

Imperialist war, the working-class upsurge in the Mideast and North Africa, and the strategy of Permanent Revolution

By Keith Jones
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On Saturday, May 4, the International Committee of the Fourth International held the 2019 International May Day Online Rally, the sixth annual online May Day Rally held by the ICFI, the world Trotskyist movement. The rally heard speeches on different aspects of the world crisis of capitalism, and the struggles of the international working class, from 12 leading members of the world party, and its sections and sympathizing organizations around the world.

On successive days, the World Socialist Web Site is publishing the texts of the speeches delivered at the rally. Below is the speech delivered by Keith Jones, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada). On Monday, the WSWS published the opening report to the rally, given by David North, the chairman of the international editorial board of the WSWS and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US).

Central to the perspective and revolutionary strategy of the International Committee of the Fourth International is the recognition that the same systemic global capitalist breakdown that is impelling the imperialist powers to aggression and war is fueling social revolution.

In the Middle East and North Africa this combined process is palpable.

No part of the world has been more ravaged by the wars that US imperialism has led and fomented, since George W. Bush first proclaimed that Washington was establishing a “new world order” in the wake of the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union.

There is not the time to catalogue all the horrors US imperialism has perpetrated in the Middle East and North Africa over the past three decades, in the name of “human rights” and the “war on terror.” But given Washington’s vendetta against Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, it is appropriate to note that the people of the Middle East—and above all Iraq—were the victims of many of the most important and chilling of the Pentagon and CIA crimes exposed by WikiLeaks.

Through its endless aggression and wars, US imperialism has torn asunder complex societies and razed entire states in the Middle East and North Africa—think Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and I could go on—resulting in millions of deaths and rendering tens of millions homeless and stateless. The expenditure of vast

amounts of “blood and treasure,” to use Obama’s expression, in establishing unbridled US domination over the world’s principal oil-exporting regions, is also bound up with social devastation in America.

Yet these wars have manifestly failed to arrest the erosion of US economic and global power.

Nonetheless, US imperialism—concentrating within itself all the decadence, parasitism and criminality of an outmoded social order—can’t help itself. It is preparing for new and expanded wars in the Middle East, although it well recognizes that the next crap shot threatens to ignite a regional or even world war.

US imperialism is intensifying its campaign, through illegal unilateral sanctions, to crash the Iranian economy and precipitate “regime change;” it is lavishing arms on Saudi Arabia and providing crucial logistical and military support to Riyadh’s assault on Yemen; it is fanning Israeli aggression, giving legal recognition to Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights; and US military forces continue to control large swathes of eastern Syria, including its major oil fields, so as to strangle Syria economically and prepare fresh aggression.

The European imperialist powers are no less predatory. They too are patrons of the House of Saud and the bloody Sisi dictatorship in Egypt, and they too defend the Zionist state’s brutal subjugation of the Palestinian people to the hilt. Their differences with Washington—the Europeans have, for example, argued for a more aggressive western imperialist intervention in Syria, while opposing Washington’s economic war on Iran—are the differences of rival gangsters over the division of the spoils.

But the Middle East and North Africa are not just ravaged by imperialist war aggression. They are also being convulsed by the resurgence of global class struggle. The working class is striving to assert its interests in a region that is characterized by massive social inequality and brutal state violence—and this is true of Israel as much as of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The 2011 NATO war on Libya, and the deployment by the US of Al Qaeda aligned Islamists against the Syrian regime, were imperialism’s response—or a key element in its response—to the Arab Spring: to the initial upsurge in class struggle engendered by the 2008 global economic crisis, above all, the working class-led uprisings that chased from power the imperialist clients, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia.

Since 2018, there has been a fresh wave of working class struggle across the region. This includes strikes and mass protests in Iran, public sector strikes in Israel, mass teacher strikes in Tunisia and Morocco, and months of mass protests in Sudan, which caused the army, fearing revolution, to oust the dictator al-Bashir, who had himself seized power in a 1989 military coup.

Of especial significance are the developments in Algeria, where a venal imperialist-backed regime, which has for decades looted the country's wealth, is attempting a cosmetic makeover by retiring the long-term president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in the face of mass working class-led unrest.

The upsurge of the working class in Algeria and across the region raises crucial questions of revolutionary perspective and strategy—above all the necessity of politically arming the working class with the program of Permanent Revolution. The democratic and social aspirations of the masses—from the eradication of landlordism, and the establishment of genuine equality, among working people of all ethnicities and religions, to freedom from imperialism, will only be realized through socialist revolution. The working class in every country must forge its political independence, rally the toilers behind it in struggle against imperialism and all factions of the national bourgeoisie, and for workers' power, and unite and coordinate its struggle with those of workers across the region and around the world.

Here the lessons of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution are pivotal. It was the working class that drove Mubarak from power. But the revolution was subsequently derailed. Forces like the pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists worked systematically to tie the working class to the Egyptian bourgeoisie and its state, by urging support for a “democratic transition,” led first by the purportedly progressive section of the military, then Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood, and finally the Tamarod, which boosted Sisi as a democrat, thereby blazing the path for the military's return to power.

Similarly, in Algeria today, pseudo-left groups like the Pabloite Socialist Workers Party (PST) are seeking to forestall revolution and subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie and imperialism by championing the call for a Constituent Assembly, that is, a reshuffling of the personnel of the current regime under cover of flowery constitutional promises.

To prevent this trap from being sprung, the most class conscious workers and youth must fight for the building of Workers' Committees of Action, independent of the government and its allied trade unions, to coordinate opposition to military-police repression and austerity, and as the future organs of workers' state power, which will, above all, build a revolutionary Marxist party that will guide the struggle for the political independence of the working class and for socialism.

Invariably, those political forces that demand, in the name of democracy, that the working class be subordinated to the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie are tied politically and materially to imperialism.

Take the example of Turkey, where the comrades of the *Sosyalist E?itlik* are fighting to found a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. In the name of defending democracy against Erdogan's Islamist authoritarian regime, the

Turkish pseudo-left is supporting right-wing capitalist parties, oriented to NATO and the European Union—the Republican People's Party and the Peoples' Democratic Party. The former is the party of the traditional Kemalist capitalist ruling elite and is complicit in all its crimes, including bloody coups directed against the working class and the Turkish bourgeoisie's brutal 35-year counter-insurgency war against the Kurdish people. The latter is the political front of the Kurdish nationalist PKK, which, in the 1980s, launched armed struggle in the name of socialism. But, since 1991, it has oriented to imperialism, like such bourgeois national movements around the world. The PKK supported the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and its Syrian offshoot, the YPG, has served for the past four years as Washington's principal proxy army in Syria.

The travails of the people of the Middle East over the past century demonstrate that there can be no struggle for democracy outside the struggle against imperialism, the principal bastion of reaction in the Middle East; and there can be no struggle against imperialism outside the mobilization of the working class in the struggle for socialism.

In conclusion, workers around the world must oppose the US regime-change offensive against Iran and all of imperialism's predations in the Middle East and North Africa, and actively support the struggle of their class brothers and sisters across the region. The workers of North America and Europe have a special responsibility. In opposing war and developing the class struggle they will be striking a blow for the liberation of the masses of the Middle East—just as when the workers of Algeria rebel against that country's venal national bourgeois regime, they are striking blows against Macron and Trump.

This objective unity of the working class animates the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International and must find expression, in the coming period, in the development of sections of the Fourth International across the Middle East and North Africa.

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