

The American ruling class confronts its most powerful antagonist at home: The working class

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This is the report delivered by Joseph Kishore, the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (US), to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

Dear Comrades and friends,

Today's rally has given powerful expression to the international unity of the working class and the global perspective advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

We have heard remarks from representatives of the ICFI, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality from a dozen countries and five continents, speaking to a truly global audience. While the specific conditions in each country may differ, the fundamental issues confronting workers and youth are the same everywhere.

The speeches today have outlined the interrelated elements of the world situation: The escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, now in its second year; the growing threat of a US-led war against China; the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 22 million people and continues to evolve into new strains; the deepening economic and financial crisis; the breakdown of democratic forms of rule, as the ruling elite turns to ever more naked forms of repression to enforce its interests; and, above all, the growth of the class struggle throughout the world.

In no country is this reality more starkly revealed than in the United States, the cockpit of imperialist war planning and the center of finance capital. More than three decades ago, at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the American ruling class proclaimed the "unipolar moment." It concluded that "force works," and that it could use its unrivaled military power to counteract its protracted economic decline.

What followed were the wars and interventions against Iraq, Serbia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and many other countries. Millions of people have been killed, and entire societies devastated. Now, the "war on terror" has given way to "great power conflict," by which is meant the targeting of Russia and China, even if this threatens what Biden himself has called "Armageddon"—that is, nuclear war.

Unending war, however, has not ushered in an "American century," but a series of ever more extreme economic and political crises. While the ruling elite pretends to be advancing "democracy" abroad, just over two years ago the government was nearly overthrown in an attempted fascistic coup, spearheaded by the former president Trump.

The coming to power of Biden has done nothing to resolve the

contradictions that have so completely eroded the basis for democratic forms of rule in the United States. On the contrary, in his attempt to establish a fictional "national unity" on the basis of war, Biden has worked to rehabilitate and strengthen the Republican Party.

In the coming election, the population of the United States is to be presented with the "choice" between perhaps the two most hated political figures: the current president, Biden, an aging octogenarian who can think of nothing but war, and the fascist conspirator himself, Trump.

As we wrote in the statement announcing this May Day rally, and as has been documented in the event itself, the massive growth of military budgets, the gargantuan sums allocated to the most advanced means of death and destruction, has assumed the form of a war against the social conditions of workers in every country.

The United States is the most socially unequal advanced capitalist country on the planet, presided over by an oligarchy that controls all the institutions of the state, from the presidency, to Congress, to the Supreme Court.

While trillions have been handed out to the banks, social infrastructure is in a state of advanced collapse and disintegration, producing such disasters as the poisoning of East Palestine, Ohio, following a train derailment earlier this year. Industrial accidents are commonplace, and the ruling class treats the deaths of workers as merely a cost of doing business. The most basic rights that workers won through bitter struggles, including even the abolition of child labor, are being ripped away.

In its response to the pandemic, the American ruling class has led the way in the ruthless prioritization of profits over lives. More than one million people have died of COVID in the United States. Thousands continue to die every week, while untold millions suffer from the consequences of Long Covid. The ruling class, first under Trump and then under Biden, declared that "the cure can't be worse than the disease," by which they meant that the health of millions could not justify taking measures that imperiled profit and the rise of the stock markets.

At the first May Day rally held in 2014, we noted that "there are two Americas. There is the America of Wall Street, the Pentagon, the CIA, the plutocracy, which lies, threatens and bullies. And there is the America of the working class, the bearer of all that is progressive, the true hope for the future." Even as the American ruling elites plot violence and plunder throughout the world, they confront their most powerful antagonist at home, the working class.

The past several years have seen significant expressions of class

struggle in the United States, as workers strive to break free of the control of the reactionary trade union apparatus—the wave of teachers’ strikes in 2018, the strike by 40,000 GM workers and 30,000 Chicago teachers in 2019; the walkouts of autoworkers at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, which forced the initial shutdown of production; the wave of struggles by educators against the homicidal school reopening policies in fall 2020 and spring 2021; the walkout of 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers in 2021; a whole series of strikes and protests involving nurses in opposition to the disastrous state of the health care system; the protracted battle of more than 120,000 railroad workers last year against contracts that were ultimately imposed by force through a vote of Congress, backed by the Biden administration. This year has seen a series of strikes by academic workers, while autoworkers in the US and Canada are preparing for a major battle as contracts expire at the Big Three in September.

The development of the class struggle in the United States is part of a global upsurge, as the speeches today have documented—from the protests of millions in France against pension cuts, to the strikes of hundreds of thousands in the UK and Germany against the attacks on jobs and the rising cost of living, to the ongoing strike by more than 120,000 federal public sector workers in Canada.

The issues posed to workers in the US are the same as the issues posed to workers in every country.

First, there is no solution to any of the great problems confronting mankind—war, the pandemic, the growth of fascism and dictatorship—except through the development of the class struggle in a globally-unified manner. But this requires the building of organizations, democratically controlled by workers themselves, through which they can unify their struggles outside of the control of the corrupt, pro-corporate trade union apparatus.

The union bureaucracy exists not as a mechanism for the development of the class struggle, but as a police force over the working class, whose services are all the more necessary for the ruling elite in time of war. Workers in the United States have taken important steps toward self-organization over the past year, with the establishment of rank-and-file committees among health care workers, educators, autoworkers and other sections of the working class.

The 5,000 votes for socialist UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman, despite systematic voter suppression by the apparatus with the assistance of the state, demonstrates the growing support for a movement to transfer power to the rank and file.

The development of committees in every sector and industry, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, is the essential basis for breaking the stranglehold of the apparatus and forging a way forward for the expansion of the class struggle.

Second, this must be connected to the independent political mobilization of the working class. This requires a fight against the Democrats and Republicans, the two parties of the American capitalist class, along with all the various organizations, in the US and internationally, that represent the interests of privileged sections of the upper-middle class.

In the US, the Democratic Socialists of America has, over the past year, revealed itself to be nothing more than an adjunct of the Democratic Party. It supports the US-NATO war against Russia, and its members voted to impose a contract on railroad workers that the workers had rejected.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality, in its meetings in the US and throughout the world, has fought against the identity politics promoted so heavily on university campuses, whose

purpose is to divide the working class and youth and subordinate them to the ruling class policy of war and social reaction.

The IYSSE fights to orient young people, politically, theoretically and organizationally, to the working class, the great social force that is capable of stopping imperialist war, ending the pandemic and abolishing the capitalist system.

This May Day rally has warned about the many dangers confronting mankind. But it is rooted in a profound optimism, an optimism that is based on the understanding that the same contradictions that produce imperialist war also produce social revolution.

This is not a matter of speculation, but rooted in a historical materialist analysis of the 20th century, the Russian Revolution, the history of the Trotskyist movement. And the growth of the class struggle as a powerful objective force throughout the world points the way forward.

This objective process must be made conscious, through the building of a revolutionary leadership, the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International. It requires a study of history, and the bringing forward of this history into the present. It requires the decision of all of you listening today to take up the active fight for socialism.

In concluding this rally, I call on all of you to take action. Donate to the *World Socialist Web Site*, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, to help us expand our readership to workers and young people throughout the world.

Educate yourself in the fundamental theoretical and political issues necessary for building a socialist movement, contained in the critical volumes available on Mehring Books. Build rank-and-file committees at your workplaces as part of the IWA-RFC. Join the IYSSE and establish a club on your campus.

Above all, join the Socialist Equality Party if one exists in your country, or help found an SEP to expand the presence of the ICFI throughout the world. Join and help build the World Party of Socialist Revolution.



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