

AURORA



May Day Statement:

Down with Nationalism and War: Workers Have No Country!

Yet again, May Day — the day of workers' international solidarity — sees millions more lives tormented and lost in war. From Ukraine to Congo via the Middle East, the Red Sea, Sudan and beyond: the escalation of violence cannot simply be put down to a surge in nasty political regimes. War is a knock-on from capitalism's economic crisis — a crisis which is deepening and increasing the threat of a new world war.

Economic crisis fuels nationalism and war

Global capitalism may be in mortal crisis, but it will not die a natural death. Falling profit rates are making it increasingly difficult for capital to find productive investment outlets. At first the easiest way out seemed to be to set the printing presses going and flee into financial speculation. However, the bursting of the financial bubble in 2007/8 brought further weakening of the productive base. So the worldwide crisis only got worse, bringing with it the progressive rise of intra-imperialist conflicts.

Against this backdrop, the capitalists are trying to solve their profitability problems by pushing down the price they pay for labour power, i.e. wages. At the same time, social benefits are being pared down and drastic spending cuts in education, healthcare and pensions are being enforced. Clearly the aim is to make workers pay for capitalism's crises.

Furthermore, workers all over the world face a merciless under-bidding contest where production is relocated to places with significantly lower labour costs, more lenient tax systems and where particularly tough anti-strike laws are a magnet.

When these measures are not enough, and they are not enough, the continuation of the now systemic crisis in all latitudes leads to the devastating and violent recourse to war. Initially war is waged by proxy, with the

imperialist powers pulling the strings behind the scenes. Finance and weapons are provided and lofty promises of future aid are made, which, if they are honoured at all, come at an immense price for those who receive them. The outcome is a world where imperialism is continuously fuelling or igniting more wars. It is a dynamic that is difficult to control and almost impossible to contain, bringing with it the increasing danger of a direct military confrontation between the great powers. Thus a scenario where imperialist players such as Iran, China, the United States and the European Union openly confront each other in a generalised war is becoming increasingly likely.

Against all nationalist ideologies!

In these circumstances, talk about the self-determination of peoples, of wars of national liberation, of the independence of peoples is a dangerous illusion. An illusion which feeds the competing nationalisms of Hamas and Israel. An illusion which encourages the idea that the Houthi dynasty has political and economic autonomy when it buys Iranian guns with Qatari money — just like the conflicting nationalist claims in the war in Ukraine. In their different ways they are all useful supporting actors, tools to be used in proxy wars, if not as victims destined for massacre.

It is impossible to contribute to the resurgence of revolutionary internationalism by taking sides in imperialist wars. One cannot fight against war by taking part in it, whatever the pretext or justification. On the contrary, the first task of internationalist political organisations is to liberate the working class from the thousand tentacles of the national bourgeoisies and international imperialism. This requires the rejection of all forms of nationalism and all wars and the defence of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism. Anything else amounts to counter-revolutionary politics and the preservation of the "status quo".

The terrible cruelty of capitalism's wars spares hardly anyone. But for the eventual "winner" there is the prospect of eliminating market competitors and appropriating their territories, all useful for a modern economy in deep crisis. It means more oil and gas, thus slowing down an urgently needed ecological transformation. It means a battle for lithium and "rare earths". It means an attempt to raise the rate of profit and finally it means the destruction of capital assets and value enabling the accumulation cycle to start anew. Whether this takes place with or without nuclear bombs will depend on the current war situations in Ukraine and Gaza, where the ongoing massacre and the crisis in the Red Sea are already threatening the possible expansion of the war to the rest of the Middle East and beyond. The new scramble for Africa, and the Chinese and US manoeuvres in the Pacific will not be limited to military moves by their proxies forever.

The future that imperialism is preparing for us is a future full of destruction, death and cruel barbarism never seen before. Who will pay the price?

The working class and the war

The answer is obvious: those who have to go to war under the banner of their own bourgeoisie or their imperialist allies. The civilian population that is literally decimated by the inhuman bombing that destroys everything and spares nothing. Those desperately trying to escape poverty and fleeing the consequences of climate change and the devastation of imperialist proxy wars.

The one force that can oppose the danger of more generalised war is that of the exploited, the international proletariat, the huge masses of dispossessed brought about by the crisis of capitalism. These wage slaves produce the social wealth of every country with their labour power, but get only a few crumbs in return.

This force, exploited in peacetime and cannon fodder in wartime, can be the most powerful antidote to imperialist war, provided it acts as a class on its own terrain against capitalism, its crises and its militarism. But to do so, it must first free itself from the dominance of the ideology of the ruling class. Wars are caused by the crises of capitalists, but they are fought by proletarians following ruling class ideologies. These range from the defence or export of "democracy", the defence of "national interests" to "universal" religious principles that must be enforced by force. Not to mention all the old and new racist and homophobic ideologies that idealise war as an instrument for "purifying the nation".

The ideological armoury of the bourgeoisie to make the proletariat identify with its interests, is richly stocked, especially in war. For these reasons, it is essential that the class produces an international political organisation with its own tactics and strategy. The nature of imperialism and its deadly actions are international. That is why we need an international party, a new International, which unites all our forces for a single goal: the struggle against capitalism in all its economic and social manifestations. The path to it is paved with pitfalls and not all of them are a direct product of bourgeois reaction.

