

The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States

Program of the Socialist Equality Party

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The Economic Crisis and its Social Impact

1. The world capitalist system is ensnared in its greatest crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The financial turmoil that began in September 2008 with the sudden failure of Wall Street icons has metastasized into a global economic breakdown. For decades the apologists of capitalism have proclaimed that American-style “free enterprise” is the most perfect form of economic organization. They ignored the many signs of the approaching crisis, while the corporate-controlled media celebrated the reckless financial speculation and irresponsible self-enrichment that define the business activities and personal lifestyles of the ruling class. When the disaster finally struck in 2008, the US government intervened with a desperate infusion of hundreds of billions of dollars to save the banking system from collapse. The president of the United States publicly acknowledged that the survival of the capitalist system was at risk. The emergency bailout protected the wealth of rich investors but failed to contain the crisis.

2. The Obama administration’s claim that it has “broken the back” of the recession is a self-serving lie, told by cynical politicians who are convinced that the people can be made to believe anything. The reality of growing social distress is not so easily concealed. Approximately 26 million people in the United States are jobless or unable to find full-time work. Half of those counted on the official unemployment rolls have been out of work for six months or longer. This is the highest long-term unemployment rate since the 1930s. Young people, burdened with debts that they accumulated to pay for their education, graduate from college unable to find decent-paying jobs, or any work at all.

3. Foreclosures are driving one million workers out of their homes every year. The income of American workers, which had been in decline since the early 1970s, is now plunging. There has been a wave of wage-cutting since the onset of the recession. Millions of working class families cannot make ends meet. Those unable to pay their bills on time are treated with inhuman brutality. In cities like Detroit, the utility corporations routinely cut off gas and electricity to impoverished workers, leading to the deaths of scores of people throughout the country.

4. Virtually every state and local government is gripped by financial crisis. The response of the corporate elite is to demand austerity. The

politicians who only yesterday bailed out the banks now proclaim that “there is no money” for essential social programs. Pension plans are being reneged on, schools shut down, and innumerable social services that are vital for the well-being of local communities drastically scaled back or eliminated. In the guise of “reform,” access to health care is being made subject to ever greater restrictions.

5. The attacks on the working class in the United States are part of a global process. The economic breakdown that began in September 2008 is comparable to the Wall Street crash of 1929. Now, as 80 years ago, the crisis began in the United States but has spread rapidly into Europe and throughout the world. In September 2008, Wall Street banks and investment houses faced bankruptcy. By the spring of 2010, with the financial solvency of European countries in doubt, one government after another announced its determination to implement painful austerity measures.

6. In the aftermath of the 1929 collapse on Wall Street, the government and the press repeated endlessly the refrain: “Prosperity is just around the corner.” But the depression that began with the stock market crash and then spread throughout the world lasted more than a decade and led to unprecedented suffering and destruction, to military dictatorships, fascism and world war.

7. The specter of past tragedies looms ever larger. On the eve of the Second World War, Leon Trotsky, the greatest strategist of revolutionary socialism in the twentieth century, described the world crisis as the “death agony of capitalism.” He warned that “a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind.” His words were vindicated by the horrors that followed. Capitalism survived only by plunging the world into the cataclysm of war. By the time it ended, in 1945, approximately 70 million people had perished.

8. A new warning must be raised with all necessary urgency. The present crisis will not simply go away. There is no peaceful, let alone easy, way out of the economic and social impasse into which capitalism has led mankind. The program of the Socialist Equality Party—which works in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International—is not a collection of palliatives and half-measures. The aim of this party and its co-thinkers in the Fourth International is not the reform of American and international capitalism. If anything is to be learned from the tragedies of the twentieth century, it is that the repetition of these horrors in the twenty-first century, on an even bloodier scale, can be prevented only through the revolutionary struggle of the American and international working class for socialism.

The Historic Decline of American Capitalism

9. There is one critical sense in which the present crisis differs from the Great Depression. Despite the severity of the crisis, the United States of the 1930s remained a rising global economic power. American capitalism, which had developed explosively over the previous half-century, still possessed the most powerful, technologically advanced and efficient industrial and manufacturing base in the world. By the end of World War II, the United States occupied an unchallenged position as the world's greatest industrial power and its principal creditor. This was the economic basis for the stabilization of world capitalism and the rapid rise in the living standards of American workers during the quarter-century that followed the end of the war. However, the recovery of Europe and Japan gradually undermined the dominance of US capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s. The deterioration of the balance of trade increased pressure on the US dollar, which served as the linchpin of the post-war international monetary system. The industrial and social militancy of the working class wrested concessions from the ruling class, placing further burdens on the finances of American capitalism. The staggering costs of the reactionary and unsuccessful war waged by the United States against the Vietnamese people brought the economic difficulties that had been mounting throughout the 1960s to a head. In what amounted to an acknowledgment that the era of unchallenged US global economic dominance had come to an end, the Nixon administration on August 15, 1971 ended the international convertibility of the dollar into gold (at the rate of \$35 per ounce).

