

Support the Socialist Equality Party in the 2004 US elections

Socialist Equality Party
28 April 2004

Below we are publishing the Socialist Equality Party's 2004 US election statement, which was first posted January 27, 2004. It has been revised to take into account the selection of John Kerry as the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate.

The Socialist Equality Party calls upon all of our supporters and all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to join the independent socialist campaign in the 2004 US elections. The all-but-certain nomination of John Kerry as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party demonstrates once again the complete subservience of the existing two-party system to the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy that rules the United States. The Massachusetts senator, an experienced and trusted representative of big business, has nothing to offer the working class. In terms of the policies that he advocates, Kerry represents no alternative to George W. Bush. The “change” that he offers is, at most, one of style, but not of substance.

On the all-important issue of Iraq—the spearhead of the drive by the ruling elite to establish a new American empire—Kerry has declared his unwavering support for the continued occupation of the besieged country and the military repression of its population. Tens of millions of Americans who oppose the war have been disenfranchised by a two-party political system that leaves no room for any serious challenge to the political priorities and financial interests of the ruling elite.

The SEP candidates—Bill Van Auken for president and Jim Lawrence for vice president—are the only candidates in 2004 who present a revolutionary alternative to the program of American imperialism. They and the SEP candidates for Congress are running on a democratic and socialist program to defend the interests of working people and oppose war, social reaction and attacks on democratic rights.

Bill Van Auken, 54, is a full-time writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* whose involvement in the struggles of the American and international workers' movement spans 35 years. He lives in New York City. Jim Lawrence, 65, is a retired auto worker, who worked at General Motors plants in the Dayton, Ohio, area for 30 years. He is a member of United Auto Workers Local 696 and has run as a socialist candidate for Congress.

The SEP campaign is of immense importance for working people not only in the US, but internationally. It takes place within the context of an unprecedented eruption of American militarism and an assault on the rights and conditions of US workers that serves as the model for governments in every other part of the world.

The conquest of Iraq is a turning point in history, not only for the Middle East and the United States, but for the world. Nearly 30 years after its retreat from Vietnam, the US ruling elite is undertaking the revival of undisguised colonialism, invading and occupying an independent country in order to subjugate its people and gain control of its oil resources. This criminal enterprise is not merely “Bush's war.” It has received the overwhelming endorsement of the entire US political and media establishment, liberal and conservative alike. The “liberal” *New York Times*, for example, published an editorial on April 25 which demanded

the dispatch of tens of thousands of additional troops to crush the joint uprising by Sunni and Shiite Iraqis, declaring, “This is not the moment for retreat and it certainly is not the moment for half measures.”

The similarities between Iraq and Vietnam lie not in the terrain or in the political ideology of those resisting US attack, but in the methods employed by the invader. Once again, the US government is using the superior weaponry of an industrialized country to exterminate opposition in an oppressed former colonial country; once again, US officials promise to create “killing fields” in any city or village which resists occupation, while justifying their brutality in the name of “democracy” and “freedom.” In fact, this war was launched without any democratic consultation, on the basis of lies and provocations. The American people must oppose the ongoing and escalating bloody violence, and hold the entire ruling class responsible for the barbarism now unfolding in Iraq, just as the rulers of Japan and Germany were held responsible after World War II.

Millions of people in the US and around the world sense that the Bush administration marks a new and ominous turn in the direction of American policy. With his so-called war on terrorism, Bush has embarked on a course that is increasingly destabilizing international politics and threatens a cataclysmic eruption of violence on a global scale.

Those who are looking for a way to fight back will not find it in the Democratic Party campaign. Kerry and the Democrats are completely identified with the policy of militarism, declaring, like Bush, that the American conquest of Iraq and Afghanistan cannot be allowed to fail, and vowing to devote even greater resources to the “war on terror.”

The 2004 election campaign is unfolding on two separate planes. Within the American ruling elite, a ferocious struggle is raging, whose bitterness intensifies as the contradictions of the profit system become more intractable. But it is an internal struggle within the elite, in which billions of dollars will be expended over which methods and which personnel should be used to accomplish agreed-on goals.

Whatever his criticisms of Bush, Kerry's differences are essentially tactical. He maintains that the successful completion of Bush's reckless invasion of the Middle East and Central Asia requires a new administration that can more effectively mobilize international support—and can give the American people the illusion of “fairness” in the sacrifices of blood and living standards that such wars will increasingly require.

Under conditions in which masses of working people are seeking to utilize the elections to respond to the most hated features of the Bush administration, the Democratic Party campaign serves a vital function for the ruling elite—to spread the illusion that the election of the “anybody but Bush” candidate will mean a real change for the better. The victory of Kerry, however, would not be a victory for the masses, but only a victory for the two-party system and its role in diverting mass discontent into safe political channels.

In launching its campaign, the Socialist Equality Party is completely

realistic. We understand very well that our candidates will, in the present situation, win only a limited number of votes. But the purpose of our campaign is to raise the level of political debate within the United States and internationally, to break out of the straitjacket of right-wing bourgeois politics, and present a socialist alternative to the demagoguery and lies of the establishment parties and the mass media. Our campaign is not about votes. It is about ideas and policies.

The Socialist Equality Party will use the elections as an opportunity to develop a serious discussion on the social and political crisis, and lay down the programmatic foundations for the building of a mass movement for a revolutionary transformation of American society.

The SEP intends to conduct this campaign not simply on a national, but on an international level. We want our campaign to represent the interests of masses of working and oppressed people all over the world, whose lives are profoundly and disastrously affected by the policies pursued by American imperialism. Given the global impact of the United States, it would be entirely appropriate to allow the citizens of every country to participate in the election of an American president. As that is not yet possible, the SEP candidates will utilize the elections to develop a conscious sense of international unity among American working people and their class brothers and sisters all over the world.

We see this fight for international unity as the most important task of our campaign. It is essential to inspire a genuinely worldwide movement against imperialism—one that opposes all forms of chauvinism, regardless of whether its reactionary appeal is based on religious, ethnic or national identity.