There is no "right side" in imperialist war!

First of all, it is obvious that quite a few "left" forces, especially those that claim to be "revolutionary" and "internationalist", are themselves caught up in the bourgeois ideology that is reproduced by capitalism on a daily basis. They try to choose "the right side" or even support a supposedly "lesser evil" in every war. For example, reference is often made to Russia's excessive military power in order to take a stance in the interests of Ukraine's "defence of the

fatherland". Others refer to the military potential of NATO in order to call for the "defence of Russia". And why defend a political formation that is the product of jihadist, fascist nationalism like Hamas? All these positions are based on a logic that is as simple as it is reactionary: In imperialist conflicts, "the lesser", the "semi-colonial country" or "the nation state under attack" must be defended, depending on terminological taste, in order to be "in the right" according to the ideas of bourgeois morality. Such positions trample the suffering of the victims of war underfoot and are the purest poison for the proletariat's struggle for freedom!

Imperialism is "not the work of any one or a few states, it is the product of a certain degree of maturity in the further development of capital, an inherently international phenomenon, an indivisible whole that can only be recognised in all its interrelationships and from which no individual state is able to escape." (Rosa Luxemburg). The decisive criterion is to determine which class is waging the war. The tragic common feature of every imperialist war is the bloody clash of the exploited on both sides. On both sides, people die for "their own bourgeoisie", for interests that are not their own!

No War but the Class War!

For this reason, we as the ICT support the No War but the Class War initiative to defend the fundamental internationalist principles within our class. Principles that have been forgotten or, worse, distorted by the political heirs of the degenerated Third International and large sections of anarchism. The gravity of the situation — the danger of a generalised war — forces internationalists to this form of cooperation. We must act in a class that has been driven onto the defensive by a century of Stalinist counter-revolution, decades of upheaval and political-social attacks by the international bourgeoisie. Despite the systematic deterioration of its working and living conditions, our class has so far not reacted, or reacted only inadequately, to the attacks of the bourgeoisie. Only the awakening of this "sleeping giant" can ensure that the political message of the internationalists does not remain a lonely cry in the desert. Only the resumption of the generalised class struggle will enable the political maturation and strengthening of the internationalist forces, leading to the formation of the indispensable political instrument for the revolutionary overcoming of the capitalist system: **the international party of the proletarian revolution.**

For a full version of the 2024 May Day Statement of the Internationalist Communist Tendency see leftcom.org

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The Problem is the System, Not Who Runs It!

As global tensions mount, the working class is paying the price at home. Last year the highest number of firms in 30 years went bust. Others are scaling back or shifting production elsewhere. From universities to high street names like Wilko, to major local employers like Port Talbot steelworks, thousands have lost jobs. Meanwhile, as the national minimum wage reaches its 25th birthday and trails behind inflation, dependence on benefits and food banks is soaring among employed and unemployed workers alike.

The underfunded NHS is at near collapse with both Tories and Labour all but openly acceding to privatisation. Its staff overwhelmed, overworked, under-equipped and underpaid, they are wholly unable to cope as waiting times in A&E and excess deaths continue to climb. It is the same sorry, penny-pinching tale for housing, social care and education. Homelessness is soaring, while the price of housing relative to earnings is the highest for almost 150 years.

Small wonder that substance addiction, depression and anxiety are wreaking destruction on working class communities, with suicides mounting as more people find less reason to go on living.

But the one cause the ruling class can find funds for is the drive to war. UK arms spending this year is at a record £25bn high. The UK already supplies arms and military 'advisers' to Ukraine and is now openly acting as a US poodle in the Middle East. As more conflicts break out and capitalism moves "from a post-war to a pre-war world",

sections of the ruling class are considering conscription. Hence a marked surge in advertising for the army aimed at the working class.

Electoral Pantomime

This is the backdrop for our rulers to prepare their ritual farce. Our role is to tick a box and then go home. With the last



election little more than a hazy pre-pandemic memory, we have had three Prime Ministers in as many years as the Tories lurch from one scandal to another. Now even by their own standards, they appear to have lost credibility as responsible custodians of the British state.

Meanwhile Labour is gearing up to campaign on a Tory-lite programme which we will be implored to vote for by the unions and Labour hangers-on, on the grounds that we must choose the "lesser evil". Others will urge us to vote for smaller parties like the

Greens or independent candidates offering their own particular brands of watered-down social democracy.

None of these options have any solution for the root problem – capitalism itself. Any appeal to vote for one option only feeds the illusion that we can get somewhere by playing the bosses' game. Working class

class derives its profit. It is in this capacity that we hold the power to pose the question of how society is organised.

Recently the UK saw the biggest strike wave in decades. Yet, the majority of strikes ended with little to show for the months of wages lost. As the movement has dwindled it is clear that the victors here were not the workers but the unions, which again shows their vital role as a pressure valve.

To exercise the true extent of our power as a class, we must look beyond the unions and parties like Labour to a new vision of the world where monstrous class-divided society no longer exists. We need our own political organisation, ultimately an international one, to guide the struggle against our common enemy: the owners of the means of production worldwide.

We'll need to overcome divisions of union membership, industry, national origin, racial and sexual identity. Our quarrel is not with one another, but with our common enemy: the ruling class, the owners of the means of production. They exploit our labour power for their profits and expect us to fight each other to the death on their behalf when their competition reaches its climax. But through our common struggle we can bring an end to their rotten system, and in its place build a society whose motive force is not profit but the fulfilment of human needs. A society without money, without national boundaries, without classes "wherein the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". If you share this vision get in touch.

power is not found in the ballot box, but built in workplaces, communities and manifested in the streets.

Working Class Response

Workers will have to take matters into their own hands. Our strength comes not only from our numbers but from our role in society: we are the class that produces and distributes all the goods and provides all the services on which the whole of capitalist society is based. It is our labour that creates the surplus value from which the capitalist

Fifty Years On: Imperial Typewriters Strike

On May Day 1974 a group of thirty to forty, mainly women workers out of around 1,600 employees at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester joined the May Day workers rally. It was not then a Bank Holiday. Nor was this a ritual walk-out by a bunch of trade union stalwarts.

Though the majority of the workforce were in the TGWU (forerunner of Unite), it certainly was not sanctioned by the union whose local branch officer was a particularly nasty racist. Women made up the majority of the workforce in Imperial's two factories in Leicester, most were not white and around two thirds were of south Asian origin, including those expelled from East Africa. Equal Pay Act notwithstanding, they were paid substantially lower bonuses than the minority of their white 'co-workers'. Sometimes bonuses were not paid at all. This was the immediate trigger for the walk-out which became a three month marathon strike-cum-lockout.

With inflation mounting and at a post-war record of around 20%, wages were falling way behind the cost of living. Unsurprisingly 1974 also saw the highest number of strikes since the beginning of the post-war boom.

What reason not to strike? Or at least down tools and join the May Day procession. The workers from Imperial Typewriters were joined by 300 more from British United Shoe Machinery; 300 from the Bentley car works and 200 from the local General Electric Company. Most returned to work but the majority of those from Imperial came back out on 3 May and brought a further 500 workers with them. Inevitably, given the divide and rule management, the strikers' demands went beyond the non-payment and under-payment of bonuses.

"The dissenting workers began to leaflet outside the factory for a strike on Friday May 3 after rejecting the solution

proposed by the shop stewards' committee... spokesperson for the strike committee, Hasmukh Khetani, wrote to the TGWU regional secretary, Brian Mathers, to outline their consolidated demands: more transparent and democratic elections of shop stewards (without manipulation by incumbents), a properly regulated wages system without overwork and bonus cheating, and the equality of opportunity for all workers." (The Imperial Typewriters Strike, 1974, Ron Ramdin)

Hasmukh Khetani and N.C. Patel were their unofficial leaders as the shop stewards refused to represent them. The local full-time official, George Bromley: long-standing member of the Leicester Labour Party, magistrate and an outright racist said:

"The workers have not followed the proper disputes procedure ...This is not an isolated incident, these things will continue for many years to come. But in a civilised society, the majority view will prevail. Some people must learn how things are done..."

The strikers insisted on black and white unity in their first strike bulletin:

"There is one thing we wish to make clear. We do not see our strike as only for the benefit of Black workers. What we fight for is the general interests of the whole working class in Britain. ... we have a common destiny as workers, ... against our common enemy—the bosses—who are only interested in making profits out of us."

Despite sackings and no strike pay, around 400 strikers persisted in battling on their own account. It would be another 6 weeks or so before the strike ended with promises of pay increases, the right to promotion, no victimisation, and so on.

A victory but there was no happy ending here. Shortly after the strike the owners announced their intention to close both of the Leicester works, as well as a plant in Hull.

The Leicester strike has gone down in

labour history as the forerunner of the two year Grunwick struggle of "strikers in saris": a step forward in race relations, equal pay and for more enlightened trade unionism.

However, to win a world of truly emancipated human beings, there are different lessons to be learned. The first is that workers must keep control of their own struggle: Don't call in the union which will only try to put a lid on things. Instead hold regular assemblies of the whole workforce/strike force. Obviously, not every struggle has the potential to turn into a class-wide, mass movement, but every experience of real struggle is a step in the right direction.

In the 1970s the cyclical capitalist crisis of

low profit rates was kicking in. It was a situation which required, and still requires, a class-wide response and a political struggle to achieve the overthrow of capitalism and its iniquitous wages system. The World Economic Forum estimates that at the current rate of progress, it will take 132 years until women world wide get equal pay, never mind the wider measures needed to make for equality for women. Meanwhile capitalist wars and capitalist destruction of the environment, and capitalist exploitation of workers' labour power, continue apace. We haven't got 132 years for a spurious gender equality. The solution is staring us in the face.

What We Stand For

Aurora is published by the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO).

The CWO is part of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), which stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers' councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: we call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world working class political organisation – a 'party' for want of a better word – not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power.

We are not in competition with other organisations but seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

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