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Meeting of the ICFI and IYSSE resolves to build global movement of young people against imperialist war

On Sunday, October 9, representatives of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a meeting to begin organizing a global movement of young people against the US-NATO war with Russia over Ukraine.

Representatives from 11 different countries participated in the meeting, including members of the IYSSE in the United States, Turkey, the UK, France, Germany, Canada, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Australia and New Zealand. Particularly significant was the presence of members of the Young Guard of the Bolshevik-Leninists, an organization in Russia that has declared its political support for the ICFI. The meeting was conducted in both English and Russian, with all contributions translated into the two languages.

The meeting voted unanimously to take immediate steps toward building an antiwar movement among students and youth, including holding an online global webinar next month. The meeting also resolved to deepen the international organizational connections of the IYSSE, the student and youth movement of the ICFI.

In opening the meeting, David North, the national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, said its purpose was to “set into motion a world antiwar movement against the conflict in Ukraine, instigated by the imperialist powers but for which the regime of Putin as well bears immense responsibility.”

The ICFI, North explained, understands the conflict in Ukraine as “the beginning of a third world war.”

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“Whatever the events that immediately triggered the conflict,” he said, “its essential aim is the subordination of Russia to US imperialism, its integration into the bloc of the US and NATO allies, and is, in that sense, the antechamber of war with China. In World War II, Germany’s slogan was ‘Today Russia, then the world.’ Today, the slogan of American imperialism is ‘Today Russia, tomorrow China and the world.’”

The meeting was held as the conflict over Ukraine threatens to develop into a nuclear war. The leaders of the major imperialist powers have made clear, however, that the warnings from the Putin government that it could use nuclear weapons in response to a series of defeats will not deter them from escalating the confrontation and defeating Russia militarily.

“It cannot be overemphasized,” North said, “that the willingness of the American ruling class to accept the deaths of over one million Americans from COVID-19, not to mention millions more internationally, is of the greatest social, political and historical significance. A ruling class whose slogan in response to the pandemic is ‘live with the virus’ is a ruling class that can also raise the slogan, ‘live with nuclear war.’ Both positions are socially and politically insane. But capitalism has degenerated into the realm of social and political insanity.”

For the ICFI, North emphasized, the central question in the fight against imperialist war is the mobilization of the international working class, based on a socialist perspective. However, this does not diminish the need for the building of a mass, international and socialist movement of youth and students.

“When we consider the present situation and the extreme danger of war,” he said, “what it means very directly is that the youth of the world are threatened with the loss of their right to a future. The reality of modern-day capitalism and imperialism not only threatens youth with poverty and disease but also their very right to life, because that is the reality of the consequences of nuclear war.”

The building of an antiwar movement among young people on the campuses is particularly important, North said, because “the defense of imperialism, the justification of imperialist war, finds reactionary expression in the ideologies promoted on the universities, in the form of the many brands of pseudo-leftism.

“But the essential orientation of that fight, if it is to be successful, must be towards building a movement of the working class based on a revolutionary and socialist program. The youth on their own cannot defeat imperialism.”

The opening report was followed by contributions from many of those attending.

Gregor, a leading member of the IYSSE in Germany, said that the experiences of working class youth are very similar throughout the world. “Young workers face the prospect of nuclear war, poverty, climate catastrophes, dictatorships and a deepening social and political crisis,” he said. “At the same time, young workers and working class youth are internationally connected with each other as never before, and this globally integrated character of working class youth must find an organizational expression.”

Evrin, a leading member of the IYSSE in Australia, reviewed the efforts to block the building of the IYSSE on campuses, in the context of the broader attack on democratic rights by the ruling class. He stressed the global character of the IYSSE and the need for international organization. “The ‘I’ in IYSSE is there for a reason,” he said. “We stress to students that we are an international movement.”

Tom Scripps, the assistant national secretary of the SEP in the UK, said, “Particularly on the universities we encounter efforts to turn young people away from class as the essential category. They have been cut off from the tradition of socialist internationalism, which is now urgently raised by the war.” The organizations of the upper middle class, he said, promoted “identity politics in opposition to international working class solidarity.”

