great Russian chauvinism that undermined the unity of the socialist republics and strengthened reactionary, anti-Soviet, and openly fascistic elements, especially in Ukraine—a nation, brutally oppressed under tsarism, from which had emerged many of the greatest leaders of the revolutionary workers’ movement, including Leon Trotsky.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was the culmination of the Stalinist counterrevolution. The Russian, Ukrainian and international working class, now confronted with its consequences, must draw from this immense historical experience necessary political lessons.

In a letter to a Russian socialist posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* on April 2, the International Committee explained the principled basis of its opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, notwithstanding the instigation of the conflict by the United States. The Trotskyist movement, the letter stated, “does not base its strategy on the sort of pragmatic nationally grounded conceptions that determine the policies of the capitalist regime in Russia.” The letter continued:

The defense of the Russian masses against imperialism cannot be undertaken on the basis of bourgeois nation-state geopolitics. Rather, the struggle against imperialism requires the rebirth of the proletarian strategy of world socialist revolution. The Russian working class must repudiate the entire criminal enterprise of capitalist restoration, which has led to disaster, and re-establish its political, social and intellectual connection with its great revolutionary Leninist-Trotskyist heritage.

The program of socialist internationalism applies to the working class in all imperialist and capitalist countries.

The war in Ukraine is not an episode that will soon be resolved and followed by a return to “normalcy.” It is the beginning of a violent eruption of a global crisis that can be resolved only in one of two ways. The capitalist solution leads to nuclear war, though the word “solution” can hardly be rationally applied to what would amount to planetary suicide. Thus, the only viable response, from the standpoint of securing the future of mankind, is the world socialist revolution.

Inevitably, the question arises: Is the latter alternative possible?

The answer is provided by an understanding of the contradictions of modern world capitalism. Lenin’s great insight, which he developed between 1914 and 1916, was that the socioeconomic contradictions that gave rise to the world war also provided the impulse for world socialist revolution. This insight was substantiated in the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917.

In the present crisis, Lenin’s conception—further developed by Trotsky and the Fourth International—is being substantiated in the rapid escalation of the class struggle throughout the world. The reckless measures taken by the United States and its NATO allies to isolate Russia have immensely exacerbated the already far advanced economic and social crises that afflict every capitalist regime. Mass demonstrations and strikes are sweeping across the globe. The working class and oppressed masses will not accept impoverishment and starvation in the interests of the imperialist ruling elites’ criminally insane pursuit of world domination.

As Trotsky explained, the strategy of the Fourth International is based not on the war map but on the map of the global class struggle.

The celebration of May Day 2022 must be dedicated to the unification of the international working class in a global struggle against imperialist war and its root cause, the capitalist system.

The strategy and program upon which the International Committee of the Fourth International will develop this historic movement will be the subject of the online rally that will be held on Sunday, May 1.

To register for the International May Day Online Rally, fill out the form below or visit wsws.org/mayday for more information.

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