We say to all those who see the need for such an alternative: contact the Socialist Equality Party today, sign up to help place our candidates on the ballot in your state, fight for the policies of the SEP campaign by agreeing to run as an SEP candidate in your congressional district!

It is an illusion to believe that the issues confronting working people can be resolved simply by the removal of Bush. The Bush administration is, in the final analysis, the political expression of the desperation, disorientation and recklessness of the American ruling elite as it confronts a systemic social and economic crisis for which it has no rational, let alone progressive, solution. There is no question that Bush and his associates represent an especially foul, reactionary and even criminal element within this elite. But even if they were to be removed in November, their replacement by Kerry and the Democrats would not substantially alter the violent and destructive trajectory of American capitalism, either within the United States or internationally.

In the event of a Democratic Party victory, the campaign promises would soon be exposed as cynical exercises in electioneering demagoguery. A President Kerry would remain subservient to the same corporate interests and pursue the same imperialist strategy of world domination.

A fundamental and progressive shift in American policy requires not merely a change in the ruling personnel, but rather a social revolution that puts an end to the domination of the American people by corporate interests, massive private wealth and the profit system itself.

The necessity of such a radical change flows from the nature and depth of the crisis of American capitalism, whose causes are:

1. The breakdown of the nation-state system: The unprecedented integration and interdependence of the world economy—the phenomenon known as globalization—is incompatible with the nation-state system upon which capitalism is based. The violent eruption of American imperialism—which finds its essential expression in the Bush administration's doctrine of preemptive war—represents a desperate attempt to resolve the contradiction between world economy and the nation state by establishing the hegemony of one country—namely, the United States—over all other countries.

2. The drive for profit and the exploitation of the American and international working class: The worldwide decline in the social

position of the working class is bound up with the emergence of transnational corporations, which scour the globe in search of cheap raw materials and low wages. Advances in technology are used to facilitate the movement of jobs to countries where lower wages and more ruthless levels of exploitation make possible higher rates of profit. The direct impact on American workers of this inexorable process of global capitalist development has been the loss of jobs and a decline in wages.

The increasingly global character of production is, in itself, a potentially progressive development. It opens up the possibility for rationally integrating and expanding man's productive forces to eliminate poverty and raise living standards around the world. But within the framework of capitalist private ownership of industry and finance, globalization is turned against the working class.

The orientation of the old labor organizations—the protection of national industry and the national labor market—is undermined by globally integrated production and the unprecedented mobility of capital. The role of these bureaucratic apparatuses, including the AFL-CIO in the US, has been transformed from pressuring the employers and the government for concessions to the workers, to pressuring the workers for concessions to the employers so as to attract capital. These organizations, which are wedded to a national program, can play only a fundamentally reactionary role.

To defend their jobs, wages and working conditions, American workers must reject all forms of economic nationalism and protectionism—which subordinate them to their corporate bosses while dividing them from their class brothers and sisters in other countries—and counterpose to the global strategy of the transnational corporations their own global strategy. They must consciously strive to coordinate their struggles to defend jobs and living standards with those of workers internationally, fighting to defend the interests of workers of all countries on the basis of a common anti-capitalist and socialist program.

3. The growth of social inequality: The interests of the overwhelming majority of the world's 5.5 billion inhabitants are subordinated to the drive for profit, which serves the interests of only the smallest fraction of society. The massive growth in the scale of social inequality over the past two decades is not merely an unpleasant feature of capitalism. Rather, the gigantic concentration of wealth within the richest 1 percent of the population of the United States and the other advanced capitalist countries is itself a major factor in making the whole socioeconomic system dysfunctional.

No matter how serious the issue—jobs, health care, education, housing—the ultimate criterion that decides the acceptability or non-acceptability of proposed solutions to one or another aspect of the crisis is its impact on the personal wealth of the rich. The resolution of all political, social and economic questions is decided on the basis of the following formula: All that increases the wealth of the rich is good. All that places restraints on the accumulation of personal wealth is bad, and should, if possible, be made illegal.

4. The anarchy of capitalism: The expanding social needs generated by a complex mass society cannot be met within the framework of an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and the unrestrained accumulation of personal wealth. The necessity for a scientific and socially motivated utilization of mankind's productive forces and technology—the absence of which threatens the very physical survival of human civilization—poses the historic task of consciously subordinating the profit motive to the principle of humane, democratic and intelligent social planning—that is, replacing capitalism with socialism.

The social force that is capable of leading this struggle and establishing the political and economic foundations of socialism is the working class. In today's mass, globalized society the working class embraces far broader social layers than just the most impoverished workers, or those

employed in industry. White-collar employees, college-educated professionals, people employed in the fields of art and culture—all those who depend for their survival on a paycheck are part of the working class. In the former colonial countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa, hundreds of millions of former peasants are being brought into the cities and put to work in the factories and sweatshops that supply the giant transnational corporations—vastly expanding the ranks of the working class numerically and increasing its social weight in the world economy.

These billions of wage earners, as well as the owners of small and medium-sized businesses, are entirely at the mercy of a small elite that controls ever more massive concentrations of industrial and financial capital. The claim that we live in a “shareholder democracy” is a fraud. In an earlier period, when progressive reforms were considered a legitimate part of official politics, the monopolization of the productive forces was seen to be antithetical to democracy, and measures were taken to break up the giant trusts and oligopolies. Such policies have long since been repudiated by all wings of official bourgeois politics.

It falls to the working class to carry out, on the basis of a socialist program, the reorganization of economic life in the interests of the vast majority of the people. The prerequisite is the establishment of democratic and popular control over the massive concentrations of capital, whether in the fields of finance, telecommunications, information technology, pharmaceuticals, energy, transport, or any of the other areas of economic life that bear directly on the conditions facing the people of America and the world.

The Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2004 elections to initiate a new mass political movement for a socialist alternative to the reactionary and bankrupt parties of corporate America. The goal of this movement must be to end the political domination of the capitalist class and establish a workers’ government, which will represent the economic and social interests of working people and vastly expand their democratic control over the decisions that affect their lives. We seek to break the influence of the Democratic and Republican parties over the working class. The goal of our campaign is to organize, educate and transform the American working class into a class conscious and politically independent force.

