

Resolutions of the Conference on Social Crisis & War

23 April 2010

The following resolutions were passed unanimously at the SEP Emergency Conference on the Social Crisis & War, held April 17-18 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Resolution 1: For an emergency jobs program! For the nationalization of the banks and the redistribution of wealth!

Conditions for the majority of the population in the US are dire and getting worse. Mass unemployment is the most urgent social issue facing the working class. Some 20 million working people in the US are either unemployed or underemployed. Of those who are officially unemployed, 44 percent have been without a job for more than six months, the highest percentage since the Great Depression.

Real wages have fallen 3.1 percent since the Wall Street crash of September 2008. Poverty, homelessness and hunger are all on the rise, with 40 million people living below the official US poverty line of \$22,000 for a family of four.

Nearly 3 million American families were in some form of foreclosure proceeding last year, with 871,000 homes actually repossessed by lenders. The number losing their homes is expected to increase even further this year. The “American dream” of home ownership is being transformed into the nightmare of subprime lending, “underwater” mortgages, foreclosures and evictions.

The claims by the White House, echoed by the media, that an economic “recovery” is underway only demonstrate the class basis of the Obama administration. There is a recovery for the financial aristocracy only, not for the working class.

Stock prices have risen rapidly from their lows of a year ago. Bank profits have soared. Corporate profits are on the rise, fueled by aggressive job-cutting, wage-cutting and a drive for speed-up that has boosted productivity by nearly 6 percent a year, slashing work hours far more than production levels.

The incomes of the super-rich have returned to their pre-crash levels, with 25 hedge fund operators taking in \$25 billion in income in 2009—an average of \$1 billion each. On the basis of a 40-hour workweek, this comes to \$481,000 an hour. Each of these hedge fund billionaires made in four minutes what the average American worker earns in an entire working year.

The Obama administration’s response to the jobs crisis combines indifference towards the plight of workers with subservience to the corporate elite. Administration representatives describe unemployment as a “lagging indicator,” not a social emergency. Obama himself has repeatedly rejected calls for direct job creation through the government,

insisting his job is to “help the private sector create jobs.”

The class nature of this administration is best demonstrated by the disparity between the resources used to bail out the banks and safeguard the fortunes of the super-rich and the pathetic sums allocated to stimulate job creation. Some \$23.7 trillion in loans, guarantees and direct cash handouts from the US Treasury and the Federal Reserve were made available to Wall Street, more than one thousand times the \$15 billion in the most recent “jobs” bill, and even that is mainly tax cuts for corporations.

While Obama hails the private sector as the engine of economic growth, the private sector in the United States actually employs fewer people than it did 10 years ago. The past decade was the first since the Great Depression to experience zero job growth. This is a demonstration of the complete failure of the capitalist system to meet the needs of working people.

This conference calls for an emergency program of public works to provide every unemployed worker with a good-paying job within six months. Trillions of dollars must be made available to rebuild the decaying social infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, public housing, roads, water and sewage systems and other public facilities.

This program of job creation should be combined with measures to alleviate the hardships brought on by the world capitalist crisis, including an end to foreclosures, evictions and utility shutoffs, an increase in the minimum wage to \$20 an hour, and a reduction in the workweek to 30 hours at 40 hours’ pay.

The claim that there is “no money” to provide for the needs of the population should be rejected with contempt. The trillions expended on war and the bailout of the wealthy must be redirected to meet social needs. The fantastic wealth accumulated by the corporate and financial elite—often through fraud and criminality—must be reclaimed.

Above all, the subordination of economic life to the capitalist principle of private profit must be abolished. The major banks and corporations must be transformed into public utilities, democratically controlled by the population in the interest of social need.

Resolution 2: On Detroit fires and the West Virginia mine explosion

Recent tragedies in two different states expose the nature of class relations in America and the deadly consequences of the capitalist system.

In Detroit, Michigan, house fires this year have killed more than a dozen people. On January 5, a fire on Dexter Avenue claimed three lives, including two wheelchair-bound brothers. On March 2, a fire on Bangor Street killed three young children, aged 3, 4 and 5. As it has done to hundreds of thousands of families in southeast Michigan, utility giant DTE cut off utilities to both homes. The company is well aware that this

policy leads to fires and deaths.

