

The working class must intervene with its own program in the political crisis in Washington

17 May 2017

With each passing day, it becomes increasingly evident that the political crisis gripping Washington involves a conflict between two reactionary factions of the ruling class and state apparatus.

The Trump administration poses a grave danger to the democratic and social rights of the working class. His administration, composed of oligarchs and generals, is seeking to establish a form of political dictatorship based on a presidency with unlimited powers. In terms of its social physiognomy, the Trump administration directly embodies the gangsterism that characterizes the corporate/financial aristocracy which rules America.

Trump's opponents in the media and political establishment, headed up by the Democratic Party, represent another faction of the ruling elite. They are not raising a single progressive or democratic issue in their campaign against Trump. Their appeal is not to the working class, but to the military-intelligence apparatus, particularly the FBI, NSA and CIA. It has an unstated agenda, developed behind the scenes, and centered largely on foreign policy issues.

If their effort to bring Trump into line or remove him from office succeeds, it will only strengthen the position of the corporate-financial elite and the "deep state" of intelligence officials and generals. The main consequence will be to immediately shift foreign policy toward aggression against Russia, escalating the drive to world war and, bound up with this, social counterrevolution.

While this conflict unfolds in Washington, something else is taking place throughout the country, separate from and opposed to the bitter infighting in Washington. Far from sharing the desire for a confrontation with Russia, masses of people are hostile to war. It is not "Russian hacking" that is on their minds, but unemployment, inequality, the destruction of health care and pensions, indebtedness and other manifestations of a deepening social crisis.

What is happening in the real world of the vast majority of Americans?

Despite Democratic Party claims that the economy has never been better, and Trump's demagoguery about "making America great again," workers face low wages, a declining standard of living and persistent unemployment. Nearly nine years after the 2008 economic meltdown, the real jobless rate is 8.6 percent,

taking into account those who have stopped looking for work or are forced to work part-time. Job cuts are devastating both the retail sector (81,000 since the election of Trump) and manufacturing. On Tuesday, Ford announced it was cutting 10 percent of its global workforce, following thousands of layoffs at GM.

Wages are stagnant, growing at barely the official inflation level. A report published earlier this month by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that the typical 27-year-old man's annual earnings in 2013 were 31 percent less than those of a 27-year old man in 1969, in real terms. Median household incomes have fallen since 1999.

Seven years after the passage of Obamacare, the health care crisis is even more severe. The effect of that law was to shift the burden of costs from corporations and the state to workers, while encouraging employers to slash "overly generous" health benefits. Last month, aviation and defense giant Honeywell became the latest corporation to eliminate health care benefits for retirees.

As the Democrats focus their attention on Trump's supposed connections to Russia, the Trump administration and the Republican-controlled Congress are going forward with their attack on health care, following passage earlier this month of the American Health Care Act, a reactionary measure that would gut Medicaid, the government program for the poor, and reduce or eliminate coverage for millions of Americans.

Popular anger has erupted across the country at town hall meetings with congressmen. Millions of people, including those with steady employment, rely on charity or emergency rooms for basic care. In March, thousands of people lined up in the cold hours before sunrise to get free dental work at a clinic in Maryland. According to a *Washington Post* article on the event, nearly one in five Americans over the age of 65 do not have a single real tooth.

Pensions are under relentless assault. Older workers are working at the highest rate since 1962, mainly because they cannot afford to retire. More than a quarter of workers over the age of 55 have less than \$10,000 saved. Large multi-employer pension funds for truck drivers, coal miners and other workers face insolvency.

The collective funding deficit for public pension funds throughout the country soared \$434 billion over the past year,

to \$3.85 trillion, according to a report in the *Financial*. The bankruptcy of the US territory of Puerto Rico, which is expected to lead to a 10 percent cut in pensions along with the layoff of thousands of teachers and other public employees, is seen by the ruling class as a precedent for a series of Detroit-style city bankruptcies to rip up benefits and slash social services.

Then there is the ongoing destruction of basic social infrastructure. In Flint, 8,000 residents face possible foreclosure for failing to pay for lead-tainted water, three years after the exposure of the poisoning of the city through the criminal actions of local and national officials of both parties. Virtually nothing has been done to replace the antiquated pipe system that leached lead into the water supply. Similarly decayed water systems exist in cities throughout the country.

Young people face a future of low-wage work and permanent indebtedness. Tuition for college and university—necessary for any prospect of decent employment—continues to skyrocket, up by more than 500 percent since 1985. Interest rates for new federal tuition loans are scheduled to rise next year. Total student loan debt is now more than \$1.4 trillion, with the average undergraduate leaving college burdened with a debt of more than \$37,000.

Mass popular hostility to the attack on public education was on display last week when students at a university commencement ceremony booed Trump's education secretary, Betsy DeVos. The billionaire heiress, who once led an organization that advocated the return of child labor, is escalating the assault on public education initiated by George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration is going forward with the roundup and deportation of immigrant workers. And with the drug epidemic spiraling out of control, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has announced plans to reverse directives for more lenient treatment of drug-related crimes. Horrific police violence continues on a daily basis, virtually unreported by the media, with 445 people killed so far this year.

The political crisis in Washington is of a historic character, with explosive consequences for the entire world. Constitutional forms of rule in the center of world capitalism are breaking down, the political consequence of endless war and historic levels of social inequality.

Such crises are hallmarks of a pre-revolutionary situation, but it is not within the warring ruling class factions that a revolutionary movement will develop. A conflict is unfolding in the United States of a very different character, one that will have far greater global implications—a conflict between the working class and the capitalist class.

The turn must be to the working class. The working class must intervene in this crisis with its own solution, one that addresses its real needs. The Socialist Equality Party is building a political leadership in the working class, unifying the developing struggles of all sections of workers—white, black

and Latino, immigrant and native ~~born~~ men and women—on a socialist and revolutionary program.

The SEP insists that workers have basic rights—the right to a good-paying and secure job, the right to health care and a comfortable retirement, the right to free public education, the right to leisure and affordable housing, the right to utilities and a healthy environment, the right to enjoy art and culture. These rights cannot be secured except through a frontal attack on the prerogatives of the corporations and the rich. A massive redistribution of wealth is required, including the seizure of the ill-gotten gains accumulated through speculation and fraud. The major banks and corporations must be turned into public utilities, under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class.

The political mobilization of the working class to secure these rights is inseparable from the fight against imperialist war, the axis of the foreign policy of the ruling elite, which threatens the entire planet. It depends upon the unification of workers of every country, who face the same conditions and the same bankrupt social and economic system.

A solution to the terminal crisis of capitalism can be found only through the independent organization of the working class, in opposition to the corporate-controlled political parties and the entire capitalist state. The aim must be the establishment of a workers' government, to reorganize economic life to meet social need, not private profit.

One hundred years after the Russian Revolution, the perspective of world socialist revolution is the only way forward for humanity. To build a leadership to develop this movement is the most urgent practical task.

For information on joining the Socialist Equality Party, click here.

Joseph Kishore

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>