The 2004 campaign is dominated by the eruption of American militarism. Since Bush entered the White House, the United States has attacked and conquered Afghanistan and Iraq, overthrown the government of Haiti and landed the Marines there, threatened attacks on Syria, Iran and North Korea, and deployed troops, aircraft and other military forces in countries as widely dispersed as the Philippines, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Liberia and Colombia.

The character of the US war drive is imperialist and neocolonialist. With the collapse of the USSR, the American ruling elite believes that there exists no effective obstacle to its pursuit of global hegemony. It aims to secure the interests of American-controlled transnationals before rival powers are sufficiently strong to challenge the US. While Bush and the American media present this explosion of militarism as a defensive response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the extreme-right faction that holds power under Bush was advocating such a policy throughout the 1990s. September 11 provided a pretext for carrying out an agenda of conquest drawn up far in advance.

The real aims of the US conquest of Iraq are threefold: to establish control over the second-largest oil reserves in the world; to place American military forces at the center of the Middle East, thus gaining an unparalleled geostrategic advantage over all potential rivals; and to provide an overseas diversion from the growth of social discontent at home.

There is an inextricable link between capitalist economics and war: the major capitalist powers are engaged in an increasingly bitter struggle over markets, profits and access to cheap labor and raw materials. In the final

analysis, a global conflict between the major powers is inevitable unless the international working class intervenes as a revolutionary force and puts an end to imperialism as a whole.

The Bush administration has invoked the struggle against “terrorism” to conceal the criminal nature of its war aims in Afghanistan and Iraq. It seeks to cover up the inconvenient fact that today’s “terrorist” or “tyrant” is, more often than not, yesterday’s ally—a category that includes not only Saddam Hussein, but also Osama bin Laden, Slobodan Milosevic, Manuel Noriega and other targets of US military action over the past two decades.

The only way to defeat the threat of terrorism is to remove its cause: putting an end to the military, political and economic domination of the Middle East by the United States and the lesser imperialist powers. The people of that region must be free to determine their own political course, including control of the natural resources. This is the essential precondition for a democratic solution to the Middle East conflict, allowing Arabs, Jews, Kurds and other peoples of the region to live together in peace.

The Socialist Equality Party demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US and other foreign troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and the entire Middle East and Central Asia. We demand the release of all prisoners taken in the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, including all those now jailed at Guantanamo Bay, on Diego Garcia, and at other US prisons and detention camps around the world. We call for the United States and Britain to pay reparations to the people of Iraq for the damage and suffering inflicted by the war, as well as compensation to the families of American and British soldiers killed and wounded in the war and occupation.

We denounce the claims by Bush, Kerry and the whole US political establishment that “failure in Iraq” is unthinkable. The people of Iraq are not the enemies of the American people. They have a legitimate right to take up arms to defend their land and homes against an invader from the other side of the world. Their actions of resistance and self-defense are not “terrorism.” The invasion of Iraq is a reckless and politically criminal seizure of a defenseless country. To the extent that political opposition to the war places obstacles in the way of the completion of this crime, such opposition is entirely beneficial to the working people of the United States and the world. A US “failure” in Iraq would serve to discredit the American ruling elite and strengthen the popular opposition to its program of militarism and world domination.

We call for those who conspired to invade Afghanistan and Iraq, from Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld on down, to be placed on trial for war crimes. We call for the dismantling of the Pentagon war machine, the closure of all American military bases worldwide, and the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, above all, in the United States and other imperialist centers. Military industries and facilities should be converted to productive civilian uses with no loss of jobs or income for the workers affected.

The increasing casualty toll in Iraq and the strain on US military forces deployed worldwide make it all but inevitable that the US government will attempt to revive the military draft. Democratic and Republican politicians have already begun to hint that such a decision will be made once the presidential election is safely past. The SEP opposes the reintroduction of conscription. It is not a matter, as its proponents claim, of sharing the military burden more equally or democratically. On the contrary, the ruling elite aims to use the draft to compel hundreds of thousands of working class youth to serve as cannon fodder for imperialism.

We propose a socialist foreign policy, based on international working class solidarity. The resources and technology of the advanced industrialized countries should be employed, not to oppress, exploit or exterminate the people of the “Third World,” but to raise living standards for all working people to a decent level and create, for the first time in

world history, conditions of genuine worldwide social equality.

In its domestic as well as its foreign policy, the Bush administration has used September 11 as a pretext to put into effect a broad range of measures prepared in advance. In the name of the “war on terror,” and through bipartisan legislation like the USA Patriot Act, it has scrapped such basic constitutional protections as the presumption of innocence, the right of habeas corpus, the right to an attorney, and the right to a speedy and public trial.

The infrastructure of an American police state is being established: the Department of Homeland Security, the Pentagon’s Northern Command, centralizing all military forces in the continental US, and a concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In legal arguments supporting the detention of Jose Padilla and Yasser Hamdi, the Bush administration has proclaimed the entire United States a war zone in which the president has the authority to act as military dictator, seizing and imprisoning American citizens without any judicial review.

The unprecedented assault on democratic rights is not merely a matter of the decisions of George W. Bush or the personality of Attorney General John Ashcroft. It is a byproduct of the enormous growth of social inequality in the United States over the past three decades.

Society is deeply divided between an oligarchy of the fabulously wealthy and the masses of working class and middle-class people struggling to pay their bills. The intensifying social stresses make it impossible to maintain democratic forms of rule. In the final analysis, the attack on democratic rights represents the defense mechanism of a financial elite seeking to protect its vast wealth against the social strivings of the overwhelming majority of the people.

The threat of dictatorship is the culmination of a protracted historical process. Since the end of World War II there have been repeated assaults on democratic rights: McCarthyism in the 1950s, FBI and CIA domestic spying in the 1960s, Watergate in the 1970s, Iran-Contra in the 1980s. The Democratic administration of Clinton carried out far-reaching antidemocratic measures. Many elements of the USA Patriot Act were prefigured in Clinton’s 1996 Antiterrorism Act, which cleared the way for more executions, secret courts and mass deportations.

