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Only the Working Class Can Prevent World War Three

Right from the start it was clear that the war in Ukraine was not just going to be any old war. It is already the first step on the road to a much wider global conflict, one in which the main victims, as in all modern imperialist wars, will be the working class as a whole, whether in uniform or not. In Ukraine the military casualties (i.e. dead and wounded) on both sides have already gone way past half a million, whilst the number of Ukrainian civilians who have died is around 10,000. Hundreds of thousands more have fled to avoid military service or have become refugees.

Two years of a vicious war in Ukraine have now been all but eclipsed by five months of systematic devastation in Gaza. Hamas' brutal massacre of 1,200 people in Israel on 7 October has led to the carpet bombing of almost the entire Gaza Strip. Well over 23,000 (45% of them children) are now dead. According to Oxfam it is the bloodiest encounter in recent history (250 dead a day compared with just under 100 a day in Syria). Nor will it stop there. Both wars share the fact that they are the products of decades-long disputes in which neither side can compromise. These wars only end with the total defeat of the enemy. Or, if that cannot be achieved, then they do not end. They just pause, largely due to economic exhaustion, before igniting sometime later.

Widening War is the Product of a System in Decline

This indiscriminate brutality and violence on all sides is the product of a global capitalist system which is in deep crisis. After six decades of declining growth rates (which declined even faster after the collapse of the post war boom at the beginning of the Seventies) our rulers' expedients to keep the system alive seem to be exhausted. Over the last four decades they have ramped up the exploitation of the world working class. They have transferred high value production to low wage economies which can sell cheap products back to the richer countries to keep wage demands down (globalisation). They have deregulated financial institutions so they can indulge in reckless spending and speculation. And they have mortgaged the future with the highest level of debt in history. While this has made a very small number of people obscenely rich, it has impoverished the vast majority. Despite all this the system still stagnates and suffers anaemic growth rates. Having run out of peaceful options the masters of the planet are now all seeking to maximise their revenues and profits at the expense of their rivals. The result is an

intensification of imperialist rivalry, particularly that between the world's major powers – the USA and China.

China boasts of becoming global top dog by 2049 whilst the US bestrides the world in defence of the dollar's hegemony in world trade. China wants what the US has – world domination. There is no room for compromise here either. The war in Ukraine is not China's war, but you would not know it if you listened to Biden and Blinken's speeches on Ukraine, which have attacked China as much as Russia. For its part even when China talks of a "win-win" situation if both sides cooperate, it still denounces the USA for arming Taiwan, which they intend to take back by force if all else fails. Both sides constantly play a dangerous game of military Russian roulette in the waters around Taiwan.

The Consequences

The Ukraine war has already had some decisive consequences. In the first place it has reinforced the strategic divide in the world. Since the collapse of the USSR, the US and its allies have increasingly used economic sanctions against their enemies, Russia, China and Iran. These are in themselves acts of war and have brought the three Eurasian states into closer and closer cooperation to mitigate their effects. On the other side, the war in Ukraine has brought the previously lukewarm European NATO members into line behind the US. It has even led to NATO expansion to Sweden and Finland. The battle is on to win friends and influence other states across the planet. The US thought that playing the "democracy versus authoritarian" card it would be able to win the ideological battle. But no country in Africa, Latin America or the Middle East has joined in Western sanction campaigns against Russia, whilst South Africa is leading the condemnation of Israel in the International Court of Justice. The disastrous outcomes of US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan have undermined its authority, and even states like India are aiding Russia by buying its oil.

Another consequence is that a new arms race has begun. Global military spending rose to a record in 2022 with the biggest annual increase in expenditure in Europe since the end of the Cold War. Whilst Russia has doubled its military expenditure, the US has been urgently retooling old armament manufacturing production lines just to keep with Ukraine's needs. Shares of weapons manufacturers are naturally booming. The two great wars for global domination last century were preceded by similar arms races.

The other economic impact has been

the drive for "energy" and "food" security. This is equally serious. Not only will attempts at self-sufficiency further undermine the global market but we can forget any attempt to carry out measures to hinder climate change or more immediate ecological disasters.

Capitalism's World War or Class War Against Capital?

Whilst the bosses fight for control of the planet the price is thus paid by the working class in death and starvation. And when Israel's UK ambassador excuses the annihilation of Gaza by comparison with the Allied bombing of Dresden in the Second World War, alarm bells should be ringing for us all. As we go to press the fear of the extension of the war in Gaza is sending tremors across the Middle East and North Africa (where there is already turmoil). It has led to the deployment of US carrier fleets to the region with the assistance of some (but not all) NATO allies. The last deployment is to counter the serious disruption to trade in the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthis (backed by Iran like Hezbollah and Hamas) demanding a cease-fire in Gaza. This already makes this a global issue since 20% of Europe's foodstuffs and 15% of its oil comes through there. Re-routing container ships and tankers round Africa is costing shipping companies millions more every day. The final price will be paid in more inflation in Europe which, of course, will hit those on low incomes the hardest.

