

May Day 2016 and the future of socialism

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On Sunday, May 1, the International Committee of the Fourth International's third annual International May Day Online Rally attracted broad participation from workers and youth throughout the world. It was the only international event that presented to the working class a genuinely Marxist and socialist perspective in response to the spreading wave of imperialist violence that threatens the very future of humanity.

The rally was an expression of a significant growth in the political influence of the ICFI. The meeting was accessed by nearly 2,500 people, an increase of more than 40 percent over 2015. The number of countries where there were listeners increased from about 80 to 98. The size of the audience was also reflected in the large number of comments, nearly 750, submitted by listeners.

The response confirms other signs indicative of the growing political influence of the *World Socialist Web Site*. In February and March, according to Compete.com, the total number of unique individuals who accessed the site each month was close to a quarter million, significantly higher than the previous year.

Underlying this growth are significant objective factors. First, the past year was characterized by an enormous intensification of geopolitical conflict and a growing concern among workers and youth internationally over the danger of war. The "war on terror," which is approaching its 15th anniversary, is developing into a global battle between major powers, centered on the increasingly provocative efforts by the US to economically and militarily encircle Russia and China. The possibility of nuclear war is once again being openly discussed by government officials and geopolitical strategists.

Second, the lasting impact of the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent restructuring of class relations is finding expression in a growth of social militancy

that is acquiring a political dimension. In the United States, the center of world imperialism, the past year has been dominated politically by an election campaign that has seen a collapse in the authority of the old political parties and their traditional representatives. As David North, chairman of the WSWI International Editorial Board, noted in his opening report to the rally:

There are many signs of a growing anti-capitalist political radicalization of the working class and youth throughout the world. Perhaps the most significant is the fact that millions of American workers, in the recent series of primary elections, cast their vote for a candidate who had identified himself as a socialist. Of course, the "socialism" of Bernie Sanders is little more than warmed over liberalism. But Sanders attracted support not because of his political opportunism, but because he was perceived by workers to be advancing, to use his own words, a "political revolution" against social inequality.

Class struggle is emerging as a dominant factor in the political situation in every country. Over the past year, hundreds of thousands of workers and youth in France participated in protests against right-wing labor reforms and an anti-democratic "state of emergency" imposed by the Socialist Party government. Autoworkers in China and India have launched strikes against attacks on wages and working conditions. Throughout Europe, there is deep opposition to relentless austerity dictated by the banks.

Another element in the growth of the influence of the International Committee is the increasingly clear differentiation between genuine Marxism and the

politics of organizations that claim to be “left,” but in fact represent the interests of more privileged sections of the middle class. In Greece, Syriza rose to power in January of last year and rapidly repudiated all of its election promises. By the end of 2015, the “Coalition of the Radical Left” was implementing EU-backed austerity while serving as a front-line police force in the brutal attack on refugees throughout the continent. Based on the analysis of the WSWS, a section of workers and youth are beginning to draw conclusions from this experience.

There is still a vast gulf between the level of political consciousness and the dangers that confront the working class. The rally had an audience in the thousands, not yet in the hundreds of thousands or the millions. However, bigger numbers will come. The growing readership of the WSWS and the response to the May Day rally anticipate a much broader turn of workers throughout the world to genuine socialist politics.

Here, the question of political leadership is decisive. A socialist revolution develops out of the interaction between the objective movement of the working class and the intervention of the revolutionary party.

The most remarkable feature of the May Day rally was the unified and politically coherent perspective advanced by all of the speakers. Leaders of the ICFI from the US, UK, Germany, Sri Lanka and Australia delivered speeches (to be published on the WSWS over the next week) on some of the most important political issues confronting the international working class, including the consequences of a quarter century of virtually ceaseless war; the impact of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” on India, Australia and the entire Pacific region; the growth of German militarism, the crisis in Europe and the imperialist campaign against Russia; the Brexit campaign in the UK; the refugee crisis in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa; the consequences of US-China tensions for Latin America, and the political crisis in the United States.

The fight to unify the working class of all countries and build a political leadership for the emerging struggles against war, social inequality and the assault on democratic rights was a dominant theme in all the speeches. As Wije Dias, general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka, argued in his

remarks, “The crucial question is to arm the incipient rebellion of workers around the world with a program and perspective that articulates their objective interests as a global class and protagonist of a new social order, free of want and war.”

The ICFI proceeds with an immense degree of revolutionary optimism. The capitalist crisis produces not only war, it produces as well the conditions for socialist revolution. As David North put it in analyzing the political situation in the United States, “The basic narrative of American political exceptionalism—that the working class will never turn to socialism in the United States—has been refuted in practice. A new chapter in the history of the American class struggle is beginning. Socialism, suppressed for so long in the United States, is entering a period of explosive growth.”

This has the most far-reaching international implications. The growing support for socialism will develop not as a national, but as a global process.

One historical period is coming to an end and a new period is beginning. The quarter century of political confusion and disorientation created by Stalinism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, along with the right-wing shift of “left” politics, is giving way to a period of political radicalization and struggle.

The May Day rally was a significant event in the history of the ICFI and the fight to build an international movement of the working class and youth against imperialist war and the capitalist system. We record in the May Day rally this important milestone, while also recognizing the immense challenges ahead.



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