The world is facing a crisis of even greater severity than the Great Recession of 2008-10. The Ukraine War has opened a new period in which economic warfare, multiple disasters caused by climate change, an accelerating arms race and the effects of the pandemic are inflicting huge shocks on the world economy. Hunger, unemployment and mass movements of refugees fleeing war and poverty are stretching the resources of states, the United Nations and NGOs to breaking point.

Already the voices of austerity and fiscal retrenchment can be heard from economists and politicians. Inflation is slashing wages but also the necessary expenditures on health, social care and education, not to speak of the pledges of Earth Summits to address climate change.

The war launched by Russian imperialism on Ukraine in February 2022, the response by NATO and the G7 imperialists, unprecedented levels of arms supplies and wide-ranging economic sanctions, have together destabilised global food and fuel supplies, threatening millions with the collapse of their already basic living standards.

Ukraine, which in 2020 had the lowest GDP per capita in Europe, is projected to see its economy shrink by 35 percent, according to the World Bank. 14 million of its people have been displaced from their homes, 7.6 million have fled the country.

The homes, factories, hospitals, transport links, power stations and grid that have been destroyed will take years to rebuild. Though the war is immediately the responsibility of Vladimir Putin and his dictatorial regime trying to assert their great power status, the NATO powers have long been seeking to draw Ukraine into their sphere of influence, tempting it with EU and NATO accession. Ukraine is the victim of this inter-imperialist rivalry.

Since Ukraine is the source of much of the world?s wheat, corn and barley and an even larger portion of global fertiliser supply, the war and the blocking of supplies from Russia too, plus oil and gas supplies, have given an enormous boost to worldwide inflation. Ukraine is also a major source of wheat for the World Food Programme, which provides food assistance to 115.5 million people in more than 120 countries, threatening famine in parts of Africa already hit by drought, a result of climate change.

Hunger has often been the trigger of revolts and revolution. Food riots have led to waves of strikes and the collapse of governments as in Sri Lanka and Haiti.

The war and the global sanctions also divert resources needed to address the growing climate crisis, seen most acutely in the catastrophic floods in Pakistan, in drought and famine across Africa and increasingly disruptive weather events in Europe, Asia, Australia and North America. Then there is the enormous stress that the still-not-extinguished covid pandemic has placed on health services and economies alike, including China, whose annual GDP growth is forecast to fall to 3.2 percent in 2022.

The deep roots of today?s interlinked crises are found in the fundamental laws of capitalist economy. The factories, their skilled workforces, the means of production, logistics and communications, new and old, exist in abundance, as do
the scientific and technological means to address pandemics and climate change. The instruments for the global planning needed to fight it exist, too, within the multinational corporations and the giant banks but they are divided one from another by private ownership and ferocious competition. This contradiction was witnessed during the pandemic: on the one hand the rapid development of vaccines, on the other, the failure to distribute them equally to the populations of our planet. In Autumn 2022, 31 percent have yet to receive a single jab.

The fundamental cause of the system’s crisis lies in the massive overaccumulation of capital and falling rates of profit in all the imperialist centres of the world economy. Unable to realise profits from production at the same or greater rate than in the boom phase of globalisation, capitalism could only resolve its crisis by massive destruction of this excess capital. However, all the major imperialist players, the US, China, the European powers and Japan, avoided such destruction by defending their capital and its position on the world market. This not only leads towards protectionism and a fragmentation of the world market but raises the question whose capital will be destroyed, a question inseparably linked to the struggle for the re-division of the world.

Capitalism has developed into a global system of environmental imperialism. The exploitation of the semicolonial countries is systematically intensified, without regard to the ecological and social consequences, in order to increase the profits in the imperialist centres.

Climate change and environmental degradation can only be mitigated and reversed if control over production is removed from the hands of the large capital formations that have brought humanity to the brink of disaster. The many "environmentalist" movements that have arisen have to move beyond protest, beyond trying to persuade, or even force, capitalist governments to take the necessary action. Such governments will never expropriate capital on the scale necessary to ensure the reversal of the headlong rush to climate catastrophe. That is a task that requires the action of the working class of all countries, the taking of political power by the working masses.

Inter-imperialist rivalry

The League for the Fifth International has been warning that a new period of rivalry between the old imperialist powers and the new arrivals on the scene, now demanding their place in the sun, would turn into open conflict. The era of benevolent synergy between the US and China, that marked the 1990s and early 2000s and underpinned Washington’s claim to have created a new world order, is long gone. Now we see not only cutthroat competition, but trade wars, a cold war and proxy ?hot? wars.

However, beyond this looms the prospect of war between the great powers, with ?powder kegs? located in Eastern Europe, the Middle and Far East. New alliances are being launched (AUKUS) and old ones upgraded (NATO, the Quad). Huge weapon supplies to Ukraine have the open aim of humiliating Putin and bringing about his downfall, while displays of naval power in the seas around China give warning to Xi Jinping not to attempt a forcible incorporation of Taiwan.

The rulers in Washington, Berlin, Paris and London, but also in Beijing and Moscow, are playing with fire. The US's role as policeman of a ?world order? is turning into its opposite, that of a fire raiser.

Biden and Putin, both trying to prove their states are ?back? as ?great powers?, have no right to complain if they are imitated by ?strong men? in Delhi, Ankara, Brasilia, Jerusalem, Riyadh. The Middle East has long been a powder keg, in Iraq, Syria, Yemen. Wars have spread to the Horn of Africa with a brutal war raging in Tigray in 2022. Saudi-Arabia wages a murderous war in Yemen, Israel a permanent war against the Palestinians and Turkey gets a free hand to bombard the Kurdish region of Rojava or even prepare an invasion and occupation. In Russia?s would-be sphere of influence, fighting has flared in the Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and in Central Asia between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The despotic rulers of these territories seek to solve internal pressures by wars and ethnic cleansing such as tore apart Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Potential ?disturbers of the peace? are appearing in Europe, too, with right wing parties in
power in Hungary, Poland and potentially in Sweden, Italy or Spain. Globally, the list is growing.

A major achievement for the far right has been Donald Trump's capture of the Republican Party and its transformation into a right wing populist party. Already his Supreme Court is carrying out a reactionary agenda against women (repealing Roe v Wade) and, sooner or later, will be robbing people of colour of their hard won civil rights.

Behind these authoritarian leaders, the last decade has seen the growth of reactionary, often racist, mass movements, targeting minorities and capable of developing into full blown fascist movements in conditions of a deep and prolonged social crisis.

America's strategic rival, despite the conflict with Russia over Ukraine, is China. Its economic "rise" and emergence as a new imperialist power in the first decade of the new millennium inevitably led it to challenge the "unilateral" global hegemony of the United States and, under Xi Jinping, to openly lay claim to its own sphere of influence. This earned it the sympathy of states that had suffered under US "hegemonism" through the IMF and other instruments of US financial supremacy, not to speak of sanctions and blockades.

To prevent the establishment of a Chinese hegemony over Pacific states replacing the hegemony the US established after World War II, the US and its British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand allies are trying to create a NATO for the Pacific, seeking allies amongst the south-east Asia states, to add to their Japanese, South Korean and Taiwanese protected allies. The "ocean of peace" could well become a theatre of war in the next ten years.

At home, Xi's rough treatment of sections of the bourgeoisie (such as Jack Ma, founder of tech giant Alibaba) is a sign that sections of the big bourgeoisie are becoming resistant to his restrictive domestic policies. Globally, his more aggressive stance has generated a blowback from the US and Europe that also cramps their ambitions. A major contradiction is thus opening between the CCP state bureaucracy, which still has great economic power in the state capitalist sector as well as the People's Liberation Army, and the billionaire-led class of private capital. This contradiction can widen into open conflict, providing one component of a revolutionary situation - a ruling class that cannot continue to rule in the old way. There are also signs of discontent in the rural banking system.

If the working masses prove unwilling to go on in the old way, if the system cannot continue to give the improved living standards of the 1980s to the 2010s, this could lead to China's ?great leader? facing his own "perfect storm" within the vast country. The capitalist growth of the last decades necessarily produces capitalist crises. The fall of the average rate of profit and the over-accumulation of capital are pushing China towards an explosion. This is further exacerbated by the economic and social costs of the Zero Covid policy, which crippled large parts of the country, as well as by the crisis of the financial sector and a speculative bubble in the all-important construction sector.

For some years, conflicts and struggles have shaken workplaces and have repeatedly led to the formation of smaller worker activist networks. The massive and widespread protests against Xi's harsh zero covid policy have forced a humiliating climbdown only a month or so after his coronation at the CCP congress. The rash of protests across China's cities and the anti-Xi and anti-CCP slogans show that the supposed omnipotence of the surveillance regime will be subjected to major shocks in the coming years.

This can create the space for the creation of a new revolutionary workers' movement, indeed a party, that recognises its main enemy in Chinese imperialism and fights for a socialist revolution based on a programme of permanent revolution.

Resistance and its leadership

The Great Recession of 2008 triggered a wave of ?democratic revolutions? in the Middle East, in which workers' strikes, as in Egypt and Tunisia, played a decisive role in ousting the old dictators. But, because these failed to become ?permanent? in the sense of working class political leadership ending in workers' governments, even as democratic revolutions, they failed, allowing Islamist or military forces to come to power. The long US-led occupation of Afghanistan ended with a Saigon-like ?scuttle? by Western forces and those who feared retribution from the victorious Taliban. The real victims were the women of the country who saw their civil rights and access to education once more
Once again, the lesson for all progressive forces in the so-called Global South is not to place their trust, their human rights or their lives, in the hands of the democratic imperialisms. Equally, to believe that Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin and their imitators atop the regional powers, represent anti-imperialism is a delusion. The former’s belt and road investments, alongside Russia’s Wagner Group mercenaries show they are not interested in the development of the sovereignty of those they aid.

Nevertheless, the last half decade or so has seen revivals of working class struggles and those of the racially and sexually oppressed. In the USA, the Back Lives Matter movement has seen several waves, sparked by the outrages perpetrated by killer cops, notably the killing of George Floyd in 2020. Also there were the Me Too and Ne Una Menos movements against rape and sexual harassment.

The most inspiring example of women’s resistance is the months of mass protests Iran which followed the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini, a 22-year old, by the infamous morality police who enforce the dress code. The average age of the demonstrators was sixteen. As the protests spread, young women, ripped off their hijabs and cried, “women, freedom, life!” and “Death to the dictator!” Despite brutal repression and hundreds of deaths, with police Basij thugs using live ammunition, the movement continued through October, November and into December. In order to appease the masses, Attorney General Montazeri announced the morality police would be abolished and the law on compulsory wearing of the hijab reviewed. Through state media, the Interior Ministry denied this, indicating divisions within the regime.

Like the demonstrations in China against the covid lockdown regulations, which have caused the regime to relax them, this shows that even the most totalitarian regimes can be shaken by mass popular protests. To bring these regimes down, however, will require sustained mass action by workers, that is, a general strike, the winning over of the rank and file of the repressive forces combined with the formation of an alternative state power; organs of power of the working class and the oppressed.

In India, on 2 September 2016, an estimated 150 million to 180 million Indian public sector workers went on a 24-hour nationwide general strike. Another, on 26 November 2020, organised by ten trade unions, brought out 250 million workers.

Also, during the last year or so, signs of the recovery of resistance have reappeared in the old imperialist heartlands, in Europe and North America, in education and health services, as well as protests against anti-union and anti-strike laws like that threatened in Ontario, Canada this year. The United States, in particular, has seen a wave of strikes in factories, schools and logistics and union drives in the new online service sector corporations such as Amazon and the so-called gig economy.

Teacher strikes have become a major feature of US labour. 2018 and 2019 saw waves of mobilisations that won higher pay or other improvements for teachers in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma and West Virginia. Then came the celebrated Chicago teachers’ strike in March, 2022.

In the United Kingdom, the surge in inflation, which really took off in 2022, has given rise to a series of strikes on the railways and the postal service. Health workers’ unions are threatening what could be the first national nurses' and ambulance crews’ strike since the 1980s. In France, too, a series of cost-of-living protests by French unions and ongoing railworkers' actions herald an increased response to inflation and the attempt by bosses and governments to make the working classes and the poor pay the price of the system’s mounting crisis.

In August and September of the same year, mass actions, organised by Argentine trade unions of the CGT and leftist political parties, forced government and employers to raise wages and unemployment benefits after soaring prices, running at 70 percent per year and by 7.4 percent in July alone and a currency devaluation, further devalued wages. All of these disputes have seen a revival of rank and file militancy after a decade-long downturn in labour struggles. After the defeats, disappointments and betrayals, by new or renewed Social Democratic or left populist parties, such as
Syriza, Podemos, Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour and Die Linke, an oncoming and severe economic crisis is stimulating a trade union fightback right around the world. Important in this respect is the role that a genuinely class struggle trade unionism can play.

The question is can it become a decisive force to turn the mass of workers toward class struggle politics, towards new workers’ parties, as the Power Loom Workers’ Union in Faisalabad in Pakistan is trying to do? Political ideas, the idea of creating loud and proud class parties, independent of all bourgeois forces, armed with a revolutionary programme, can become a powerful addition to the effectiveness, across the whole fighting front, of workers and the struggles of the nationally, racially and gender oppressed, too.

For this reason, it is the duty of the revolutionary vanguard, both in the unions and in revolutionary organisations, to push for the idea of founding independent workers’ parties. This will include splitting the unions away from alliances with bourgeois parties, such as between the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO/Change to Win federations in the USA or, in Argentina, the need to break the CGT and other unions from their long subordination to the Peronist party.

On every front of struggle, however, the inadequacies and betrayals of the old leaderships in the unions and parties, and even the "spontaneous" movements, repeatedly hold us back. Social Democracy, Labourism, Stalinism, but also the new left populists and anarchists, continue to lead struggles to defeat. We need to fight for a clear revolutionary strategy and organisation, parties and class struggle unions and, at times of heightened economic or political struggle, for councils of delegates elected in the workplaces and communities. Even in these bodies a revolutionary party is essential for victory.

Class independence, militant action and rank and file democracy are essential in the coming period. They can help enormously the development of revolutionary parties internationally and a Fifth International.

No to Imperialist War

The war in Ukraine is the most dramatic expression of struggle for the re-division of the world. Revolutionaries condemn the reactionary attack and invasion of the country by Russian imperialism. We support the defence of the country against a takeover by Putin’s forces, the initial objective he declared, rejecting the country’s right to independent statehood and, indeed, its national existence, as well as against the lesser aim of partitioning it. But the imperialist friends of Ukraine are not supplying unprecedented quantities of weaponry, plus grants and loans, for such elementary democratic ends. Where Putin wishes to turn Ukraine, or part of it, into a Russian colony, Biden and European leaders seek to convert it into a semi-colony of the West, an advance guard of NATO. Putin wants to weaken and divide the EU and NATO, whereas Biden and Co want to cripple the Russian Federation as a great power and end its role as spoiler of their plans in countries like Syria or sub-Saharan Africa.

As well as a war of national defence against imperialism, Ukraine has taken centre stage in the current struggle for the re-division of the world. Despite the fact that NATO is not officially engaged in the war, the inter-imperialist conflict between Russia and the Western powers is a determining factor in this war, with the Western imperialists imposing economic sanctions of historic dimensions on Russia and arming and training the Ukraine to act as their proxy.

Therefore, revolutionaries must oppose NATO’s war aims, its sanctions, its rearmament drive and its expansion to hitherto neutral states like Sweden and Finland. Whilst we support the fight of Ukrainians to resist the Russian invasion, this in no way means support for the pro-Western Zelensky government or its ambition to join NATO or subordinate its economy to the EU as well as its struggle to impose its regime on Crimea, Luhansk or Donetsk, which have not democratically expressed the desire to be part of Ukraine (or of Russia, either). The people of these regions must have the right to self-determination without Russian or West Ukrainian occupiers coercing them or falsifying the results of referenda or elections.

Likewise, we must oppose the Western imperialist bloc’s policy of confrontation with Russian and Chinese imperialism, conducted under the false flag of democracy versus autocracy. This start of a new Cold War will drag
humanity ever-closer to a Third World War, which could easily be its last. The same principles would apply if China were to invade Taiwan. Xi Jinping and forces in the US Congress are both heading in this direction. It is vital to fight to prevent the labour movements, and anti-imperialist forces around the globe, from joining one or the other imperialist camp. Rather, we must seek links with the workers of Russia and China, as well as the workers and fighters for democracy in the many dictatorships allied with the Western camp.

Fight inflation, hunger and poverty!

Already, the global recession, which was synchronised by the pandemic, in 2020 and 2021, has led to massive impoverishment of the working class and the poor, in particular in the semi-colonial world. Even before the war in Ukraine, 800 million people suffered from hunger, millions are threatened with death from starvation.

And more is to come. Inflation, which never disappeared? in the global south, is back in the imperialist heartlands. The next global recession is already coming.

Billions of workers, peasants, the rural and urban poor were put on rations. In the semi-colonies, most of them had hardly any health protection or any state support during the pandemic, being forced to work in unsafe and extremely precarious conditions or to starve. Even in the imperialist countries, the masses faced significant losses of income, despite furlough allowances or other state protection schemes. At the same time, the large corporations and other sectors of capital were compensated with billions during the pandemic and now during the war and the sanctions.

Whilst the Western governments pledge support for those facing starvation, at the same time they impose drastic neoliberal conditions on semi-colonial countries, already faced with hyperinflation, currency crises and an ever greater debt burden.

We need a global movement of the working class and the poor to fight for an emergency programme for millions, to guarantee income, food, housing, electricity and health care for all. We fight for the cancellation of debt and austerity programmes imposed by the IMF or by the old and new imperialist powers.

We need to support and generalise struggles for wages to compensate for price rises. The struggle for a sliding scale of wages, social benefits and pensions will be key, a demand which must be linked to the demand for control of prices and wages by the working class.

In countries where price increases take the form of hyperinflation, which eats up wage increases almost daily or weekly, and where money itself loses value so rapidly that it can no longer perform its function as a means of payment, the struggle for wage adjustments is not enough. What is needed is not only price control committees, but direct intervention by workers and consumers in the distribution of vital goods for the people.

Given the global crisis, inflation and the attacks on jobs and conditions that we will face in the coming crisis, we must not fail to address the fundamental cause of the crisis; the private property concentrated in the hands of the capitalists. If we want to combat unemployment, social regression, scarcity, and hunger, if we want to reorganise society according to human needs and to create socially useful work for all, we need to expropriate the owners of big capital, their factories, large service companies, banks and financial houses, without compensation. Only on such a basis, can we free the resources needed for an emergency plan to address the needs of the millions facing starvation, hunger and extreme poverty.

Fight environmental catastrophe and environmental imperialism

The degradation and destruction of the environment and of natural resources continues unrestrained and is becoming more and more threatening. The increase in extreme weather events; unprecedentedly destructive and frequent storms; floods and forest fires; the increase in droughts; the melting of the ice caps and glaciers, which will lead to a rise in sea levels and threaten many regions or whole countries with inundation, all these are indications of the advance of climate change on Earth.
At the same time, the ruling classes of all countries prove completely incapable of addressing even the most burning and immediate questions as the COP27 proved once again. This is not surprising. The current increased global competition and the struggle for the re-division of the world, actually accelerate capitalism's tendency to destroy the natural foundations of human life. The exploitation in the semi-colonial countries is systematically intensified, without regard to the ecological and social consequences, in order to increase the profits in the imperialist centres. All the features of environmental imperialism as a global system face humanity as a whole with unpostponable tasks.

The global environmental movements, which rose in recent years, have time and again exposed the cynicism and hypocrisy of the world's leaders. Millions followed the calls for global climate strikes and marches, in which courageous activists aimed to enforce change by radical direct action.

Revolutionaries need to solidarise with those movements but, at the same time, they need to challenge the reformist, petit-bourgeois and anarchist ideas that dominate them. Protests, no matter how militant or disruptive, will not convince our rulers to take the measures needed if they threaten their profits or their dominance of their countries or weaken them against economic or military competition. We need to win the youth for a working class answer to the environmental crisis, workers' power and a planned economy. Young people need to challenge the complacency and passivity of the bureaucratic leaders of the trade unions and reformist parties and any subordination of measures needed to address the environmental question to the interests of capital.

Climate change and environmental degradation can only be mitigated and reversed if control over production is removed from the hands of the large capital formations that have brought humanity to the brink of disaster. Democratic control bodies consisting of employees, consumers, those affected by large-scale projects, young people fighting for their future, etc. must be formed and empowered to decide on projects, risk levels, threshold values, ecological measures, etc. Capital must be systematically confronted with social control with regard to the socio-ecological effects of its actions. Ultimately, only the socialist revolution will overcome the system of environmental imperialism and enable the planned optimal use of resources under the control of the majority worldwide.

In Summary

The deepening economic crisis, the climate catastrophe, together with the threat of a global war, testify to the fact that capitalism is a dying system. The decisive question is whether it will be overcome in time by a revolutionary upheaval, or whether humanity will tread the path to barbarism and social regression.

Already the voices of austerity and fiscal retrenchment can be heard from economists and politicians. Inflation is slashing not only wages but also the necessary expenditures on health, social care and education, not to speak of the pledges of Earth Summits to address climate change.

While billions live in poverty, a tiny minority live in unimaginable luxury. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of billionaires increased from 1810 to 2755. The investment decisions of these financiers and industrialists can bring entire countries to their knees. Just below the billionaires, hundreds of thousands of multi-millionaires live in shameless luxury at our expense while 852 million people go hungry, and more than 1000 children die from hunger-related causes every day.

In the emerging global movements of the oppressed, as well as in national upheavals, revolutionaries must always emphasise the need for a new International. In this we advocate a revolutionary programme from the beginning, without, however, making this a precondition for real steps towards uniting and to stand up to crises and wars in the here and now.

We call for all those fighting crisis, war and oppression to work towards the adoption of a common action programmes of urgent immediate and transitional demands, leading in the direction of world socialist revolution. We call upon all socialist, communist, Trotskyist currents who agree with this perspective, to join in seeking unity on an international programme for a revolutionary response to the oncoming attacks.
In country after country, wracked by the historic crisis of the system, we must organise to hurl capitalism into the abyss. Our principles are class independence, international solidarity and action, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism and opposition to all forms of social oppression. They must be embodied in a world party of social revolution, uniting all the heritage of the previous four internationals.

World Revolution, and nothing less, this must be the task of a Fifth International.

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