

May Day 2016: War and the 2016 US elections

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The following speech was delivered by Jerry White, the SEP (US) presidential candidate, to the International May Day Online Rally held on May 1, 2016.

The Socialist Equality Party has entered the 2016 presidential elections to provide workers and young people a socialist and internationalist alternative to the two parties of war, social inequality and oppression. My running mate, Niles Niemuth, and I have placed at the center of our campaign the fight to raise the political consciousness of the working class, to oppose all forms of national chauvinism, racism and anti-immigrant baiting, and to unify workers in the United States and around the world to oppose imperialism and the danger of world war.

The presidential election in the United States has revealed the enormous crisis of American capitalism and its two party political system. The one issue that dominates over these elections—and the one issue least discussed—is the war drive of the American ruling class, including the well-advanced plans for expanded military interventions, including a direct clash with Russia and China, which carries with it the threat of a nuclear holocaust.

After one of the most convulsive elections in US history, the American people are being left with supposed “choice” of two warmongers. Whatever their tactical differences, the likely nominees of both parties, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, are both strategically committed to American imperialism’s reckless drive for world domination.

Clinton’s hands are already covered in blood. Under her husband’s administration, she supported the horrific sanctions against Iraq, which were responsible for the deaths of a half million children, and the bombing of Yugoslavia. As New York senator she supported the criminal invasion of Iraq; and as Obama’s secretary of state she oversaw the preparations for the fascist-backed coup in Ukraine and the bloody regime change operations in Libya and Syria.

As the *New York Times* recently noted in a glowing piece, Clinton has the closest ties to the military-

intelligence apparatus, particularly the Pentagon brass. “For all their bluster about bombing the Islamic State into oblivion, neither Donald J. Trump nor Senator Ted Cruz of Texas have demonstrated anywhere near the appetite for military engagement abroad that Clinton has,” the *Times* wrote, adding, she is the “last true hawk left in the race.”

The billionaire Trump, however, is not to be outdone. Expressing the unvarnished violence and decadence of the American ruling class, he combines the demand for the unlimited use of military power and CIA torture and assassinations, with the promotion of “American First” nationalism. His call for the building of a wall on the border with Mexico and fascistic agitation against Muslims and Hispanic immigrants is aimed at silencing and intimidating all opposition to war and the dictatorship of the financial elite.

The aim of “our unquestioned military dominance,” Trump declared last week, is “to make America great again.” At its most fundamental level, this means the unlimited use of American military power to block the rise of economic competitors and attempt to restore American dominance after decades of economic decline, growing trade and balance of payment deficits, and descent into the worst forms of financial criminality.

The US elections have revealed the immense and growing opposition of workers and youth in the United States who are sick of the war crimes committed overseas, as well as the decades-long class war waged against the jobs, living standards and democratic rights of workers on the “home front.”

Eight years after the 2008 crash, the economic and social misery felt by tens of millions of people in the US lies in sharp contrast with Obama’s pronouncement of an “economic recovery.” Depression-like conditions prevail in whole swathes of the country hit by the global collapse of the coal, oil and steel industries. In February and March, factories eliminated 50,000 jobs, wiping out all of the gains in manufacturing jobs recorded last year. The fall in the official unemployment rate is chiefly due to the

record number of workers who have given up searching for jobs or who are forced to work part-time. In fact, all of the net gains in jobs since the so-called recovery have been as independent contractors, temporary and part-time.

The Obama administration has overseen the greatest transfer of wealth in US history. The top 20 billionaires in the US have as much wealth as the bottom 150 million Americans. The rich not only enjoy untold wealth and privilege, they live longer. The life expectancy gap between the richest and poorest Americans averages almost 15 years for men and 10 for women.

This has had a profound impact on social consciousness, particularly among the young generation, which has seen nothing but unending war, growing indebtedness and economic insecurity. A new Harvard University survey of young adults aged 18 to 29 found that 51 percent of those surveyed did not support capitalism, compared to 42 percent who did. One-third of these young adults affirmatively supported socialism, and near-majorities agreed that health care, food and shelter were basic human rights.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who pitched himself as an opponent of the “billionaire class,” has been the initial beneficiary of this political radicalization. The scale of his support blows up the official narrative of American politics, according to which no one claiming to be a “socialist” can get a hearing.

Sanders, however, is no socialist. For all of his talk about a “political revolution,” Sanders studiously avoided any discussion of military policy, and in the last days he declared support for drone warfare and Obama’s infamous “kill list.” Hostile to the fight for the international unity of the working class, he promotes economic nationalism and the lie that job losses in the US are due to China and Mexico. His support for US imperialism is highlighted above all by his promotion of the Democratic Party, and his pledge to support the warmonger Hillary Clinton after she wins the nomination.

The only reason a billionaire demagogue like Trump has gotten a hearing and could even win the presidential elections is because of the bankruptcy of the official “left” in the United States, which is consumed by the lifestyle concerns of the upper middle class and oblivious and hostile to the economic and social grievances of working people.

The political radicalization born of endless wars and the explosive growth of social inequality will go far beyond the warmed over liberalism of Sanders and the confines of the Democratic Party. Despite the best efforts of the trade

union bureaucracy to suppress it, there are signs of the reemergence of the class struggle in the US, from the rebellion of autoworkers against the contract betrayal by the United Auto Workers last fall, to the protests by teachers and students against the destruction of public education, and the current strike by 39,000 workers against the telecom giant Verizon.

Our election campaign is aimed at broadening this political opposition and developing it in a consciously anti-imperialist direction. The same transnational corporations that are waging unrelenting war against the jobs and living standards of American workers are hell bent on waging war to conquer the world. But workers and youth in the US have no interest in fighting and dying to see which global corporations dominate the world’s profits, raw materials and sources of labor.

The reemergence of the class struggle in the US and our party’s fight to arm workers with a socialist and international program and perspective is of critical international importance. The American ruling class may be determined to control the world, but it will soon find out it is not the master of its own house.

For all of its arrogance and hubris, the American ruling class is the most frightened in the world. Their own spokesmen warn that it is only a matter of time before the “pitch forks come out.” In our discussions on Verizon picket lines, workers liken the class divide in America to France before Marie Antoinette lost her head. They say that if things continue as they are workers will have no choice but to make a revolution.

These sentiments are part of an international process of political radicalization. The most essential question, however, is the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the revolutionary leadership of the coming struggles of the international working class.

In the spirit of May Day, the Socialist Equality Party will use this election campaign to politically educate the working class, oppose all forms of national chauvinism and bigotry, and to build a powerful, international movement against war, social inequality and exploitation. We call on all of our listeners to support this campaign.



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