

Emergency Conference on the Social Crisis & War The Fight for a Socialist Alternative

23 February 2010

The *World Socialist Web Site*, Socialist Equality Party and International Students for Social Equality are holding an emergency national conference on the social crisis and war, to be held April 17-18 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We urge all of our readers and supporters to register and make plans to attend today.

A year and a half after the onset of the world economic crisis, any prospect for a peaceful restoration of capitalist equilibrium has been shattered.

The world economy and all official political institutions are dominated by a tiny layer of the population, determined to resolve the crisis in a way that guarantees *its* interests. The measures taken by the capitalist class, however, have only created new sources of crisis while intensifying class antagonisms in every country.

World markets are in turmoil over the massive debts accumulated by states in order to bail out their financial systems. Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal are planning austerity budgets aimed at placing the crisis on the backs of the working class. Behind these countries stand looming debt crises in Italy, France, Britain and, above all, the United States.

In the face of the long-term US economic decline, the American corporate and financial elite is determined to maintain its position through a drastic lowering of the living standards of the American and international working class, accompanied by internal repression and the unleashing of military violence on a scale not seen since World War II.

For millions of people in the US and internationally who hoped that the election of Barack Obama would bring an end to the policies of the hated Bush administration, the past year has come as a shock. With unbridled cynicism, Obama has pursued the most right-wing policies—from the bank bailouts, to war, to the attack on education, health care and Social Security.

Broad sections of the working class are coming to realize that what they face is not a temporary downturn or the policies of one individual or party, but the failure of an entire system—capitalism. The working class must impose its own solution to the crisis, but this can be done only through the revival of an international socialist movement, dedicated to the transformation of the world economy to meet social needs, not private profit.

The social crisis in America

Conditions for the majority of the population in the US are dire and getting worse. Some 15 million people—or close to 10 percent of the working population—are officially counted as unemployed. Over 4.2 million jobs have been wiped out over the past year alone. The real unemployment rate, including those who have given up looking for work

and those who are involuntarily working part-time, is close to double the official level.

In some areas, unemployment is at depression levels. In Detroit, Michigan, where the median income was once among the highest in the nation, more than half the working-age population is out of work. Six million people in the country have absolutely no income, subsisting on food stamps alone.

Throughout the country, states and cities are going bankrupt, schools are being shut down, factories are being closed, and college tuition is being raised. Wages and social services are being slashed at an unprecedented rate. Despite a multitrillion-dollar bailout to protect the wealth of the financial elite, banks are choking off lending to individuals and small businesses.

The net worth of US households fell 13 percent over the past decade—by far the worst decade since World War II. The “American Dream” of home ownership is turning into a nightmare. Nearly three million foreclosures were filed in 2009, and millions more families will be thrown out of their homes in 2010.

The economic crisis has been exploited to increase social inequality and make the wealthiest sections of the population even richer. Thanks to the policies of both the Bush and Obama administrations, the top Wall Street firms handed out an estimated \$145 billion in bonuses for 2009, a new record.

War

The economic crisis is accelerating the breakdown of the nation-state system, as rival capitalist states seek to place the burden on the backs of their competitors. The violent eruption of American imperialism over the past decade, including the proclamation of the doctrine of pre-emptive war, continues. It is the most destabilizing factor in world politics.

The US is approaching the tenth anniversary of the so-called “war on terror”—the unending series of wars aimed at establishing US control of the Middle East and Central Asia. These wars have been a disaster for the peoples targeted by American bombs. Well over a million Iraqis and Afghans have been killed, along with thousands of US and coalition troops.

The occupation of Iraq continues under Obama. The war in Afghanistan, fueled by the deployment of tens of thousands of additional troops, is entering a more bloody phase. US drone and missile attacks against Pakistan have risen sharply over the past year.

Yemen has been added to the list of countries to be bombed or invaded. The US is threatening a new round of sanctions against Iran, with eerie similarities to the run-up to the war against Iraq. The New Year began with an escalation of tensions between the US and China, including

threats over currency valuations, trade restrictions, and increased US military support for Taiwan.

There can be no peaceful “rebalancing” of the world economy within the framework of the capitalist nation-state system. Without a socialist movement of the international working class, the world is heading inexorably toward a new world war, with catastrophic consequences for all of humanity.

The Obama administration

The American people have gone through a bitter experience with the Obama administration. Elected by posing as the candidate of “hope” and “change,” Obama has proven a committed defender of the interests of the financial elite. The massive bailout of the banks will be paid for through fiscal austerity and cost-cutting to deal with the tripling of the US deficit. Obama has established a deficit panel whose central task will be to attack Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. Obama’s health care “reform” has been exposed as a cynical scheme to slash government programs and reduce health benefits for millions of Americans.

In the face of the worst social crisis since the Great Depression, Obama has offered nothing to alleviate the desperate conditions facing working people. The administration’s “stimulus” measures—consisting largely of tax cuts for businesses—have been premised on a rejection of the central step required to address the unemployment crisis: a federal jobs program. Obama has refused to bail out the states, forcing through crippling cuts in spending for education and other social services.

Elected in large part due to popular hostility to war, Obama has expanded military spending and increased the number of US troops abroad. The same generals and top officials that led Bush’s wars remain in place.

Popular support for Obama has deflated with astonishing speed. One year after Obama’s inauguration, the Democrats lost a key Senate seat in Massachusetts, long considered a safe seat for the Democratic Party. The defeat was due primarily to a collapse in the Democratic vote, despite personal appeals from the president.

The administration’s response to the erosion of popular support is to turn even more sharply to the right, appealing to Republicans to join him in a bipartisan attack on the interests of the vast majority of the population. Obama has worked relentlessly to rehabilitate a party that was repudiated by the electorate just over a year ago.

A socialist program for the working class

Opposition to the conditions forced on millions of people is inevitable. There is an immense and growing chasm between the working class and all of the existing institutions. That includes the trade unions, which have been transformed into adjuncts of the corporations and the government for the impoverishment of working people.

The Socialist Equality Party supports every step in the direction of new and independent forms of popular struggle. The decisive question,

however, is the construction of an independent political movement of the working class. It is only on the basis of a socialist program that the struggles of workers can be directed at the underlying cause of the crisis—the capitalist system.

The fundamental elements of such a program include:

1. The international unity of the working class. The international scale of the crisis has underscored the objective unity of the interests of workers all over the world. The global integration of the world economy provides the basis for a vast development in the living conditions of mankind. However, within the framework of capitalism, it produces only a coordinated attack on workers everywhere, combined with escalating conflicts between rival nation-states. To fight against this attack, workers must reject all forms of nationalism and chauvinism and unify on the basis of a common struggle against global capitalism.

2. The political independence of the working class. The Obama administration has underscored the impossibility of working people defending their interests within the framework of a political system dominated by political parties of big business. Working people must break from the Democratic Party and the two-party system and build their own mass party to fight for a workers’ government.

3. An emergency public works program. The claim that there is no money for jobs, education, health care and other social services when trillions are handed out to the banks and lavished on the military must be rejected with contempt. An emergency public works program is required to provide good-paying jobs for all who can work. Millions must be employed to rebuild the schools, ensure affordable housing, and revive the basic social infrastructure. Trillions of dollars must be allocated to guarantee free, high-quality education from kindergarten through the university level and provide quality health care and a decent retirement for everyone.

4. Nationalization of the banks and major corporations. The stranglehold exercised by the financial and corporate elite over political and economic life is the principal obstacle to any rational and egalitarian solution to the crisis. All banks and major corporations must be transformed into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities.

5. Redistribution of wealth. The requirements of mass society cannot be met within the framework of an economic system in which every decision comes down to one fundamental question: How will it impact the pocketbooks of the wealthy? A solution to the crisis in the interests of the working class requires the expropriation of the wealth of the super-rich and the utilization of these resources to meet pressing needs in the US and internationally.

6. An end to militarism and war. Imperialist war is the external expression of the interests of the corporate and financial elite. It is impossible for American workers to defend their own interests without taking a stand in defense of working people targeted by the US military. All US troops must be withdrawn from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and wherever else they are stationed. The US war machine must be dismantled, and reparations paid to societies devastated by American bombs.

7. Defense of democratic rights. Democracy is incompatible with the enormous levels of social inequality at home and imperialist war abroad. To carry out its unpopular policies, the American ruling class will resort ever more openly to repression. The use of torture, abductions, assassinations and indefinite detention, the erection of police-state structures and the expansion of domestic spying can be ended only

through the independent action of the working class. The defense of democratic rights requires the expansion of democracy to include popular control over the giant economic forces that determine the life of millions.

The crisis facing workers internationally can be resolved only through a far-reaching transformation of world society and the establishment of a rationally organized and democratically controlled economy.

Socialism arises as an objective necessity, corresponding to the social interests of the working class. But the success of socialist revolution requires the construction of a political leadership. Without a unified political movement of the international working class, every separate struggle will be isolated and defeated.

The Socialist Equality Party is the vanguard for the rebuilding of an international socialist movement of the working class.

To all readers and supporters who are looking for a way to fight, who have drawn conclusions from the economic crisis and the experience of the Obama administration, and who understand the necessity for unifying the working class on the basis of a socialist program, we say: Attend the emergency conference in April, build and join the SEP, and take up the fight for socialism!

For more information on the conference, click here.



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