

Anti-immigrant politics kill “reform” bill in US Senate

Bill Van Auken
10 April 2006

The following leaflet is available in PDF in both English and Spanish to download and distribute at demonstrations in defense of immigrant rights planned for Monday, April 10, in cities across the US.

The US Senate’s failure to pass a “compromise” immigration bill was the result of a reactionary debate over how severely undocumented immigrants should be punished for having entered the country.

The bill was in essence a reprise of legislation enacted in 1986 under the Republican administration of President Reagan. However, given its host of repressive initiatives, the measure was considerably more reactionary. That the Senate should fail to enact even the most minimal reform in the face of the demonstrations that have brought millions into the streets demanding just treatment for immigrant workers is an indication of how distant the two-party system has become from the interests of masses of ordinary working people as well as a measure of how far the US political establishment has swung to the right in the past two decades.

The legislation was aimed at allowing the two parties to bridge the gap between appealing to anti-immigrant sentiment and avoiding a political backlash at the polls in November from tens of millions of voters who are themselves recent immigrants or are connected by family and personal ties to others who are.

It included measures militarizing the 2,000-mile US-Mexican border and more than doubling the number of Border Patrol agents to an army of 25,000.

The portion of the bill dealing with the 12 million undocumented immigrants already in the country would have divided them into three categories. Those here more than five years—who can prove it—would be allowed to apply for permanent residency after working uninterrupted for another six years. They would also

be required to pay a \$2,000 fine and meet other requirements.

The next tier includes those who have been in the US from two to five years. They would have to leave the US to apply for a temporary work visa. The final group, estimated at between one and two million undocumented workers, who entered the country after January 1, 2004, would be subject to summary deportation.

If the Senate had approved this legislation, it would have had been reconciled with the even more draconian bill passed by the House, which called for the criminalization of undocumented workers and anyone who aids them. It was this reactionary anti-immigrant bill that provoked the recent mass demonstrations, marches and school walkouts as well as the national day of protest called on April 10.

Even the supposedly more lenient Senate version posed the nightmarish prospect of subjecting millions of workers to deportation and denial of work, while breaking up families and creating a vast new apparatus for repressing immigrants

The US financial elite and the two parties that represent its interests—the Democrats and Republicans—have neither the interest nor ability to resolve the issues raised by immigration to the US in a democratic and socially progressive manner.

On the one hand, they want to assure big business a steady supply of cheap labor from immigrants forced to leave their own countries by desperate conditions created by globalized capitalism. At the same time, they want to use immigrants as scapegoats to divert popular anger over growing social inequality and the scarcity of decent-paying jobs.

Working people must oppose both of these reactionary strategies with their own independent

policy, based on the fight for the unity of the working class and the demand for full democratic and citizenship rights for all undocumented workers. Against the drive by multinational capital to move freely across national borders while walling workers within them, the demand must be raised that workers be allowed to live and work in the country of their choice.

This policy can be fought for only through a break with the Democratic and Republican parties and the building of a new independent political movement of the working class based on a socialist program and an internationalist perspective of uniting the struggles of workers in the US with workers in every part of the world.

This is the program and perspective fought for only by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the *World Socialist Web Site*. We urge all those who want to fight to defend the rights of immigrant workers to join in the campaign to place the candidates of the SEP on the ballot for the 2006 election and to bring this program to the widest possible audience.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact