

“The time is now to fight for genuine socialism and an end to capitalist exploitation”

SEP presidential candidate Joseph Kishore opens 2020 campaign with address to students and supporters in Michigan

Our reporters
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Joseph Kishore, the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party and its newly announced candidate for US president in the 2020 elections, kicked off the party’s campaign with a meeting at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor on Monday evening.

Kishore’s report, “The resurgence of class struggle and the fight for socialism in 2020,” focused on the growth of strikes and protests in 2019 and 2020 which has taken place against the backdrop of increasing imperialist violence, escalating assaults on democratic rights and the resort by the ruling class to fascism and dictatorship. The event was sponsored by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at UM.

There is a clear alternative facing the American and international working class, Kishore said: capitalist barbarism or international socialism. The enrichment of a parasitic ruling elite coincides with unending war that threatens the whole world. “All the filth of the past is returning,” said Kishore, “fascism, anti-Semitism, the mass detention of immigrants and refugees... Without a revolutionary change to the social system, human society itself faces collapse.”

“The working class, however, has begun to fight back.” Last year, said Kishore, mass demonstration and strikes occurred in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, South America, and the United States, which saw a 40-day strike by GM autoworkers.

The strategists of the ruling class had taken note, with the *Financial Times* comparing 2019 to the revolutionary years of 1848, 1917 and 1968 and noting nervously that 2020 appears to be even more explosive. Another report referred

to a year of sweeping revolutions, “the likes of which we’ve never seen.” The only consolation for these writers is that the upheavals of the past year were apparently “leaderless.”

“The question of leadership is indeed critical,” said Kishore. “Workers are on the move. However, for the struggles of the working class to succeed, they need a political program and a party, that is, a leadership.”

Kishore stressed the significance of the enormous growth of inequality, which has driven widespread interest in socialism. In 2019, he reported, the richest 500 people increased their wealth by a total of \$1.2 trillion dollars, a sum that is enough to nearly wipe out all US student debt (\$1.5 trillion), twice cover the entire spending on public education in the US (\$700 billion), or eliminate the debt suffocating Puerto Rico (\$74 billion) twenty times over.

The unprecedented levels of inequality are a result of policies enacted by both Democrats and Republicans. The result, said Kishore, has been a “social catastrophe” borne by the working class in the form of job cuts, the slashing of wages, the elimination of social programs, and the desolation of cities through deindustrialization.

The gargantuan US military budget (\$738 billion) is both an enormous drain of social resources and a menacing danger to the world, said Kishore, who proceeded to review the record of the past 25 years of unending war by the US, particularly against Iraq and Afghanistan, with its toll of millions of lives.

The impeachment of Trump by the Democrats—whose trial was in process Monday night—is conducted on the most right-wing basis and has heightened rather than lessened the danger of war. Kishore noted the comments of Adam Schiff, the key impeachment manager for House Democrats, that funding for Ukraine was needed so that the country could

fight Russia “over there so we don’t have to fight them here.”

To which Kishore replied by asking, “And who asked the American people whether they wanted war with Russia, either over there or over here?”

Kishore returned to the need for the development of a political leadership in the working class, which he said was not simply a matter of alerting workers to growing inequality or even the growth of militarism, as critical as these tasks are. Instead, he told the audience, it is necessary to explain the methods and aims of those who seek to block the working class and tie it politically to the ruling class.

A significant portion of the report was devoted to an analysis of the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project. The lead author of the Project, Nikole Hannah Jones, spoke yesterday at the University of Michigan campus. Kishore explained that the *World Socialist Web Site* has played the leading role in exposing the historical falsifications and political motivations involved in the effort by the *Times*, the media outlet for the Democratic Party, to rewrite history.

The aim, said Kishore, is to establish a new narrative that places race and racial conflict at the center of American history and contemporary politics. “The aim is to promote racial conflicts at the very point that masses of workers and youth all over the world are entering struggle over issues of class.” He noted that Hannah-Jones has stated that race is “just as material as class,” meaning that there exist, objectively, racial interests.

The remainder of Kishore’s report and several questions from the audience concerned the role of Bernie Sanders. The Vermont senator has been moving up in opinion polls, particularly in Iowa and New Hampshire, which have primary contests in the coming two weeks, based on his appeal to opposition to social inequality and war. Questions pertained to the role of the Democratic Party establishment in opposing a Sanders nomination in 2016 and whether a Sanders administration would create greater space for socialist candidates.

In reply, Kishore explained that the role of Sanders is to channel social opposition behind the Democratic Party and block an independent political movement of the working class. If he were to become president, he added, Sanders would play a role similar to that of Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”) in Greece, which has implemented the dictates of the banks and served as a frontline of the European Union’s anti-refugee policy.

Concluding, Kishore returned to the role that workers and youth must play in 2020. “The time is now to fight for genuine socialism and an end to capitalist exploitation,” he said. He urged all those attending to support the SEP election campaign.

Students remained after the presentation and official question period to talk in smaller groups and meet the candidate.

A student from China had come to previous meetings and was particularly drawn to the SEP’s principled stand against the 1619 Project. He expressed concern, however, that the SEP placed such weight on political-theoretical issues relative to “bread-and-butter” matters of wages, workplace conditions, and student debt. He stayed for a wide-ranging discussion with a supporter of the SEP.

Roman, a retail sales worker, was strongly interested in the international unification of the struggles of the working class that Kishore had addressed in the report. “I understand the working people should be, and actually really are, connected,” he said. “But right now I want to know how can we achieve that kind of internationalism if it doesn’t yet exist in our own borders yet.”

Supporters of the SEP discussed the type of political initiative that is required in combating the nationalist poison spread by the trade unions, which work to isolate struggles of workers. Roman wanted to learn more and concluded by saying, “I plan to come to every SEP meeting I can. I am certainly interested in this campaign.”

Vanessa and Michaela, both students and workers, expressed their support for the SEP campaign after the meeting as they talked with SEP supporters. Vanessa mentioned her interest in the Sanders campaign but added that the meeting had given her pause, saying, “I’m realizing that there are people to the left of me, and I think I need to think more critically” about Sanders. In 2020, she did not want to adapt to the pressure to choose “the lesser of the two evils.”

Michaela, likewise, had been attracted to the Sanders campaign, but was taking a broader look at the political situation in its global context. “I am really interested in how actual revolution happens, mobilization through protests and like what we’re seeing in Chile. How can we make that happen at American universities?”

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