Comrade Andrei, a representative of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, gave a statement explaining how the group of young socialists in Russia initiated contact with the ICFI and came to agree with its political perspective and analysis of the role of Stalinism.

“Inasmuch as our organization is a Trotskyist youth organization, the most important next step will be our integration with the IYSSE, the youth organization of the ICFI,” he said. Integration into the work of the IYSSE will be critical in “building the influence of the ICFI in Russia, Ukraine and throughout the former Soviet Union.”

Ulaş Ateşçi, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Group in Turkey, reviewed the evolution of the middle class left, from its involvement in the antiwar movement of the '60s and '70s into open supporters of imperialism today.

“The massive global antiwar movement before the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was demobilized by the middle class tendencies,” he said. “Since then, the main function of the pseudo-left internationally has been to legitimize imperialist war, especially the wars against Libya and Syria, and now the war against Russia over Ukraine. Today, the majority of pseudo-left tendencies and trade unions internationally are the main supporters of the imperialist campaign against Russia.”

Kapila, IYSSE convener and member of the political committee of the SEP in Sri Lanka, said that the impact of the war in Ukraine, two years of the pandemic, and cuts in

education, health care and other basic social services are common to all countries. He explained, “These conditions expose the bankruptcy of the nationalist programs of the capitalist governments and other nationalist organizations.”

He noted that the ruling classes in South Asia, including in Sri Lanka, are aligned with international finance capital and the imperialist war, while the pseudo-left organizations that have led protests of young people and workers work to channel opposition behind the political establishment.

Tomas Castanheira, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Group in Brazil, reviewed the experiences of previous youth movements in that country. Through the influence of Stalinism and Pabloism these movements were used as tools to subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie. “Today, under the perspective of the ICFI, the youth in Brazil will orient themselves to the working class but with a new, revolutionary and socialist perspective,” he said.

Clara Weiss, a leading member of the IYSSE in the United States, stressed that the present war is the outcome of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, “both in terms of the eruption of US imperialism and in terms of the reactionary response of the oligarchic regimes that emerged out of the Soviet Union.”

She noted that an entire generation of young people in Asia, Africa, the former Soviet Union and in the centers of world imperialism confront the disastrous consequences of capitalism and the social counterrevolution that followed the dissolution of the USSR. “At the same time, young people have been cut off from the history of the working class movement by the attacks on Marxism and the promotion of all kinds of reactionary ideologies and historical falsification,” she said.

“There is no tendency outside of our movement that opposes this war, opposes capitalism from a socialist standpoint and can speak of the history of the Trotskyist movement and the Marxist struggle against war and Stalinism.”

In concluding the meeting, David North emphasized the significance of the discussion and the broad representation of speakers from throughout the world. “More important than the quantitative representation of speakers and countries,” however, “is the qualitative unified perspective rooted in the entire history of the Trotskyist movement.”

“In this war,” he said, “we are confronting the unsolved problems of the 20th century, and we understand that if these problems are not solved in the years immediately before us, it will mean the end of human civilization.

“That is why the question we are posing is so critical: ‘The youth, if they are to have a future, will have to fight for it, and that fight has as its content the fight for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism.’”

At the same time, he said, the building of a movement of young people against war must be based on opposition to “all the reactionary currents that have, in one way or another, claimed to represent the youth: Stalinism, Pabloism, social democracy, bourgeois nationalism, infinite forms of contemporary identity politics, and even the hypocrisy of various forms of pacifism, which oppose war in times of peace and oppose peace in times of war.”

Another tendency that must be opposed, he said, “is the infection of pessimism, the belief that change is impossible, an outlook that is encouraged by all the tendencies to which I referred. Our party is the party of optimism and therefore the party of the future. The future can be won, but young people must fight for it and fight for it on the basis of a correct historical perspective. All of history demonstrates that revolution is possible, capitalism can be overthrown, but the great problem is the development of leadership in the working class.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* will publish in the coming days details on the upcoming meeting organized by the IYSSE. We encourage all students and youth to join the IYSSE today and help build a movement against imperialist war.

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