

May Day 2016: The international working class is an immense social force

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The following speech was delivered by Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (US), at the conclusion of the International May Day Online Rally on May 1, 2016.

I want to conclude this meeting by thanking all of the speakers today, and all of you who have participated in this online rally. This is truly a unique event, bringing together workers and young people from more than 90 countries, on every continent, to express their united opposition to the policies of the ruling class that are leading humanity towards disaster. Thank you to all of you who contributed to this discussion by leaving your comments, very interesting comments, over 500 comments so far.

A number of people have gathered in significant numbers in many countries to listen in to this meeting. There's a meeting of 40 workers and youth in Germany. One comment left by comrades there is along the following lines: "Workers at the meeting in Berlin argue, that everybody in the world should be able to vote for the US president and that they would vote for Jerry and Niles."

Well, we would say that we agree with you. The US election is an international election, with international consequences. In fact, Obama was just in Germany, to pressure the European powers to join forces in the plotting of new wars in the Middle East, North Africa and against Russia. To this conspiracy of the capitalist elites, the war planning of the German and American ruling class, we respond with a joint struggle of workers in the US, Germany and around the world against imperialism and against the capitalist system.

This rally is a concrete expression of the fundamental purpose of May Day, the historic day of international working class solidarity. Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution and the founder of the Fourth International, explained that the aim of May Day was, "by means of simultaneous demonstrations by workers of all countries on that day, to prepare the ground for drawing them together into a single international proletarian organization of revolutionary action having one world center

and one world political orientation."

That is our purpose today. The global unification of the working class is the necessary response to the global crisis of the capitalist system, which finds its most dangerous manifestation in war.

The speeches delivered today provide a powerful picture of an extremely explosive world situation. Their combined impact makes clear the immense tasks we confront. We live in an era of perpetual war. Twenty-five years of escalating military conflict following the dissolution of the Soviet Union; fifteen years of the "war on terror," the fraudulent pretext for neocolonial operations by the US and European powers, and the catch-all justification for the destruction of democratic rights.

The spreading maelstrom of imperialist violence brings into its orbit every country and continent, as we have seen in the speeches today. In East Asia and the Pacific, the US "pivot to Asia," aimed at encircling China, is embroiling the entire region. Australia is becoming the American aircraft carrier in the South Pacific, while Japan is even considering nuclear weapons as it reinterprets its constitution. This is a country that was the victim of the only atomic bombs dropped on a civilian population, which killed more than 200,000 people at the end of the Second World War.

The Middle East and Central Asia have already been devastated by wars and occupations that have destroyed entire societies, stoked sectarian conflict and driven millions from their homes. The countries of Africa are the perpetual target of imperialist intrigues over control of natural resources. The US and European powers are flooding arms and troops into Eastern Europe in the campaign against Russia. In Western Europe, Germany, Britain, France and Italy are remilitarizing to ensure their share of the spoils. Latin America, long a target of US imperialism, is an emerging center of competition with China.

Expanding regional wars are developing ever more directly into a conflict involving major powers, armed with nuclear weapons. Even if they wanted to prevent a descent into world war, the imperialist governments cannot control

the consequences of their own recklessness, let alone override the logic of imperialism.

In this developing inferno of imperialist war and violence, the American ruling class plays a central role. Its criminal machinations, however, are the most concentrated expression of a bankrupt world system that is charting a catastrophic course.

Now, there are immense risks, but there are also enormous possibilities. The old order is breaking apart. The old political institutions are increasingly incapable of containing explosive social tensions. The same contradictions that produce imperialist war are also exacerbating class conflict and creating the objective conditions for social revolution.

Who is to pay for war? The working class, in the form of body bags, shattered homes and cities, and unrelenting demands for “sacrifice” in the name of so-called “national interest.” In the same way, it is the working class that is forced to pay for the trillions funneled into the stock market, in the form of mass unemployment, poverty and the destruction of social rights to ensure the bloated wealth of a financial aristocracy that has accumulated incomprehensible sums of money.

All over the world we are beginning to see the signs of developing class struggle, including here in the United States. As comrade Jerry White said, the American ruling class confronts its most dangerous enemy at home, that is, the American working class. What does it mean that millions of young people and workers in the United States identify as socialists? And this in the “land of unlimited opportunity,” of “American exceptionalism,” of the “American dream”? The country where socialism has been ignored or vilified and suppressed for generations?

The change in objective conditions is leading workers to change their minds.

What is happening in the United States is of immense political significance, but it is certainly not unique. Whether the workers in France opposed to right-wing labor reforms and an anti-democratic state of emergency; the wave of autoworkers’ struggles and other strikes in China and India; the strikes of Kuwaiti oil workers; protests in Japan, with a population deeply opposed to war and remilitarization; everywhere workers are becoming radicalized, politicized, looking for a way forward, turning toward socialism.

The international working class is an immense social force. It is not our task to create opposition, to convince broad masses of workers to enter into struggle. Rather, our task is to develop an understanding, within the working class, of the real nature of the present crisis and its world-historical implications, to unite the separate struggles into a common political movement against imperialism and the capitalist system.

To accomplish this, a political leadership must be built. That leadership is the International Committee of the Fourth International. There is no other political movement that can or will take up the fight against imperialism. The ignominious demise of Bernie Sanders’ “political revolution” is mirrored in different forms all over the world: the actions of Syriza in Greece, of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, of the PT in Brazil.

To this must be added all the pseudo-left organizations, the champions of “human rights interventions,” those who have backed the CIA operation in Syria and Libya, who have campaigned for war against China and Russia, who have denounced “knee-jerk anti-imperialism.”

All these forces support imperialism because they support capitalism and are hostile to the interests of the working class. The class interests these political forces represent is most clearly expressed in their attitude towards war.

A new anti-war movement must be built, but it must be rooted in an understanding that there can be no struggle against war without a fight for socialism, just as there can be no fight for socialism without a struggle against war. This anti-war movement must be based on the working class; it must be socialist. It must be independent of and hostile to all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class. And, above all, it must be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.

This is the program and perspective that we advance in the fight against imperialist war. And in fact this rally is the political foundation for this movement.

I would like to conclude this rally with an appeal: To all those who are listening today, take up the fight for socialism! Build the International Committee of the Fourth International. Where there are sections, join the Socialist Equality Party. Where there are not, help to build one. 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 Socialist Equality Party 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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