In an earlier period, such as that of the Watergate crisis, attempts to undermine the constitutional order ultimately encountered significant opposition within sections of the ruling class. As these attacks have grown more far-reaching—and the financial gap between the ruling elite and the working class has grown wider—this opposition has become progressively weaker. There was no significant resistance to the destabilization of the Clinton administration through a series of bogus investigations, culminating in impeachment. The theft of the 2000 election, carried out with the complicity of the mass media and facilitated by the capitulation of the Democratic Party establishment, demonstrated that no section of the ruling elite has a serious commitment to the defense of democratic rights.

The Bush administration represents, in the fullest sense of the word, the coming to power of a criminal element within the American ruling elite. This is an unelected government, installed in office by the Supreme Court despite having lost the popular vote. It rules through methods of political provocation, using the terrible events of September 11, 2001, as an all-purpose justification for an extreme-right agenda. At the same time, it blocks any serious inquiry into what happened on that day: why US intelligence agencies gave known terrorists free rein, why the US military did nothing when four airliners were hijacked simultaneously, why the Bush administration ignored the advance warnings of an attack.

The revelations of former White House counterterrorism director Richard Clarke confirm the worst suspicions about the Bush administration’s role in the “war on terror”: it first blocked any action that could have forestalled the terrorist attacks, then utilized September 11 as a means of overcoming public opposition to US military intervention in Central Asia and the Middle East. The most plausible explanation for the

extraordinary inaction before September 11 on the part of the FBI, the CIA, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Pentagon—virtually every agency responsible for security procedures—is that high-level decisions were made, knowing that Al Qaeda was preparing terrorist attacks, to allow them to take place, in order to provide a suitable pretext for unleashing a program of military aggression that was already in an advanced stage of planning.

Bush’s decision to stake his political survival on his self-proclaimed role as a “war president” has the most ominous implications for the American people. There is no reason to assume that the Bush administration will willingly give up office, no matter what the popular sentiment. There is a real danger that, in the course of the 2004 campaign, the current administration will permit, or even engineer, a new and devastating terrorist attack within the United States, especially if Bush’s electoral fortunes take a turn for the worse. There have already been hints in the US media that in the event of such an attack, the November 2 election could be postponed or canceled outright, or held under conditions of martial law.

The defense of democratic rights requires a counteroffensive against the attempts by the Bush administration to whip up the most reactionary political and social forces and roll back progressive reforms won in the past. The Socialist Equality Party is indefatigable in its defense of past democratic and social gains—civil and voting rights, universal public education, health care for seniors, etc.—as well as constitutional guarantees of civil liberties.

The SEP demands equal rights for all and opposes all discrimination in employment, housing, education or any other field based upon race, national origin, religion, sex or sexual preference. We defend the unrestricted right of women to abortion on demand and uphold the right of gay people to marry and to receive the same medical, legal and employment benefits as heterosexual couples. We oppose the death penalty as a barbaric measure which sanctions the taking of human life by the state—a penalty that is imposed almost entirely on the poor and disproportionately on racial minorities.

But the defense of democratic rights cannot be limited to the purely negative task of beating back attacks on civil liberties and constitutional norms. The very concept of democratic rights must be expanded beyond the narrow framework of equality before the law and due process. It must encompass the social realities of life for the broad mass of working people.

The defense of democratic rights is inseparable from a struggle against the concentration of private wealth. There is a fundamental hypocrisy in the conception of equal rights before the law in a society permeated with economic and social inequality. The right to vote every two or four years means little when a financial oligarchy dictates the most important issues of daily life: whether people will have a job, how much they will be paid, under what conditions they will work.

Democracy must be infused with a profound social content, beginning with the democratization of the workplace, where most people spend the bulk of their time and effort. Industrial democracy means real control by working people over their working lives. Decisions affecting conditions of work, safety, salaries, hiring and hours must be subject to the democratic voice of the workforce. This presupposes the opening of the books of all corporations for inspection by the workers, and the ratification of corporate leadership by a democratic vote of all employees.

In the final analysis, the defense and extension of democracy are dependent on the political mobilization of the working class in the struggle for socialism.

America in 2004 is more sharply polarized along economic lines than ever before. The rich are far richer, the poor far poorer. The gap continues to widen, as more and more families that once would have considered themselves middle class face mounting economic insecurity and a steady

downward pressure on their living standards.

The top 1 percent owns more than 40 percent of the total wealth of American society—and more than 80 percent of financial assets like stocks and bonds—and its share is steadily growing. The top tenth of 1 percent, the richest 129,000 households, had \$505 billion in income in 2002, an average of \$4 million apiece. At the same time, one quarter of all wage workers earned less than \$8.70 an hour, the official poverty wage for a full-time worker.

Jobs: More than nine million workers are officially unemployed, and another five million classified as “discouraged” and not counted. An additional 25 million people are working part-time, generally for low pay and without benefits. Since Bush entered the White House, in January 2001, more than 2.5 million manufacturing jobs have been wiped out. Bush will be the first president since Herbert Hoover in the Great Depression to oversee a net reduction in jobs over the course of his four-year term.

Living standards: Median household income fell 2.2 percent in 2002, with the biggest fall in the Midwest (3.7 percent) due to job losses in manufacturing. Real wages have stagnated or declined for the past 30 years. During this same period, from 1973 on, the cost of a home mortgage has risen 70 times faster than the wages of the average male worker. American workers have been compelled to work longer and longer hours just to pay their bills. Working hours for the average full-time worker have increased from 1,720 a year in 1973 to 1,898 hours a year in 1998, a rise of 178 hours, the equivalent of more than four additional weeks of work per year.

Economic insecurity: Consumer debt, the main financial burden on working class and middle-class Americans, has mushroomed from 22 percent of income in 1946 to 110 percent of income today. Total credit card debt tripled between 1989 and 2001, with the average family’s debt rising 53 percent. In the last four years alone, household debt has risen from \$6.5 trillion to \$8.7 trillion, mainly from middle-income families refinancing the mortgages on their homes in order to obtain cash to pay pressing bills.

