May Day 2017: Fight Back against Reaction, Racism and War

International Secretariat of the League for the Fifth International

The international working class has few victories to celebrate on May Day this year. Millions of workers and the oppressed will take to the streets but against a global background marked by mounting attacks and dangers.

Within his first one hundred days, US President Donald Trump, despite his election rhetoric against foreign military interventions, has bombed a Syrian regime airfield, dropped a MOAB (massive ordnance air blast) bomb in Afghanistan and threatened to strike North Korea if it continues with its nuclear weapons programme. He has also dropped any pretence of US support for worldwide action to tackle climate change and environmental degradation.

Far from there being any remission in the struggle for the re-division of the world being waged by the global powers, it is likely to hot up under Trump. The tensions in the South China Sea and over Korea, like those between Nato and Russia over Syria and Ukraine, are particularly dangerous because they could spark wars not only between the regional powers but even their imperialist sponsors.

Indeed with the advance of Nato to the borders of Russia, with Putin?s adventures in Syria, with Trump and Xi Jinping?s manoeuvres, the danger of global conflagration is greater than it has been for decades. At the same time, we see moves towards a dictatorial regime by Erdogan in Turkey and the strengthening of El Sisi?s dictatorship in Egypt, both with the explicit support of Trump and at best verbal grumblings from Europe.

The European Union has itself entered into such a deep crisis that its survival, at least in its present form, is being openly discussed for the first time in decades. The acute Greek crisis, Germany?s imposition of harsh terms, a general fiscal crisis and austerity all undermined the popularity of the European Union with its peoples and set the governments of the member states at one another?s throats. The Brexit vote opened the possibility of other ?exits? which the leaders of the union are now doing all they can to make impossible.

Around the world, right wing populist, racist and sometimes proto-fascist forces are advancing. This is as true for imperialist heartlands, such as France, as for the semi-colonial world, such as India under Narendra Modi. In Latin America, the capitalist élites, encouraged by the imperialists, have ousted or are trying to oust, left-wing populist or reformist governments. Trump?s victory also brought with it an unprecedented challenge to the dominant ideology of globalisation and neoliberalism. It threatens a neo-protectionism and a retreat from the world and regional multilateral trade agreements (TTIP, TPP, NAFTA) as well as trade wars with Mexico and China.

All these developments are combined with a massive global onslaught on the working class and the
oppressed; austerity and privatisations. Trump, Merkel, May, Temer or Putin, they have all implemented, or are implementing, attacks on the working classes in their own countries or on the masses in states plundered by imperialism for more than a century.

Crisis of leadership
During the last 10 years, since the outbreak of the global capitalist crisis, the working class and oppressed have mounted resistance. We have seen general strikes of millions, as in in Greece or India, and only yesterday we saw the tremendous strike against the Temer putschist government in Brazil.

We see huge strike movements in India and China and the emergence of new layers of the working class. In many cases, youth, women and other socially oppressed groups have been most under attack, but they have also been in the forefront of the resistance. In the US, two days after Trump’s Inauguration, we witnessed a massive outpouring of protest on the streets, which could signal the emergence of an anti-racist and anti-sexist mass movement against the most reactionary president for decades.

But, despite the determination and heroism of the working class and popular masses, 2016 was a year of defeats and a shift to the right globally, a shift that the Brexiteers in Britain expressed and exploited. Prime Minister May has triggered a general election at a time when the Labour Party is 20 per cent behind in the polls, hoping to decimate the party in parliament, provoke the ousting of the left leader Jeremy Corbyn, and give herself a huge majority in Parliament before the terms of Brexit, or its consequences, are known.

In France, the first round of the presidential elections saw the Socialist Party crushed, Jean-Luc Mélenchon clothing himself in patriotic populist colours and no labour movement party getting through to the second round. Voters have been left with a choice between the racist Le Pen and the neo-liberal Macron, a choice between protectionism and islamophobia, on the one hand, or privatisation and the slashing of labour rights, on the other.

The working class and the oppressed must reject that false choice, just as they must reject the reformist and left-populist leaders whose only strategy is to seek a ‘new deal’ with ruling class. On more than one occasion we have seen these leaders exhaust and weaken movements, like that in Greece, which had so much potential and which under a revolutionary leadership could have opened the way to working class power and the expropriation of the capitalist class.

In country after country, the politics of making concessions to the ruling classes and, ultimately, to imperialism, of failing to carry the revolutionary struggle through to its end, has led to reversal and defeat. We saw this in the Arab revolutions, which brought down austerity governments and dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and shook the imperialist order. The same pattern was clear in the series of general strikes in Greece, in the US-wide Occupy movement and later Black Lives Matter, in the Indignados and in other examples which challenged rampant inequality, exploitation and national and racial oppression.