We are in the foothills of world war. What is happening to the population in Kharkiv, Kherson or Gaza today is a taste of what could be coming to a street near us in the not too distant future. Imperialist war means total war. This is not just a war between two armies or even between two states but between two imperialist interests. And those interests are the interests of the rich everywhere. It makes sense for them to fight for "the country". After all, they own it. It makes no sense for workers who own only personal property, and their ability to work to make profits for the capitalists.

The idea that dying for your country is the finest thing you can do ("Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" as the Romans had it) is one of the oldest cons in history. It means identifying with our exploiters to go and kill our fellow workers. In 1914 the virus of nationalism led to the slaughter of the First World War. It even infected most socialist parties and trade unions who abandoned all their resolutions to oppose war. All of them found excuses for encouraging workers into the slaughter and signing away the right to strike. Only a few stood out against that

war and they were largely derided. It took nearly a year before Lenin's call to turn the imperialist war into a class war found an echo in the Zimmerwald Left's resolution to make the struggle against war the struggle for socialism. Today that struggle is more necessary than ever but it would be better starting with an international organisation already in place. The Socialist International's betrayal of the working class then and after meant that it would take years before the war would be brought to an end. Today the atrocities on both sides also strangle dissent of any kind. Once war starts, opposing it gets even harder. Just surviving in places like Gaza is hard enough. We salute all those who have deserted, sabotaged or opposed the war in Ukraine and Russia (in particular, the Assembly and KRAS), as well as the brave young people in Mesarvot (We Refuse) in Israel like Tal Mitnick who refuse the draft.

Whilst we give vocal support to all refuseniks everywhere, it is not enough. Humanitarian pacifism is, unfortunately, not enough either. Well-meaning sympathy for the victims does not amount to a strategy for getting rid of the causes of imperialist war. The responsibility of those who already see this is enormous. Around the world there are many organisations who understand that the only way forward is for the working class to reject all national struggles and war. We don't defend any nation state or even potential nation state – socialism will abolish the state and all national frontiers to create a world human community where people are not forced to migrate to escape the misery brought about by a rotting capitalist system.

For our part we are trying to cooperate with any organisation which adheres to the principles of NWBCW (see accompanying article) in order to bring about an organisational force capable of putting up effective resistance to the most powerful form of exploitation known to history. We are moving towards a decisive point in human history and the choice is stark: socialism or barbarism.

Now available:



We Don't Feel At Home In This World Anymore



"Lifestyle Choice"?

Children's charity Barnardo's have invented a new term "bed poverty". It describes the present crisis where nearly half a million children in the UK have to sleep on the floor because their family cannot afford beds, and where a further 200,000 children's beds or bedding are mouldy or damp because for their family putting the heating on is too expensive. At the same time we read that, according to research by StepChange reported in *The Guardian*, "half of all private renters – about 3.7 million people – had had their rent increased in the last 12 months, while more than 1.2 million said they were using credit to make ends meet." Food bank use and household debt were at record levels in 2022 and 2023.

Awaab's Law (named after the little boy who died of exposure to black mould in his home) will require councils and housing associations to "investigate and fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes." However, social housing for people seeking asylum is exempt from the law (meaning 118,000 people left out) and there are no plans to expand the law to protect tenants of private landlords.

Between July and September 2023,

landlords began 8,399 court proceedings to evict households throughout England in "no-fault evictions" by Section 21 order – that is, without having to give any reason at all – up 27% from the same quarter the year before. The *Evening Standard* says almost 300 households in London alone are hit with notice of a Section 21 eviction claim every week. Worse still, Ministry of Justice figures admit that bailiffs were used to clear out 2,307 households from their homes as a result of Section 21 orders during the same period. The figures don't mention how often these court-appointed bailiffs were supplemented by hired thugs, who frequently are involved by unscrupulous landlords furious at any delay. And when the unfortunate tenants try to find a new home in the private sector, 1 in 5 said they were asked to pay more than two full months' rent in advance!

10.8% of "homeless householders" are homeless despite being in full-time work, because of this high financial barrier to renting. Meanwhile, Newcastle City Council (to take one example) is planning cuts of £1.6 million to homelessness services, which will mean drastic reduction of temporary accommodation, and more people on the streets.

The Kerslake Commission on Homelessness & Rough Sleeping notes a 26% increase in rough sleeping last year, and the highest number of people living in temporary accommodation since records began. They tell us "at the heart of it are chronic and unresolved systemic issues... many of the problems outlined would be resolved if there were more supply of

social rented housing and supported housing." (In the decade up to 2022 there was a net loss of 165,000 social homes, due to sales and demolitions outpacing the rate of new building.)

But as of 2023 housing associations in England have cut planned spending on building new "affordable" housing by £20 billion over the next decade. At the same time, Bloomberg report that a "major loosening of budget rules for local councils" is being planned "giving them the ability to sell assets... to stave off a wave of bankruptcies," further reducing the stock of social housing and adding to the number of people stuck in temporary accommodation. As of 2023, around 1.2 million households are on the waiting list for social housing. Without major change to the way we do things, they will be waiting for a very long time.

