

May Day 2017

Militarism, social reaction, and authoritarianism in the United States

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4 May 2017

This speech was delivered by Kristina Betinis, from the Socialist Equality Party (US), to the 2017 International May Day Online Rally, held on April 30.

The crisis of the world capitalist system finds its sharpest expression in the United States. The American ruling class is engaged in unending war in every corner of the globe, and it is engaged in a vicious conflict within the United States itself—a war against the working class; a social counter-revolution.

The Trump administration in the US represents the rule of the oligarchy in naked form. Its tax proposals, unveiled last week, express the aspirations of this oligarchy, which can be summed up in four words: “We want more money!”

The administration is setting the pace for the turn by capitalist governments all over the world to policies of extreme reaction.

Grotesque levels of social inequality are painted into the fine details of the entire social order. The United States is a society in which 20 individuals have more wealth than the bottom half of the population. This new aristocracy owns both political parties, controls the entire state, and has countless media pundits and columnists at its beck and call.

Just hours after Trump’s tax plan was announced—a plan that will shift trillions of dollars from the federal Treasury to the bank accounts of the rich—Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos became the second highest net worth individual in the world, based on overnight trading. Bezos is now worth more than \$80 billion. Last year his personal income, counting profits and rising stock prices, was greater than the combined income of all the workers in the Amazon offices and warehouses throughout the world.

Beyond the ruling oligarchy, the top 10 percent of income earners have a larger share of wealth than the rest

of the population combined.

The upper middle class live up to 15 years longer than the working class, their children have access to decent education, they have medical and dental care, and clean, safe drinking water, access to higher education and safer neighborhoods. Such basic social rights are out of the reach of a growing *majority*.

For the working class, life expectancy is lower, general health and well-being is poorer, educational, employment and cultural opportunities are far more limited. For the bottom *one half* of income earners, it is hunger and homelessness that are the greatest worries.

As the financial aristocracy tries to rob older workers of their pensions, the burdens of student loan and medical debt on younger workers has meant delaying, or giving up on, buying a home or starting a family. The Democrats and Republicans alike, eager to cover up the yawning chasms of class division, make pitiful attempts to pit urban and rural populations against one another, as if there is no shared experience of a struggle for jobs and decent education, amid crumbling social infrastructure, drug epidemics and murderous police forces.

Democrats and Republicans together force states like Illinois, and municipalities all over the country, to limp along without official budgets, effectively slashing social services and college and university systems through non-payment. Public schools are routinely closed and teachers are scapegoated for the social problems their students battle with.

In Chicago, where unemployment among minority youth is the highest in the country, there is an epidemic of violence, mainly fueled by gang conflict. But even this is moved by the deep sense of frustration and hopelessness young people feel about the future. This is a city that has been ruled for eight decades by the Democratic Party and

maintains a notoriously violent police force, which has, no doubt, been emboldened by Trump's authoritarian politics.

Immigrant workers, in addition to facing all of the challenges and deprivations of working class life, have even fewer rights and much higher rates of exploitation, wage theft and other abuses, including blackmail and extortion. Arrests and detainment in terrible internment conditions have doubled this spring under Trump, on the heels of Obama's record-breaking deportation numbers.

In four decades of counterrevolution, in which the gains workers had fought for throughout the 20th century have been clawed back by the financial aristocracy, the Republican and Democratic parties have worked together to do the bidding of the financial elite.

No serious opposition to the national chauvinism, rapacious greed or open warmongering is to be found anywhere in the political establishment. After the 2016 presidential election, when a stunned population woke up to a President Trump, it was Obama, himself, who said that the bitter election was just "an intramural scrimmage," and that "we're all on the same team."

After leaving office, Obama has shifted quickly into money-making mode, pulling in \$400,000 each for two speeches—more than the majority make in an entire year, or even ten years. Such is American politics today.

Trump does not represent a sudden departure in American politics, but rather the culmination of social processes over decades.

Obama oversaw the greatest transfer of wealth from the working population to the multimillionaires and billionaires. He continued the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while adding Libya, Yemen and Syria to the battlefield. Twenty-five years of constant war are incompatible with democracy. The methods of repression to brutalize people abroad are being brought home to use against us.

The nationalist poison that comes out of the mouth of the billionaire Trump, in all its arrogant stupidity, is the undisguised voice of the decadent, violent and backward ruling class of this country. Combining threats to use unlimited military force and CIA torture and assassinations, with the promotion of "America First" nationalism, Trump has called for the building of a wall on the border with Mexico and police-state measures against American Muslims and all immigrants.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the defense of the social rights of the entire working class—uniting workers native and foreign-born, black, white and brown, of all

sexes and orientations. In this, we fight to raise the political consciousness of the international working class: to oppose all forms of national chauvinism, racism and anti-immigrant baiting; linking workers and youth in the US with those around the world, to oppose imperialism and the growing threat of world war.

We stand by the principle of the international unity of workers of all lands. Workers and young people in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East are not the enemies of working people in the United States. It is not they who have robbed us of our wages, slashed our social programs and dismantled our public education. It is not they who have destroyed the Constitution, erected massive surveillance systems to spy on our communications, and monitored our activity. It is not they who send young people off to kill and be killed in an effort to control the world.

The ruling class is preparing to suppress opposition, rejecting the rule of law, and attempting to make authoritarian rule official. This is their response to the crisis—not jobs, education, healthcare and peace—but austerity, repression and war.

There is a powerful social force to oppose all of this: it is the working class. The policies of the ruling class are not popular and there is deep opposition among millions of workers and young people. This opposition must be mobilized and organized, given conscious political form and directed against the capitalist system, which is the source of war, inequality and dictatorship.

Workers need a party that represents them internationally, in order to meet the threat posed to human life by the world capitalist system. This party is the Socialist Equality Party, and it can and will unite workers internationally in the fight against war and for socialism.



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