On April 5, a mine explosion in West Virginia killed 29 workers, the deadliest coal mine disaster in the US since 1970. The Upper Big Branch Mine, run by Massey Energy, had been cited for hundreds of safety violations over the past year.

All of these deaths are the consequences of criminal policies pursued by companies determined to extract as much profit as possible from the working class. The profits go to pay the enormous salaries of top executives and satisfy the demands of Wall Street investors.

DTE Chief Executive Anthony F. Earley Jr. received \$9.2 million in total compensation in 2009, the same year his company cut off service to 221,000 households in southeast Michigan. Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship made \$35 million in 2007 and 2008 by slashing jobs and wages and flouting basic safety protections. Since 2000, at least 47 miners have been killed and hundreds more injured at Massey operations.

In Detroit and West Virginia, the government agencies that claim to protect the interests of ordinary people functioned as accomplices in the deaths of these workers.

In both areas, the working class has been betrayed and abandoned by the unions—in Detroit by the United Auto Workers, in West Virginia by the United Mine Workers—leaving workers with no organizations to defend themselves.

The fact that the victims of these tragedies came from different sections of the population—African-Americans in inner-city Detroit and white workers in rural Appalachia—only underscores that the working class, no matter what color or nationality, faces the same struggle. Under capitalism, every aspect of life—including the right to life itself—is subordinated to the profit interests of the super-rich.

This conference denounces the efforts of DTE and the authorities to blame the victims of these tragedies in order to conceal their own responsibility. The media continues a campaign to vilify so-called “energy thieves,” while Sylvia Young—who lost three small children in the March 2 Bangor Street fire—has faced a legal witch-hunt because she was buying space heaters at the time the fire broke out.

This conference supports the Citizens Inquiry into the Dexter Avenue Fire: Utility Shutoffs and the Social Crisis in Detroit, and endorses its findings and recommendations, which were released last week:

- The shutoff of utilities should be immediately stopped and made illegal.
- DTE workers should refuse to comply with company instructions to shut off utility service.
- All charges against Sylvia Young must be dropped and her children immediately returned to her. DTE should compensate Young for her loss, ensuring that she has a safe home to raise her family and financial assistance.
- DTE, Massey Energy and their executives and regulators should be held legally responsible for their actions.
- There should be a multibillion-dollar public works program to end poverty, create jobs and rebuild communities in metropolitan Detroit, West Virginia and throughout the country.
- The utilities and the mining industry should be nationalized and transformed into publicly owned, democratically run entities, to guarantee gas, electricity and water as a basic human right, not on a for-profit basis.

The establishment of a committee to fight utility shutoffs on the basis of these findings must be the beginning of the broadest mobilization of the working class in Detroit and around the country to fight for decent, safe and affordable housing for all. This struggle must be conducted independently of the trade unions and the Democratic and Republican politicians—the bought-and-paid-for representatives of big business.

Resolution 3: For the international unity of the working class!

The financial crisis that erupted in the United States in September 2008 triggered a chain reaction that has engulfed the world in the deepest economic recession since the 1930s.

In virtually every country, unemployment is rising, wages are being cut, inequality is growing and the government is demanding massive cuts in social programs.

In recent weeks, the initial signs of working class opposition to these attacks have emerged.

* Europe has been convulsed by militant strikes. Greece has been at the center of these mobilizations, including two one-day general strikes involving millions of workers. But major strikes have also occurred in France, Britain, Germany, Spain and Portugal.

* Over the same period, large protests occurred in Russia, plantation workers struck in Sri Lanka, jute mill and government workers went on strike in India, steel workers struck in the Philippines, tire workers walked out in South Korea, telecom workers struck in Israel, and textile workers went on strike in Egypt.

* There were strikes of teachers and coal miners in Australia, oil workers and teachers in Nigeria, and dock workers and miners in Argentina and Peru.

* There are signs of mounting working class opposition in the United States. Hundreds of workers at a meeting of the United Auto Workers in California erupted against the treachery of the union leaders, who refused to oppose the closure of the Nummi plant.

* Last month, tens of thousands of students, teachers, professors and workers demonstrated against cuts in education in California and across the country. On March 21, hundreds of thousands of immigrants demonstrated in Washington to oppose the Obama administration’s attacks on undocumented workers.