So the housing crisis is not only the fault of individual private landlords, those ogres straight out of *Oliver Twist*. Nor is it just the Tories: the last time there were over 100,000 families living in "temporary accommodation" was in 2005 under the Labour government. Nor is it simply a question of a parliament stuffed with landlords in safe seats. The £20 billion in cuts to new building is not only due to political ideology but to a crisis of profitability that goes back decades. This is why cuts have gone on decade after decade no matter whether the left or the right of capital is in power. When a speculative bubble bursts (as in 2007-8), the state takes on the financiers' debt to avert a systemic meltdown. Then, to keep overall national debt down to levels the

same banking system will accept, the state has to make permanent cuts in social spending. Housing association and local authority budgets make easy targets. The state cannot solve the housing crisis or be shamed into solving it, because it is subject to the same necessity to balance the books or go under. And the charity sector can only tinker with the housing system. We cannot hope for either of them to stand outside or above capitalism and save us.

Capitalism is founded on the "chronic and unresolved systemic issue" of the exploitation of the vast majority of humanity to support a minority of others in ease and comfort. For them it is not important that human beings are suffering wretchedness, homelessness and poverty. What is important is that money is being made out of them. Part of the tragedy here is that we already have the capacity to solve the crisis and house everyone: there are more than 600,000 empty homes in the UK, and more than 800,000 "second homes". But we will only be able to use the resources that exist already to help people when we no longer have to justify that help as profitable.

A different system is possible, founded on the production of goods and provision of homes on the basis of human need rather than profit-making for the already rich. As the vast majority in society, we have it in our power to create a new world where we can all be comfortable with a roof over our heads, feel valued and be healthy. It is the only realistic alternative to the cost of living crisis today and tomorrow and next year.

Capitalism Offers Only a Future of Devastation and Decline... But There is a Solution

By any standards the global capitalist system is in dire straits. The richest countries in the world have had declining growth rates for over six decades. The consequences for individuals and states are mounting. The fate of humanity in 2024 is in as dire a condition as it has been for decades. On a personal level many, even in the richest countries in the world, are finding it hard to make ends meet and personal indebtedness is at record levels. In the US alone household debt was \$17.25 trillion at the end of the third quarter in 2023 and equals \$103,358 per household. The figures are similar for the UK where the Trussel Trust distributed 3 million food parcels (to 3% of the population) last year. The debt is nice for the finance capitalists who run the world – not so nice for those paying increased interest rates. And states further down the global power pecking order fare even worse.

And now the cancer of imperialist war is spreading across the world as their latest "solution". These wars are naturally accompanied by nationalist campaigns which aim at demonising the "other" in order to con us into fighting for their class interests and not our own. It is likely that in 2024 more right populist regimes will get into power.

There is a solution. The victim of the system is the working class everywhere. It makes up the vast majority of the world's population. It might be divided by all sorts of identities but it is united in one crucial way. We are the wage workers of the world. We share a common exploited relationship in the capitalist system. Without us the system could not function.

And given the constant tendency of the system to make us produce more profit for the capitalist class we are its natural antagonists. However the exploitation game can go on and on as long as we don't challenge the basis of the system itself. The years of decline show that demanding a fair day's wage for a fair day's work is increasingly pointless. It is long past the time for the abolition of the wages system itself.

The history of our class has also shown us how we might achieve this. In the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, workers united strike committees into local bodies of workers' councils, which spread across the old Russian Empire. They were not like a parliament where you elect an MP and never hear about them again until the next election. The delegates to them were DIRECTLY responsible to those who elected them. They could be RECALLED at any time if they did not carry out the mandate for which they were elected. It was the solution to how a real workers' democracy could operate in a mass society.

The social and economic conditions in Russia eventually led to them becoming rubber stamps for the new Russian state but not before the idea had spread to other countries (like Germany and Hungary). The working class organised in its councils brought the slaughter of the First World War to an end. In them we have a glimpse of how a different society might be organised.

And across the world, after decades of class quiet there are signs that workers are no longer accepting austerity and declining living standards. Strikes are re-appearing in numbers not seen for years. These, of

course, are only a beginning. As the crisis deepens the capitalists will resort to greater violence at home and abroad. The response of internationalists has to be to organise against it **politically**. This is what we are trying to do by adhering to the No War but the Class War initiative which has now spread to many countries. Its basic five points are:

- Against capitalism, imperialism and all nationalisms. No support for any national capitals, "lesser evils", or states in formation.
- For a society where states, wage-labour, private property, money and production for profit are replaced by a world of freely associated producers.
- Against the economic and political attacks that the current war, and the ones to come, will unleash on the working class.
- For the self-organised struggle of the working class, for the formation of independent strike committees, mass assemblies and workers' councils.
- Against oppression and exploitation, for the unity of the working class and the coming together of genuine internationalists.

If you agree get in touch and we'll point you to the nearest committee. We have a world to save!

Public Meeting
2pm on Saturday 2nd March
The Drive to World War

Map Room in Cherry Reds,
88-92 John Bright Street,
Birmingham, B1 1BN

What The CWO Stands For



We stand for a global society where production is for need and not profit, where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where power is exercised through class-wide organisations 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 organisation – 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.

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