Poverty: Despite enormous advances in science, technology and labor productivity, the number of Americans facing hunger, homelessness and poverty is greater than at any time since World War II. The number living in poverty increased by 1.3 million in 2002, to 35 million. Cities and charities report sharply higher demand for emergency food and shelter, while government programs for the poor have been cut back sharply.

Health care: More than 43 million Americans are living without health insurance, and tens of millions face skyrocketing health care costs, especially for prescription drugs. For most working class families, a layoff means not only loss of income, but loss of health insurance. In 2002-03, two thirds of the states cut Medicaid benefits for the poor or reduced eligibility, ending coverage for nearly 2 million people, the majority of them children.

The environment: The Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Interior and similar agencies have been turned over to lobbyists for the corporate polluters. The Bush administration has repudiated efforts to abate global warming and loosened regulation of mercury, PCBs and other toxic substances, including radioactive waste. It has opened up national parks and national forests to unrestricted exploitation by the timber, energy and mining companies. For the first time in three decades, US air, water and wilderness are becoming dirtier and more polluted, at an incalculable cost to the future health and well-being of the American people.

Retirement security: Tens of millions of elderly people face a mounting threat to their right to a dignified retirement, as corporations loot pension funds, 401(k) accounts plunge in value, and Wall Street and the Bush administration target Social Security for privatization. The Medicare “reform” bill enacted by Congress and signed by Bush last year

is the first step in the privatization and destruction of the program that guarantees health care coverage for the elderly.

Education: 30 percent of American youth dropped out of high school before graduating in 2000, up from 26 percent in 1990. Thousands of school buildings are crumbling and dangerous. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” program, adopted by Congress with bipartisan support in 2001, is a deliberate attempt to undermine public education and force the closure of thousands of public schools. It substitutes standardized testing and regimentation for the all-rounded development of children, and especially their ability to think critically. Schools have focused their dwindling resources on meeting test requirements, scrapping instruction in non-tested subjects such as art and music, and cutting extracurricular activities like sports and drama.

College education is increasingly out of reach even for middle-income families, in the face of soaring tuition costs and cuts in financial aid. In place of any effort to meet the basic responsibility of society to insure that the next generation is properly educated, the Bush administration has cut funding for Pell Grants and other need-based programs. Kerry and the Democrats are proposing to link college tuition grants to the establishment of mandatory national service for young people, using college education as an incentive to drive youth into the military.

Social infrastructure: American roads, bridges, mass transit, water and sewer systems, and other aspects of the social infrastructure are crumbling due to budget cutbacks and the refusal of the moneyed elite to permit any significant social investment. The most acute crisis is in state governments, which went into the current fiscal year facing a combined deficit of over \$80 billion. State governments have carried out cutbacks ranging from closing libraries to shrinking meals for prison inmates. As the August 2003 power blackout in the Northeast and Midwest demonstrated, privately owned utilities have failed to make needed investments in maintenance, under the pressure of Wall Street to maximize quarterly profits.

Prisons: More than 2.1 million Americans were in jail or prison in 2000, four times the number in 1980. The US imprisons a greater proportion of its population than any other industrialized country, and is one of the few that still carries out the barbaric practice of capital punishment. From 1980 to 2000, the number of black men in prison rose from 143,000 to 792,000, and there are today more black men in prison than attending college.

Conditions for youth: About 5.5 million young people, aged 16 to 24, are out of school and out of work—essentially abandoned by American society. Some 1.3 million runaways or homeless youth are living on American streets, and 5,000 die each year from assault, disease or suicide. The number of juveniles in prison rose 74 percent in the 1990s, despite a sharp fall in juvenile crime. As many as 4 million children suffer from mental illness, and tens of thousands of parents have been forced to turn over custody of their children to the states as the only way to obtain mental health treatment.

The policies of the Bush administration have exacerbated economic inequality and starved essential public services. The bulk of the \$1.35 trillion tax cut in 2001 and the second round of cuts in 2003 went to the top 1 percent of the population. Meanwhile, real federal spending on domestic social needs has been sharply reduced.

The highest echelons of corporate America are rife with criminality and fraud. Hundreds of CEOs have looted their own companies, amassed personal fortunes of hundreds of millions and even billions, while workers and small shareholders have paid the price. Enron is only the most notorious—and the most closely connected to Bush personally—of the corporate criminals. Nine out of the ten largest bankruptcies in US history have taken place since Bush became president. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been looted or lost. But only a handful of top executives have been arrested, let alone convicted or sent to prison.

What is involved here is not an aberration, but a form of social pathology: the criminalization of the American corporate elite. The objective source of this process lies in the protracted crisis of American capitalism, beginning with the sharp decline in profit rates, particularly in manufacturing, during the 1970s. The ruling class responded to this crisis with a vicious offensive against the working class throughout the 1980s, slashing jobs and wages, smashing unions, enacting tax cuts for corporations and the rich and gutting regulations on big business. With the collapse of the old labor organizations, the ruling elite felt increasingly freed of any restraint, social, political or even moral, on the accumulation of private wealth. However, even these measures could not overcome the underlying contradictions of capitalist production, which tend to drive down the rate at which profit is extracted from the labor process. In the 1990s, corporate America turned to outright fraud on a massive scale, “cooking the books” to show false returns, boost stock prices and swell the incomes of top executives.

The Socialist Equality Party advances a program whose aim is the reorganization of the US and world economy in the interests of the working class. The present capitalist setup, in which all the vast forces of industry and finance are privately owned and controlled, must be replaced by a socialist system of public ownership and democratic control of the economy. We advocate the creation of an economic system whose organizing principle is the satisfaction of human needs, not the creation of profit and the accumulation of vast personal wealth.

To establish the economic foundation for the reorganization of economic life in the interests of the broad mass of the working people, we advocate the transformation of all privately owned industrial and manufacturing corporations valued at \$10 billion or more—companies that, taken together, control the decisive share of the US economy—into publicly owned enterprises, with full compensation for small shareholders and the terms of compensation for large shareholders to be publicly negotiated. The SEP also proposes the nationalization of all large banking and insurance institutions. In addition, the SEP advocates the nationalization of the railroads, airlines, telecommunications and power utilities, and the placement of all critical natural resources under public ownership and control.