All over the world, the working class is seeking to fight, but it requires a new perspective. The struggle in each country must be seen as part of an unfolding international struggle of the working class.

In every country, the enemy of working people is not only the corporations in that one country, but a global network of corporations and banks. They operate on an international scale to extract the greatest possible profit from the labor of the working class.

What is required is a high degree of solidarity between workers of all countries—in united industrial and political action. The struggles of workers around the world against common attacks, common problems and a common enemy must be brought together on the basis of a common program.

The trade unions have no answer to these attacks. In every country, they collaborate with the corporations and the government to impose layoffs, wage cuts and austerity measures on the working class. This is because they are based on a nationalist perspective and the defense of the profit system.

Jobs and living standards cannot be defended in the US or any other country outside of a struggle to unite the international working class against the capitalist system.

The Socialist Equality Party fights for the closest unity between workers of all countries and the coordination of their struggles on the basis of a socialist and revolutionary program. Within the US, the SEP fights for the unity of all sections of the working class—white and black, native-born and immigrant—and opposes all forms of nationalism and chauvinism.

To unify the struggles of workers on a world basis, a new international leadership must be built. The SEP fights to build the International Committee of the Fourth International as the international socialist party of the working class.

Resolution 4: Withdraw all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan!

This conference condemns the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, their extension into Pakistan, and the unending threats against Iran. It calls for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all American and foreign troops from the region.

We denounce the widespread, daily brutality committed by US and NATO forces against civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The US government and media campaign in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is based on lies. The massive presence of the American military in the Middle East and Central Asia has nothing to do with the so-called “war on terror,” establishing democracy or stabilizing the area. These wars were launched in order to seize the region’s energy supplies in the interests of the same corporate and financial elite that is attacking workers in the US. This is a new colonialism.

The economic crisis is intensifying tensions throughout the world. The capitalist powers are seeking to divide and redivide the world among themselves, to force their rivals to bear the burden of the crisis, with the US the leading aggressor.

The Obama administration, elected by the American people in large part to end the two wars, has taken up where the Bush government left off.

In Iraq, seven years of US occupation have devastated the economy and social infrastructure and destroyed entire cities. More than 1 million Iraqis have died and millions more have been forced into exile. The danger of renewed sectarian fighting remains ever-present. More than 4,000 American military personnel have died in Iraq, and tens of thousands have been wounded.

The US will have nearly 100,000 troops in Afghanistan when the current redeployment is complete, and the total number of NATO and other foreign military personnel will exceed 150,000. The purpose of this army of occupation is to terrorize the Afghan people, impose an American-backed puppet on it by force, and create a launching pad for further US military operations in the region.

Afghan president Hamid Karzai charges Washington with wanting “a puppet government...a servant government.” In turn, US officials and the American media describe Karzai as a corrupt despot, who rigged the most recent election and has no credibility with his population.

US authorities *do* want an utterly pliant regime in Kabul. Karzai *is* a wealthy thug and tyrant, and, through his brother, is linked to the narcotics trade and death squads.

According to a recent study, US-occupied Afghanistan is the world’s second most corrupt country, while US-occupied Iraq ranks fourth on the list.

This is what young American men and women are being sent to fight and die for—in the name of “freedom” and “democracy.”

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will have cost \$1 trillion dollars by September 2010. This is money that could have been spent to build hospitals, schools and roads.

US government actions in the Middle East and Central Asia violate the

principles established at the post-World War II Nuremberg trials. Aggressive war is a war crime banned by international law.

The murderous drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan; the policy of assassination of political opponents, including US citizens; the continued use of “rendition” (sending prisoners of war to countries where they will be tortured)—all this demonstrates that the American ruling elite has descended into barbarism.

The election of the Democrat Obama has meant the abandonment of serious opposition on the part of the official “anti-war” movement, although popular hostility to the Iraq and Afghan wars is pervasive in the US. For those on the liberal left, the brutal conflicts have now become “good wars,” since these political elements all agree that the Obama administration is “progressive” in both domestic and foreign policy.

This conference encourages mass protests against the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. We call for the immediate withdrawal of all US and foreign troops from the Middle East and Central Asia, the closure of all military bases, and the disbursement of billions of dollars in reparations to the populations of the affected countries.

A peaceful and humane global society is impossible without the dismantling of the US military and CIA, by far the main perpetrators of “terrorism” in the world today.

Opposition to imperialist war can develop now only as a working class movement, linked to an international socialist political program. There is no way to halt the American ruling elite’s insane drive for world domination without ending capitalist rule.

Resolution 5: Break with the Democrats and Republicans! For an independent socialist movement of the working class!

A little more than a year into his administration, hopes among broad sections of the population that the election of Barack Obama would bring real change have been rapidly dispelled. His election should put the final nail in the coffin of the claim that the interests of the working class can be served by electing a Democratic president.

Every element of Obama’s policies is determined by the interests of the corporate and financial elite that controls the political system in the US: the expansion of war, the continued destruction of democratic rights, the bailout of the banks, the wholesale attack on the working class in the US.

The administration’s principal domestic initiative, the health care overhaul, is aimed at slashing costs for corporations and the government and establishing an even more class-based health system, in which the wealthy get the best care money can buy while the vast majority are denied access to supposedly “unnecessary” and “excessive” tests and treatments.

This so-called “reform” will, in fact, strengthen the power of the insurance companies and lead to a reduction in health care access for the majority of the population. It is a central part of a budget-cutting campaign which is directed at all social spending that benefits the working class.

Obama is also leading an attack on public education. Using the power of

the federal government, Obama is pushing for states to shut down public schools, expand for-profit charter schools, and victimize teachers through mass layoffs and merit pay.

After bailing out the banks, the administration has stood by as state governments have responded to budget deficits by imposing crippling cuts in essential programs.

This conference calls for the broadest possible mobilization of the working class in opposition to the attacks on jobs, education and social programs. This should include preparations for a nationwide general strike of the entire working class.

The coming struggles must be guided by a new political program and perspective. The experience of the Obama administration has exposed all those organizations that claim the Democratic Party can be pressured to represent the interests of the working class.

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—the subordination of the economy to social need, not private profit—is the precondition for meeting the basic needs of the working class: the eradication of poverty around the world; the provision of jobs and decent housing for all; universal health care; quality, free education from kindergarten through university.

The fight for socialism is the fight for equality. The technical and material resources for uplifting humanity exist, but their potential cannot be realized so long as society remains in the stranglehold of a corporate and financial elite determined to defend its wealth through the impoverishment of the great majority.

What is required is the development of a revolutionary leadership, one that proceeds from an insight into the laws of the capitalist crisis and the lessons of history, and has as its practical aim the independent political mobilization of the working class, in the United States and internationally, for the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Resolution on the youth and education

When young people look to the future, they see only mass unemployment and unending war.

The economic crisis has led to the destruction of millions of jobs, and the youth are among the worst affected. In the United States, the youth unemployment rate is 19.1 percent, while the unemployment rate for teenagers is 26.1 percent and rising.

Conditions are similar worldwide. In Spain, youth unemployment hit 39.6 percent 2009, up from 19.1 percent in 2007. In Ireland, youth unemployment has risen from 9.2 percent to 27.8 percent over the same period. The unemployment rate for young people is 27.5 percent in Greece, 23.3 percent in France, and 19.6 percent in Britain.

The bailout of the banks has been followed by an attack on social programs that benefit the working class, including education. Tuition at colleges and universities is soaring; states and localities are shutting down

public schools, laying off teachers, privatizing services and eliminating programs. Students today graduate with no job

prospects, burdened by thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars of debt.

The denial of decent education and jobs will be used to dragoon many more young people into the military to be used as cannon fodder in neo-colonial wars.

Opposition to this attack is growing. In March, tens of thousands of students, teachers and workers participated in mass demonstrations in California in defense of public education. This opposition needs a clear program and perspective.

This conference calls for quality, free public education to be provided for all young people, from kindergarten through university. An emergency public works program is necessary to provide decent paying jobs to all workers, including the youth. Student loan debt, often owed to the very same banks that have bankrupted the country and received trillions in bailouts, should be canceled.

The interests of students and young people can be defended only through the political mobilization of the entire working class against the capitalist system. The fight for jobs, public education and an end to war is bound up with the socialist transformation of economic life. This requires the closest collaboration between workers and young people in every country.

This conference calls on students and youth to join and build the International Students for Social Equality, the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, and to actively fight for a socialist program in the working class.



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