In the Middle East, we have seen not only the continued heroic resistance of the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples but also the intervention of rival regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia) and their imperialist backers in the US, the EU and Russia into the Syrian civil war. Together with jihadi terrorists like ISIS, they have together reduced that country to bloody chaos, forcing millions of refugees to seek asylum in nearby countries, where refuge means a concentration camp, or to risk death crossing the sea only to be confronted by the walls and razor wire of fortress Europe.

In South Sudan, Somalia and sub-Saharan Africa, we have seen war, terrorism and imperialist interventions that have made it a region to rival the Middle East in terms of human suffering.
In the imperialist countries, what we have seen since the financial crash of 2008 is a massive weakening of the traditional parties and forces which have dominated the scene for decades. This reflects a breakdown of finance capital's hegemony over the petit bourgeoisie and the working class and those classes' search for a radical alternative, whether on the right or the left. Trump demagogically raised a mass movement and virtually forced himself upon an unwilling Republican establishment with a programme few of them wanted. Bernie Sanders nearly did the same thing with the Democrats. In Europe, the Spanish and French Socialist Parties are in what could become terminal crises.

New parties, like Syriza and Podemos and now Mélenchon’s France Insoumise, suddenly became serious contenders for government. The forces of the bourgeois centre have also been weakened as the opposing left and right poles strengthened. At first, it was the left that flourished but, after serious failures, it is now the right populists who are advancing. Nevertheless what is certain is that, despite the present reactionary conjuncture, we are in an extended period of great instability and sudden shocks can easily reverse this right wing advance. Everything depends on how the working class movements world wide respond. Now is the time to renew and rebuild the resistance.

Coordinating resistance
Against the global offensive of racists, right-wing populists, neo-liberals, new and old dictators and warmongers, May Day once more brings us the message Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World, Unite.

We urgently need to coordinate our struggles and build united fronts of all working class organisations, unions and parties, together with the organisations of the nationally and racially oppressed, of women and of youth which can resist and throw back the capitalist and imperialist offensive. We need to defend the refugees who make it into the imperialist countries against state and racist harassment.

We need to boldly demand that the borders be opened to them, that their right to asylum be recognised unconditionally. In Europe and North America, we should likewise defend the principle of the free movement of labour whilst defending migrant workers against slave-like exploitation by the bosses and people traffickers.

We need to solidarise with the expanding industrial workforces in south and east Asia, amongst whom there are large numbers of women workers, and which face repression from the state, victimisation from the bosses and attacks by fascistic religious parties and terrorists.

All these struggles call for the renewal of our fighting organisations, trade unions, parties, and the coordinating organs that every major struggle needs. In general strikes and social movements, we need to organise mass meetings which elect accountable and recallable committees of action that are rooted in the work places and communities, in town and countryside alike.

Based on those mass forces, we can take determined action; mass demonstrations, occupations and all-out indefinite general strikes, which can stop the offensive of the ruling class and solidarise with all those in struggle against exploitation and oppression.

In the USA, in Greece, in Britain, in France, in Venezuela, recent developments call out for a break with the bankrupt, right wing, pro-bourgeois elements within the labour movement and for the creation of new militant parties with anticapitalist programmes and militant tactics.

This means not only discussion on immediate joint action, but also on programme and strategy. There will be no end to exploitation and misery, to racism, sexism, national oppression, wars and environmental
If we cannot raise our struggles to the level of a fight against the global capitalist system, a struggle for socialist revolution.

To do this, we need to take every opportunity to coordinate both struggles and mobilisations. One such opportunity will be provided by the G20 summit, meeting in Hamburg in July. While the imperialists plan their next moves, we need to raise the urgent task of building new working class parties and a new, Fifth International, to lead and coordinate the fight against them and for a socialist system on the basis of revolutionary programme.

We could do no better than pledge ourselves to this task on the 100th anniversary of the great Russian Revolution. 1917 proved that the working class can do more than resist. It can win by leading the popular masses to a successful revolution. It can turn the wars that the imperialists wage, the war that every capitalist wages every day against the workers, into a class war to overthrow capitalist rule.

To do so it must create its own, democratic fighting organs, soviets of the workers, peasants and soldiers and a workers' militia which can overthrow and replace the bourgeois state apparatus with workers' and peasants' councils. For that, however, the class must have a leadership, a political party with its roots in the workplaces and the communities, a working class party conscious of its own tasks, based on a revolutionary action programme, that can lead the class from today's struggles to working class power.

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