The reorganization of the American economy along these lines would make available immense resources to implement programs that would significantly improve the living conditions of the working class.

We call for a massive program of public works to guarantee employment for all those who are presently unemployed and able to work. The urgent need to raise the income level of millions of working Americans must be tackled by establishing a guaranteed federally funded annual income, indexed to inflation. To create jobs and make possible the increased participation of workers in political and cultural life, the workweek should be reduced to 30 hours, at 40 hours pay. Full-time workers should receive at least five weeks annual vacation.

We call as well for a massive investment to ensure high-quality public education and access to free higher education for all; universal, comprehensive medical coverage; state-subsidized housing construction to build comfortable and affordable homes; a guaranteed right of workers to join a union and control the union democratically; the outlawing of union-busting tactics and wage-cutting; full democratic rights, including citizenship, for immigrant workers, whether legal or “illegal”; retirement security at a decent income for all working people; and government support for small and medium-sized businesses.

The social rights outlined here can be realized only on the basis of concrete measures to promote social equality. Tax policy must be stood on its head: from a means of plundering the people to enrich the millionaires and big business, it must become the instrument for a radical redistribution of wealth. This means repealing the tax cuts for the rich enacted under Ronald Reagan, the elder George Bush and George W.

Bush, restoring direct taxes on wealth, such as the estate tax, and abolishing the loopholes and accounting gimmicks that allow most large corporations to pay only a tiny fraction of tax on their profits. Taxes should be reduced for the vast majority of the population, and sharply increased on those with high incomes and accumulated wealth.

Particular attention must be paid to investigating the speculative activities of the 1990s and the criminal misappropriation of corporate resources by CEOs, at the expense of the workers and small shareholders. This stolen wealth must be recaptured and used to improve social services and working class living standards.

Property rights must be subordinated to social rights. This does not mean the nationalization of everything, or the abolition of small or medium-sized businesses, which are themselves victimized by giant corporations and banks. Establishing a planned economy will give such businesses ready access to credit and more stable market conditions, so long as they provide decent wages and working conditions.

The Socialist Equality Party calls as well for measures to enable working people to have full access to art and culture. American popular culture was once one of the wonders of the world, a pole of attraction because of its innovation and powerful democratic and humanistic spirit. As in other spheres, the subordination of culture to the profit motive has led to an immense degeneration.

Popular culture has suffered under the impact of funding cuts for the arts and a right-wing ideological assault on artistic expression. Government subsidies to museums, orchestras, theaters and public television and radio have been gutted. Art and music education has been drastically curtailed or eliminated outright from most public schools. Library hours and services have been scaled back. The damage to the intellectual and moral fabric of society resulting from such a mercenary and philistine approach is impossible to quantify. There is, however, an indisputable link between the glorification of militarism, brutality and egotism and hostility to the artistic and cultural heritage of previous generations.

The Socialist Equality Party demands massive funding for the arts and the creation of new schools and centers to ensure that every section of the population has access to music, dance, drama and art, either at a nominal fee or for free. Decisions on subsidies and grants for the arts must be taken out of the hands of the politicians and bureaucrats and placed under the control of committees of artists, musicians and other cultural workers.

Alongside the right to culture stands freedom of the press and political expression, which has likewise been drastically curtailed. The corporate-controlled media has played the most deplorable role in acting as a propaganda service for the government and big business. The broadcast networks and major newspapers, increasingly monopolized by a handful of giant corporations, long ago surrendered any claim to represent a “Fourth Estate” that subjected the actions of the government and corporate elite to critical scrutiny. There is truth to the saying that an informed public is an essential component of democratic governance. The systematic disinformation and lies churned out by the cynics of the establishment media play a major role in the subversion of democratic rights.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the equation of a “free press” with the ability of malefactors of great wealth to own and control the newspapers and the airwaves, dictating what the people are allowed to know and polluting the public mind with backward and reactionary prejudices. We advocate the breakup of the media monopolies and their placement under public ownership and control, with democratic access guaranteed for opposing points of view.

The democratization of the media must be accompanied by a broad restructuring of the US political system itself, abolishing such archaic institutions as the Electoral College, ending the numerous restrictions on the right of all citizens to vote, and eliminating the myriad obstacles to third parties and independent candidates who wish to challenge the

Democrats and Republicans. These barriers amount to state-sponsored props for a two-party system that is increasingly discredited—and narrow to the point of irrationality, given the vast diversity of a country of nearly 300 million people. The SEP advocates a system of proportional representation in which all parties that received a significant share of the vote would be represented in legislative bodies.

Only a socialist economic program can assure the rational development of the earth's finite resources. The subordination of all human activity to the drive for profit and the accumulation of personal wealth threatens to unleash an ecological disaster. The inability of the profit system to confront this or any of the other problems posed by the increasingly complex needs of mass society poses a mortal threat to mankind's survival. Socialist economic planning will create conditions for genuine global collaboration in the protection of the earth's environment.

None of the social rights discussed here can be secured without the emergence of a broad and powerful mass movement of working people that fights for them. The Socialist Equality Party intends to utilize the 2004 elections for the purpose of building such a movement from the ground up, appealing to workers, students, young people and professionals to come forward and join the struggle for a better world.

The central historical problem of the American working class has been its inability to break from the bourgeois parties and establish its own mass independent party. The established two-party system offers only the illusion of choice. Both the Democrats and the Republicans, whatever their differences, accept and defend the social framework of American capitalism: the domination of all aspects of life by private wealth and production for profit.

While working people possess the right to vote and can exercise that right, despite mounting social and legal obstacles, they have nothing to vote *for*, and no effective means to influence the policies of the government. Those are determined entirely by the competing interests of rival factions within the economic elite. The working class is, in practice, politically disenfranchised.

The central weakness of previous mass social movements in the United States—the populist revolt of the 1890s, the militant union struggles of the IWW before World War I, the massive labor upsurge of the 1930s, the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s—is that they never succeeded in freeing working people from the political domination of the Democratic Party. Consequently, the working class was limited to fighting for the mitigation of this or that social evil. It could not place on the political agenda the systematic reorganization of American society to serve the needs of the people, as opposed to the corporate establishment.

The most farsighted leaders of the Democratic Party, such as Franklin Roosevelt, sought to alleviate the worst features of capitalism in order to save the profit system as a whole. His New Deal policies, followed by the social measures enacted under Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s, enabled the Democratic Party, with the assistance of the trade union bureaucracy, to block any direct challenge to American capitalism.

Over the past three decades, however, the decline in the global economic position of American capitalism has produced a drastic shift to the right by both big business parties. The Republicans have openly embraced an agenda of social reaction, demanding the destruction of all past social reforms. The Democrats have abandoned any policy of liberal social reform and adapted themselves, in deeds if not in words, to the class-war policies of the Republicans. This has gone hand in hand with the increasing role of huge sums of money, campaign contributions from the wealthy and corporate interests which amount to little more than the systematic bribery of political officeholders. More than \$3 billion was expended on the 2000 elections, and even greater sums will be spent this year, while voter turnout continues to decline as working people see both parties catering ever more openly to the super-rich.

An entire generation has grown to maturity in America since the last

serious social reforms were enacted, in the late 1960s. It is nearly 40 years since Johnson proclaimed his “war on poverty,” based on the premise that the capitalist system was capable of eliminating social misery. Today, American capitalism is richer than ever, but more people are living in poverty than in 1965.

The record of the Clinton administration demonstrates the bankruptcy of Democratic Party “liberalism.” Clinton laid the basis for many of the reactionary policies of the Bush administration: abandoning promised health care reform, eliminating welfare, attacking democratic rights, carrying out military interventions and strikes in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq. Bill and Hillary Clinton both supported Bush's decision to invade and occupy Iraq, and both oppose any US withdrawal from that country.

The Democratic Party opened the door to the takeover of the US government by the Republican right, refusing to conduct any serious struggle against the impeachment conspiracy spearheaded by far-right political operatives, judges and Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. This destabilization campaign was followed by the capitulation of the Democrats to the hijacking of the 2000 presidential election and the installation of an unelected president through the intervention of the Supreme Court.

The 2004 campaign marks a further stage in the right-wing trajectory of official US politics. In the Republican Party one finds a pure expression of the most unrestrained and rapacious sections of the corporate elite. They seek to mobilize as their core base of public support the most backward and reactionary sections of the middle class, such as the Christian right, racial bigots and outright fascists. The common goal of these elements is to remove all restrictions on corporate profit-making and the exploitation of working people. Union conditions, to the extent that they still represent any benefit; environmental, health and safety regulations; taxation on business income and inherited wealth; the progressive income tax; the eight-hour day; and even restrictions on child labor are targeted for elimination.

The Democratic Party, despite the occasional populist posturing of its candidates, remains one of the two main political institutions of American capitalism. It serves the interests of the financial oligarchy, which is deeply concerned with the selection of the candidate who may well, if circumstances warrant it, replace George Bush in the White House. As soon as it became clear that the Bush administration faced growing difficulties because of the war in Iraq and the worsening social and economic crisis at home, the ruling elite moved swiftly to dump the front-runner in the Democratic primaries, Howard Dean, who was viewed as too closely identified with antiwar sentiment, and replaced him with Kerry as the presumptive nominee.

The speed with which this was carried out demonstrates an inarguable historical fact: the Democratic Party is an instrument of big business. It cannot be “taken over” or transformed into an instrument of the working people. The entire election process is dominated by big money and the media. The candidates are put through their paces and whipped into shape. In the final analysis, the choice of president reflects a consensus within the ruling elite, rather than the democratic will of the people.

The conflicts during the primaries within the Democratic leadership, however bitter, were fundamentally over tactics: how best to position the Democratic Party to preempt, if possible, and eviscerate, if necessary, an upsurge of social protest, containing and diverting it along channels that do not threaten the capitalist system as a whole. The clearest demonstration of this came when Dean, after being driven out of the race, rallied behind Kerry and denounced any effort among his supporters to support an antiwar third-party campaign.

The SEP fights for the political independence of the working class. This means not only a formal break with the two-party system, but a rejection of various forms of “radical” and quasi-populist politics which, in the

final analysis, are only a left prop for bourgeois politics as a whole. Some of these tendencies operate openly within the Democratic Party (the campaigns of Dennis Kucinich and Al Sharpton); others support the Green Party or the candidacy of Ralph Nader. All advocate perspectives that would disorient and derail any struggle by working people against the profit system.

Kucinich embraces the economic nationalism of the trade union bureaucracy and more backward and noncompetitive sections of American business. Nader promotes illusions that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left or even transformed into an instrument of radical political and social reform. He openly presents his campaign as an adjunct to that of Kerry, advocating a “two-front” struggle against the Bush administration and thereby renouncing any genuine independence from the two-party system.

Sharpton’s candidacy was based on racial politics, which are fundamentally inimical to the interests of working people and the critical need to build a mass international movement against capitalism. Those who claim to politically represent racial constituencies invariably do so in the interests of narrow and privileged social layers, whether among blacks, Latinos, or other ethnic groups, who seek positions and perks within the framework of the capitalist system.

The Socialist Equality Party opposes the various strains of identity politics, including cultural nationalism and feminism, whose essential role is to obscure the most fundamental division in capitalist society, that between the social classes. We stand firmly in support of integration and the unity of all working people. In that context, we oppose affirmative action policies, which pit white and minority workers or students against one another in a divisive struggle for jobs or college admission. Such programs benefit only a privileged few, not the masses of minority people. We insist on full and genuine equality of opportunity, within the framework of a massive social investment to guarantee good-paying jobs, quality K-12 and college education, affordable housing and all other social needs. Only such a policy, based on the unity in struggle of all sections of working people, can create the conditions for a society in which all people can enjoy economic security and realize their full potential, not one where limited opportunities are rationed out on the basis of race or gender.

The Greens play a reactionary political role, opposing the development of a socialist movement based on the working class in favor of the formation of a third capitalist party. As the record of the Green Party in Germany has demonstrated, once the Greens begin to achieve influence in bourgeois politics, they quickly discard their initial radicalism. The former pacifists in the German Greens paved the way for the first overseas deployment of German troops since World War II. In California in 2003, Green gubernatorial candidate Peter Camejo backed the right-wing-inspired recall campaign and ended up tacitly supporting a vote for the main Democratic candidate, Cruz Bustamante.

In the 2004 campaign, such left-talking politicians will once again seek to put off the critical question of establishing the political independence of the working class from both big business parties. They will seek to divert the mass opposition to Bush behind Kerry and the Democratic Party. They all subscribe to the position of “anyone but Bush,” as though Bush were the only weapon of American capitalism, rather than one of many instruments of the ruling elite.

All such “lesser evil” politics are truly a dead end for the working class. There is no shortcut in the struggle against imperialist war and social reaction. It is necessary to undertake now the construction of an independent, mass socialist party. It is to provide a framework and focus for this struggle that the Socialist Equality Party is running in the 2004 elections.

The Socialist Equality Party bases itself on the great traditions of the international socialist movement. Socialism stands for equality, human solidarity and cooperation, the material and spiritual liberation of mankind

from oppression and want. The first task of socialism is the elimination of poverty—a goal that is eminently realizable, given the enormous development of man’s productive forces and the tremendous advances in science and technology. Socialism will proceed to raise the living standards of the broad mass of humanity and create the conditions for full equality.

But man does not live by bread alone, and the perspective of socialism does not stop at the fulfillment—as crucial as it is—of immediate material needs. That achievement lays the foundations for an enormous flowering of culture, science and the intellectual and moral stature of individual men and women. Socialism envisions the fullest possible development of people’s talents, interests and potentialities, in a world where social ownership of the means of production, international planning and cooperation, and a vast extension of popular participation and democratic control will enable man to overcome the demoralizing grind of economic insecurity and the dehumanizing effect of dog-eat-dog competition.

With the advent of Karl Marx, socialism became a science. With the October 1917 Revolution, it became the program of a mass popular movement that overthrew capitalism and established the first workers’ state—the Soviet Union.

The Russian Revolution was part of a broader international struggle of the working class for social equality. Every major advance of American workers was associated with socialism and spearheaded by socialist-minded militants—from the eight-hour day, to child labor laws, to universal public education, to the formation of mass industrial unions, to the end of Jim Crow segregation in the South.

Like many great ideals, socialism has been abused and betrayed. In the Soviet Union, it was betrayed by the bureaucracy that arose under Joseph Stalin. Stalinism was not the continuation of the egalitarian and internationalist legacy of the Russian Revolution. It was a conservative, bureaucratic reaction against the revolution, based on the nationalist program of “socialism in a single country.” The Stalinist bureaucracy crushed workers’ democracy, imposed dictatorial rule, liquidated the genuine Marxists and subverted revolutionary struggles of the working class around the world—all in the name of “socialism.” This betrayal of the Russian Revolution and socialism culminated in the direct collaboration of the Kremlin bureaucracy with international imperialism in the breakup of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism at the beginning of the 1990s.

In the US, the struggles of the working class were betrayed by the bureaucracy that arose within the trade unions. The bureaucracy defended the capitalist system and politically subordinated the workers to American big business, primarily through its alliance with the Democratic Party. The betrayal of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy has led to the identification of the unions with corporate management and their transformation into instruments to suppress the working class, rather than defend it.

Our movement bases itself on the legacy of the best, most courageous and far-sighted representatives of the working class, who fought for socialism in opposition to bureaucracy. The greatest embodiment of this tradition was Leon Trotsky, a leader of the Russian Revolution who led the struggle against the betrayals of Stalinism and laid the basis for the rebirth of the international workers’ movement through the founding in 1938 of the Fourth International—the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

America has also produced great fighters for socialism—men and women who battled the labor bureaucrats and devoted their lives to the liberation of the working class. Among them are such figures as Big Bill Haywood, Eugene Debs and James Cannon. American workers must re-appropriate this rich socialist heritage in order to organize the struggle today to defend their democratic rights and social conditions.

In no other country does the ruling class wage such a ferocious and relentless campaign against socialism as in the United States. From the moment of birth, every American is subjected to a barrage of anti-socialist

propaganda. Workers should ask themselves why this is. What are they afraid of? Is it mere coincidence that of all the industrialized countries, the US is where the elevation of profit and personal wealth over social needs is most entrenched, where capital exercises its rule over labor most ruthlessly, and the concentration of wealth is most brazen and obscene?

All those who instinctively recognize that the interests of society must take precedence over the accumulation of individual fortunes should rally to and actively support the campaign of the Socialist Equality Party in the 2004 elections.

We urge all of our supporters, all those who look to the *World Socialist Web Site* for political analysis, and all those who support a socialist alternative to the big business parties to become active participants in the SEP 2004 election campaign. This means, in the initial stage, joining in the effort to place our candidates on the ballot.

This, in itself, is a serious challenge and a major struggle to defend and expand democratic rights. In no other advanced capitalist country is it so difficult for an independent working class party to exercise the elementary democratic right of gaining access to the ballot as in the US.

Placing Bill Van Auken and Jim Lawrence on the ballot in all 50 states would require collecting petition signatures from nearly 750,000 registered voters (150,000 in California alone), as well as tens of thousands of dollars in filing fees and legal expenses. Placing SEP candidates on the ballot for the US Senate and the House of Representatives is another major task.

It can be achieved only by developing a grassroots political movement that will broadly mobilize workers, professionals, young people and students and extend beyond the election itself, laying the foundations for the building of a mass socialist party of the working class.

We place this challenge before our supporters: Join us in the effort to publicize the SEP campaign, win support for its candidates, and place them on the ballot in as many states as possible. Decide yourself to run as an SEP candidate for Congress. Help build the SEP as the new political party of the working people.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact