

DOWN WITH NATIONALISM AND WAR: WORKERS HAVE NO COUNTRY!



Another 1 May in the midst of bombs and massacres. Another 1 May, when the threat of a new global carnage becomes ever more real. A carnage that eclipses even the darkest dystopian nightmare and threatens survival on planet Earth. From the Ukraine to the Middle East and the Red Sea, from the Congo to Sudan...: Everywhere, armed conflicts are on the rise and with them the suffering of the people. This escalation of violence is by no means simply due to the ill will of individual politicians or states, as pacifists on all sides claim; it is the logical consequence of a crisis-ridden capitalist system that is forcing "our" rulers into militaristic attack mode.

The crisis is fuelling nationalism and war

Global capitalism may be in a deep crisis, but it will not die a natural death. The tendency towards crisis manifests itself in the fact that it is finding it increasingly difficult to utilise capital for productive investment due to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. The first and easiest way out seemed to be to start the printing press and flee into financial speculation. Ultimately, however, this only made the original problems worse. The bursting of the financial bubbles resulted in a further weakening of the productive base. This deepening crisis has been reflected in a progressive escalation of intra-imperialist conflicts.

Against this backdrop, capital is trying to increase exploitation by pushing down the cost of labour power, the direct wage, as far as possible. At the same time, social benefits are being cut and drastic cuts in education, healthcare and pensions are being enforced. The absolute and essential aim is to make wage earners pay for the crises of capital by curbing or reducing deferred and indirect wages.

Furthermore, the working class worldwide faces merciless competition as capital and production are relocated to places where labour costs are significantly lower and where more favourable tax systems and, last but not least, particularly tough anti-strike laws are attractive for capital investment.

If 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, a war is waged by proxy, with the imperialist powers pulling the strings behind the scenes. Financial resources and weapons are made available 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 result is a dynamic in which imperialism con-

tinuously fuels or ignites wars. A dynamic that is difficult to control and almost impossible to contain, and which brings with it the permanent danger of a direct military confrontation between the great powers. A scenario in which imperialist players such as Iran, China, the United States, Russia and the European Union openly confront each other in a generalised war seems increasingly likely.

War in capitalism leads to terrible cruelty that spares hardly anyone. But for the eventual "winner" there is the prospect of eliminating market competitors and appropriating their territories, which are useful for the production needs of a modern economy in structural crisis. It means more oil and gas, while an urgently needed ecological transformation is only barely getting underway. It means a battle for lithium and "rare earths". It means an attempt to increase 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 terrible slaughter unleashed by Hamas' 7 October 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.

Only one force can oppose the danger of an even more destructive war than all previous ones. This force is that of the exploited, the international proletariat, the huge masses of dispossessed brought about by the crisis of capitalism. It is these wage slaves who produce the social wealth of every country with their labour power, from which they only receive a few crumbs back with difficulty. It is those who, unemployed or "underemployed", try to survive somehow on the fringes of a society that is determined down

to the last sphere by the dictates of the capitalist drive for profit.

This force, which is exploited in peacetime and used as cannon fodder in wartime, can be the most powerful antidote to imperialist war, provided it acts as a class that fights against capitalism, its crises and its militarism on its own terrain. 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 capital. They are waged by the bourgeoisie to defend its political and economic interests. But they are fought by proletarians who are subject to the ideologies of the ruling class. Ideologies that 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, with which it seeks to make the proletariat identify with its interests, is richly stocked, especially when it comes to 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.

This is no easy task and, like any perspective of historical significance, faces many obstacles. The path 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. In view of the ongoing wars in Ukraine, Palestine, the Red Sea, etc., they are really floundering as they try to choose "the right side" or even support a supposedly "lesser evil". For example, reference is often made to Russia's excessive military power in order to support the interests of Ukraine's "defence of the fatherland". Others refer to the military power of NATO in order to call for the "defence of Russia". Similarly, the military superiority of Saudi Arabia over the Houthis or Israel over Hamas is used as an argument to more or less "critically" support the latter. Where does one get the idea, for example, of wanting to defend a 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 proletarian struggle for freedom!

Imperialist policy "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) Furthermore, in imperialist conflicts,

states that are completely on the same level in terms of their economic and military development rarely face each other, which in some respects is also a cause of war. 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!

Against any nationalist ideology!

Against this backdrop, any talk of the "right of peoples to self-determination", "wars of national liberation" or the "independence of nations" is a reactionary abstraction into which the currently "woke" ideas of Hamas as an alleged "anti-colonial movement" or the Houthis as an "anti-imperialist force" fit. The interests of the proletariat cannot be defended by leaving the fate of wage earners in the hands of the bourgeoisie, whether they are jihadists or secular forces. 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".

No War but the Class War!

For this reason, we as the ICT have launched the initiative No War but the Class War 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 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.



Unions don't give you the time of day!

A vital and necessary point around which the class struggle has been fought throughout the history of capitalism is the reduction of the working day. May 1st, International Workers' Day itself was established as part of the workers' movement's push for an 8 hour working day. This demand has by no means diminished over time. In 2022, rail workers in the US nearly went on strike over 24/7 on-call status. This year, home care workers in New York went on hunger strike to protest 24-hour working days, often back-to-back shifts in a single week. Around 40% of the workers in the industry are unionized under 1199 SEIU, a branch of the US's second-largest union. The union's response to the 24-hour shift? All is working as intended!

The homecare workers in New York, most being migrants hired through agencies, are forced into 24hr shifts, of which only 13 hours are paid as the rest are supposedly reserved for sleep and meals. However, this means little when the homecare workers' patients typically demand constant attention and check-ins. The obvious result? Rampant insomnia and heinous physical degradation.

The overworked, underpaid homecare workers are told by both their bosses and their union that the 24hr shift must continue. The union, SEIU, has testified against the workers in an official hearing, claiming that the entire industry would collapse without them being worked to the bone. Instead, the union has claimed a great victory by winning a few minutes of pay out of the 11 unpaid hours of the shift! This stance is just another example of how unions have become tools of the state, bound legally and institutionally to the oppression of the working class.

Despite unions' posturing that they have the workers' best interests in mind, the true role of unions is to negotiate the sale of labor-power on behalf of the capitalists. Any promises given to workers of improved working conditions are almost always a farce. Capitalism is in a period of deep crisis, and the unions' role, if they are to remain legally recognized, is to enforce the losses of capital onto the workers. Negotiations take place in the place of strikes, as a strike would inhibit the functioning of the workplace or industry. Strikes themselves have been converted into a bargaining tool instead of a means of struggle. Workers are expected to be grateful for any measly rise in wages or improvement in working conditions, despite these "gains" most often being in effect a loss compared to inflation. This does not only sabotage the real defensive demands of our class; it simultaneously takes the struggle out of its hands and divides it sectorally.

The state of the homecare workers is

only one example of a wider, international assault on workers unleashed by the capitalist crisis. The working day has extended through means like gig work, work itself has sped up, rent and evictions have skyrocketed, and inflated prices have sapped away at real wages. In face of a serious decline of profitability,

the capitalists are making the working class pay for an economic system bound by massive contradictions. The permanent, legally recognized bodies for negotiating wages, A.K.A. unions are therefore compelled to enforce these worsening conditions on workers. Something other than a "unionize and pray" approach must be done.

The working class can rely on neither the popular reformers of electoral politics, nor the pragmatic negotiators of the union sphere, to achieve its goals. The struggle must be taken into the hands of the workers themselves through their real self-organization outside of the union. Whether it takes the form of independent strike committees or mass assemblies, a self-

organized struggle would allow for us to struggle as a single class, not bound by legalities or by trade. If workers are attacked as a class, it's necessary that it fights back as one.

The struggle for the reduction of the working day or higher wages must be linked to the overall political struggle against the wage system itself. This struggle demands a revolutionary class party that fights to connect the immediate struggle to the ultimate aim of abolishing capitalism. Through the working class' forceful seizure of power from the capitalists, a new system of production based on human need (and with plenty of free time!) rather than accumulation and profit, can emerge.

Sunday, May 19th at 3:30 p.m.
876 Riverside Dr, New York, NY 10032

The Internationalist Workers' Group Presents...

The Role of Women in the Class Struggle

Join us as we discuss women's liberation
and the historical and modern role that women
have played in the class struggle. Open to all!



Contact us:
Insta: @iwg.official
Facebook: @iwgusa
Twitter: @iwgofficial
us@leftcom.org

Who We Are

"The IWG 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 organizations 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 organization - 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, the majority of the world's population, is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system, it will have to unite and overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites."

The Internationalist Workers' Group is the US affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency.

For more information about our organization and answers to frequently answered questions: <https://www.leftcom.org/en/about-us>

Publication and Contact Info

Internationalist Notes, Volume 1, Number 8, Spring 2024
Address all correspondence to:
Email: us@leftcom.org
Webpage: leftcom.org
Instagram: @iwg.official
Twitter: @IWGofficial
Facebook: @iwgusa
Scan our QR Code to access our webpage:

