

The crisis of capitalism and the reemergence of class struggle in the United States

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This speech was delivered by Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (US), as the concluding remarks to the May 3 International May Day Online Rally, organized by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

The speeches today present a clear analysis of a precarious and explosive world situation. A stark dichotomy is posed, between world war and socialist revolution.

The objective situation raises immense risks, but also immense possibilities. The old order is breaking apart, the old political structures are collapsing. We have entered into a revolutionary epoch, one that holds the potential for finally doing away with a bankrupt and obsolete social order and establishing the foundations for a globally coordinated economic system founded on social equality.

The dangers must not be underestimated. World imperialism is charting a catastrophic course.

The speeches delivered today provide a comprehensive portrait of a global geopolitical and social tinder box: A deepening economic crisis, with massive speculative bubbles built up through bank bailouts and “quantitative easing” measures all over the world; intense geopolitical conflicts in Europe and the militarization of Eastern Europe; a “pivot to Asia” bringing the US into conflict with China; tensions between India and Pakistan; a regional war in the Middle East; the remilitarization of Germany and Japan, accompanied by the rewriting of history to prepare the crimes of the future; tensions between the US and China in Latin America and Africa; the horrific attack on migrants fleeing imperialist crimes; the growth of nationalist and fascist reaction; and unending austerity against the working class all over the world.

In his opening remarks, Comrade David North pointed to the central and profoundly destabilizing role of American imperialism. The United States is the cock-pit of international war. The American financial aristocracy—engorged with wealth accumulated through fraud and speculation, and armed with a military that dwarfs every other on the planet—is engaged in a campaign of world conquest.

In the early days of the Iraq war in 2003, the WSWS wrote that American imperialism “has a rendezvous with disaster. It cannot conquer the world. It cannot reimpose colonial shackles on the masses of the Middle East. It will not find through the medium of war a viable solution to its internal maladies.”

How correct this assessment has proven to be! Every war launched by the United States has ended in disaster. Every country it touches, with its bombs and drones, descends into chaos. Yet every disaster becomes the basis for new wars. With recklessness bordering on insanity, the American ruling elite is laying the ground for the first conflict between nuclear-armed powers in world history.

Any movement against war must reckon with American imperialism. But to look at the United States and see only the power of its military and state would be to make a fatal error. As it wreaks havoc in country after country, the ruling class confronts its most potent and powerful foe within its own borders: the American working class.

In last year’s May Day rally, we referred to the American working class as the “sleeping giant of world politics.” This year we can say that it is beginning to awaken.

Consider the events in Baltimore, Maryland, over the past two weeks, following the police killing of 25-year-old Freddie Gray. The exposure of the police murder of yet another unarmed young man—which occurs on almost a daily basis in the United States—quickly sparked demonstrations that shook a major metropolitan area only 40 miles from the nation’s capital.

Class tensions are so explosive that it takes very little to set off a social eruption. Whether a police killing or some other egregious crime, one incident can quickly produce a chain reaction, becoming the focal point for the deep social and economic grievances of millions of people.

The fear of the ruling class over just such a possibility is demonstrated by its response. The entire political superstructure reacted to the protests by demanding and backing the deployment of thousands of National Guard troops. Baltimore was effectively occupied, with heavily armed units placed in key public locations throughout the city, accompanied by armored vehicles and military helicopters. A state of emergency was declared and a curfew imposed on all residents.

The actions in Baltimore come half a year after a similar crackdown in Ferguson, Missouri, last August, when the city was turned into a war zone in response to demonstrations over the police killing of Michael Brown.

What a devastating exposure of the hypocrisy of American imperialism! A government that preaches “democracy” and “human rights” all over the world, which declares it has the right to wage war on this basis in any country, increasingly relies on the methods of martial law and mass repression—in fact, quasi-dictatorship—in response to any sign of social unrest within its borders.

In fact, the same ruling class, the same financial aristocracy, that wages unending war abroad, is engaged in a war against the American working class at home.

While the media and the political apparatus do everything they can to deny it, social inequality—that is, the class divide—is the defining feature of social life in America. It is not the politics of race, gender or sexual identity that will open up a path toward a new society, but the

class struggle.

The United States is the most unequal country in the industrialized world. In cities like Baltimore and Detroit, the political representatives of the banks are moving to shut thousands of people off water, the most basic necessity of life. Yet the 400 wealthiest individuals in the country now control a staggering \$2.29 trillion in personal wealth.

The period since the economic crisis of 2008—the Obama era—has seen unlimited resources funneled to the banks and Wall Street. The stock market and corporate profits stand at record highs. Since 2009, nearly all the income gain in the United States has been captured by the top one percent of the population.

In what is supposedly the richest country in the world, more than one fifth of the population has reported they could not afford food for themselves and their families at some point in the past year. Young people face a future of permanent indebtedness. The elderly are being told that their health care is not affordable. Manufacturing workers now make poverty level wages. Public schools are being dismantled and teachers victimized.

All on the basis that there is supposedly no money. One further statistic is revealing: A single F35 Striker costs something on the order of \$200 million. This is about ten times the deficit of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, a deficit that is being used to justify shutting off tens of thousands of people from running water.

The mechanisms through which the ruling class has previously sought to regulate social tensions and contain class conflict have broken down. The trade unions are thoroughly corrupt, pro-corporate entities that are broadly hated by the workers they claim to represent. The middle class “left” and liberal organizations, wedded to identity politics, and that hailed Obama as the “transformative candidate” are increasingly discredited.

The 2016 elections are a year and a half away, and it is already clear that the presidential election campaign will be the most manipulated in US history, costing more than a billion dollars in expenses for each of the major big business party candidates.

One has the absurd spectacle of Hillary Clinton, a right-wing, militarist with the backing of Wall Street, attempting to posture as a candidate of the people. More recently, we have the announcement of the fraudulent candidacy of Bernie Sanders, a longtime Democratic Party collaborator, the best so-called “socialist” money can buy.

The ruling class faces a profound crisis of its political system. Both leading capitalist parties represent the interests of a tiny layer of the corporate and financial elite, in alliance with the military-intelligence apparatus.

Beyond the confines of the top five or ten percent of the population, the state confronts an angry, dissatisfied and increasingly hostile working class. Broad sections no longer look to the political system as a mechanism for addressing any of their grievances. This has immense revolutionary implications.

The question is not if there will be an eruption of class struggle in the United States, and indeed all over the world, but what form it will take. Everything depends on arming the working class with a revolutionary political program.

This requires the building of a consciously internationalist movement. Just as the working class of the world cannot put an end to imperialism without the intervention of the American working class, so the American working class cannot solve the great and monumental tasks it confronts except through a common struggle with its class brothers and sisters in every country.

This world movement must have as its conscious aim the overthrow

of the capitalist system, a system based on plunder and exploitation, on the division of one country from another, on the subordination of the great productive capacity of mankind to the endless greed and thievery of the capitalist class and its drive for profit and power.

US President Abraham Lincoln, during another revolutionary period, at the beginning of the US Civil War, remarked in a letter to Congress, “The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise—with the occasion.” The tasks today are different than they were in 1862, yet Lincoln’s call to action to finally put an end to slavery in the United States applies as well to our task, the task of the international working class, to abolish capitalism and open the way to a new era of human development.

This rally presents a powerful foundation for resolving these tasks. Reading the comments posted online is immensely encouraging. We have participants and comments from Canada, Peru, Turkey, throughout the United States, Australia, Abu Dhabi, Germany, Scotland, India, Bangladesh, France, Romania, South Africa, Britain, China, Ghana and countless other countries.

Trotsky wrote in “War and the International” that “Imperialism represents the predatory expression of a progressive tendency in economic development—to construct human economy on a world scale, freed from the cramping of the nation and state.”

In a very important sense, this rally itself is the progressive expression of this same tendency. A single worldwide movement based on a common political program: the program of revolutionary socialist internationalism.

All of us participating in this rally have, as Comrade North said in the opening report, an “inescapable responsibility.” We have, assembled online here today, the nucleus of a mass international movement, a leadership that can and will guide millions of people. We must shoulder this responsibility with the gravity imposed by the situation we confront.

I therefore conclude this meeting with an appeal. Take up the fight for socialism! Set up a branch of the IYSSE at your school or college. Build a faction of the SEP in your factory or workplace. Study the program of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International and make the decision to join and build the World Party of Socialist Revolution!



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