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Sanctions: A new generation of warfare

Below is a slightly edited version of a talk by Makasi Motema given at a Dec. 19 Workers World Party meeting in New York City.

In the winter of 1941, the people of Leningrad survived on 125 grams of bread per day. Half of that bread was made of sawdust. In many buildings in the city wallpaper paste had been made from potato starch. In their desperation, citizens began to strip the walls and boiled the paste to make soup.

The cause of this suffering was the military encirclement of Leningrad by Nazi Germany during the early stages of “Operation Barbarosa,” the Nazi offensive into the Soviet Union during World War II. The German Wehrmacht quickly surrounded the city and could have easily sent troops to occupy it.

But this was ruled out early by the German high command “because it would make us responsible for food supply” (Leningrad: The Epic Siege of World War II, 1941-1944 by Anna Reid) for the civilians in the city. Instead, the cold calculation was to maintain the siege. Block off all roads. Allow no supplies in or out. Allow starvation to take its course.

Since 1941, the imperialist powers of the world have grown more sophisticated, but they have not become more merciful. The United States has earmarked many governments for destruction, but like the German high command before them, they understand that a military occupation would make the U.S. responsible for feeding and caring for millions of civilians.

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And like the German high command, the U.S. ruling class has settled on the cold, inhuman calculation of siege warfare. Cut all lines to survival. Do not allow supplies in or out. Allow starvation and disease to take its course.

This is so-called “modern warfare.” The goal is, through minimum effort, to create chaos and desperation among the civilian population — to facilitate and finance the evolution of general chaos into civil unrest, then political destabilization and finally regime change.

The first critical step in this process is the imposition of sanctions. The use of sanctions is as clear an act of war as occupying highway intersections with Nazi Panzer divisions. It is a means of cutting off the supplies necessary for the continuation of human life from an entire population.

Sanctions Kill campaign holds NYC planning meeting

Saturday, Dec. 14, about 40 organizers gathered at the Solidarity Center in New York City to plan a campaign against U.S.-imposed sanctions. This campaign will lead to nationwide actions on the weekend of March 13-15. In New York, a demonstration on Wall Street will be held on March 14.

During the meeting, several organizers raised the importance of political education around this issue — which is intentionally complex and opaque. That’s why the leadup to these actions will be driven by an educational campaign done through social media, leafleting and teach-ins.

There is also a draft resolution calling for the immediate abolition of sanctions and a call that has already been translated into 12 languages, with more on the way. These resources can be used by any organization that wants to participate in the call to end sanctions.

The meeting was an important first step in the education process in New York City. As organizers, we have to make the effort to explain the way that sanctions are used as an act of war. That they are a critical tool for the U.S. and its junior partners to expand the hegemony of finance capital across the globe. Please take the time to go to sanctionskill.org and spread this information wherever you can.