10. The last four decades have witnessed the stagnation and decay of American capitalism. Since the early 1970s, the value of the dollar, relative to the currencies of America's major capitalist competitors in Europe and Japan, has fallen drastically. The United States has become the largest debtor nation in the world. The monthly balance of trade and payments deficits run into the tens of billions of dollars. The deterioration of the industrial and manufacturing base of American capitalism—the outcome of the interaction of international competition and declining profitability—underlies the massive growth of financial parasitism. Thirty years ago, the financial industry accounted for only six percent of corporate profits. Today, more than forty percent of corporate profits are generated through money lending, stock market speculation and related forms of financial swindling. Moreover, to the extent that the financial aristocracy invests in production within the United States and internationally, it is for no other reason than to generate the greatest mass of profits and personal wealth in the shortest period of time. This is the economic source of the relentless drive to eliminate jobs, lower wages, increase productivity and slash social spending. The American financial aristocracy stands at the apex of a global system of exploitation that seeks to squeeze as much profit as possible out of the flesh, bones and sinews of every worker.

11. It is not only its money-madness and pursuit of boundless personal wealth that drive the American ruling class to intensify exploitation. The protracted economic decay of American capitalism is, in the final analysis, the principal cause of the assault on the living standards and social conditions of the working class. The United States can no longer present itself as the “land of unlimited opportunity.” In truth, this famous phrase was always a myth that concealed an uglier and harsher reality. But in the 1930s, under the leadership of Franklin Roosevelt, it was still possible for American capitalism to promise workers a “New Deal.” Even then, with a reform-minded administration in power, the working class had to wage bitter struggles to translate Roosevelt's vague and often insincere promises into reality. Today, the Obama administration has no “New Deal” to offer. The “Yes We Can” demagoguery of the campaign trail has become the “No We Can't” reality of his presidency.

The Failure of the Obama Administration

12. Millions of working people voted for Barack Obama in the hope that his administration would reverse the reactionary policies of George W. Bush. These hopes have been refuted by experience. Under the fraudulent banner of the “war on terror,” the Obama administration continues to pursue the global imperialist agenda of the American ruling class. Troops remain in Iraq, and military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan have been escalated. The use of drone missiles has made the “targeted killing” of Afghan and Pakistani civilians a daily occurrence. At the same time, the Obama administration steadily intensifies pressure against Iran, preparing the grounds, on one or another pretext, for a military attack that would have catastrophic consequences. In the final analysis, Obama, like his predecessors, believes that American military power can be used to offset the consequences of the decline in the global economic position of the United States.

13. The advances in communication and information technologies have created the material foundations for the global integration of all aspects of economic life. But the progressive features and productive potential of economic globalization are negated by the continued division of the world into nation-states. The political life of the planet is dominated by this contradiction. History has already demonstrated the horrible consequences, in World War I and World War II, of the struggle among competing capitalist nations. The danger of a new global conflagration is mounting rapidly. The United States views with anxiety the economic growth of potential rivals in any part of the world. In particular, the rapid economic development of China has provoked widespread discussion within the US political and military establishment about the possibility and implications of war with that country.

14. The result of such a war would be, without question, a disaster of unimaginable dimensions, but this does not mean it cannot happen. The logic of imperialism leads to military conflict, and the drive toward war is determined by harsh economic and geo-strategic considerations. Nor is China the only potential adversary. Conflicting interests and ambitions in Central Asia, the Black Sea region, the Balkans and Eastern Europe underlie persistent tensions between the United States and Russia. There are clear signs that mounting differences over economic policies are leading to a resurgence of the old antagonisms between the US and Germany and other European countries. Within its “own” hemisphere, relations between Washington and Latin American states are deteriorating.

15. The determination of American imperialism to maintain its dominant position in the global capitalist system creates innumerable scenarios, involving many different states, which lead to military conflict. One or another of these scenarios, or some unforeseen variation, will ultimately be played out in reality. This, in fact, is the expectation of the American military. The official 2010 analysis of the Joint Operating Environment (JOE), published by the United States Joint Forces Command, bluntly declares in its introduction: “War has been a principal driver of change over the course of history, and there is no reason to believe that the future will differ in this respect.” There is only one way that another catastrophic world war can be prevented, and that is through the international political mobilization of the working class in the struggle for socialism. The American working class must and will play a central role in this global struggle.

16. The Obama administration's failure to take any significant measures to alleviate the economic distress of tens of millions of working class Americans testifies to the supreme reality of political life in the United States: the total control maintained by the multi-billion-dollar corporations and the super-rich over all branches of government and the two-party system. The executive branch, Congress, the judiciary and state and local governments are subservient to corporate interests. No legislation can be

enacted and no measure can be taken that is perceived by the capitalist class as a threat to its interests and wealth. American democracy is ever more nakedly a government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich. The growth and concentration of personal wealth during the past 30 years, which has produced a degree of social inequality higher than any other advanced capitalist country, is the outcome of tax cuts and the repeal of laws and regulations that once placed restraints on the exploitative activities of the corporations.

17. The concentration of staggering sums of money in the hands of a small fraction of the population, the consequence of private ownership of the means of production, is not only socially obscene. It is, more significantly, economically destructive and incompatible with the critical needs of society, within the United States and internationally. This is the age of a globally integrated mass society. Approximately seven billion people inhabit our planet. Three hundred million people live in the United States. All the great social problems that confront modern society—the provision of food and other basic necessities, education, medical care, housing, social infrastructure, the development of natural resources—require solutions that are collective, not individual, in their character. There is a desperate need for the rational development of global economic resources and their utilization in the interests of the world's people. Moreover, the technological advances and economic growth that are required to abolish poverty and meet the ever-rising social and cultural needs of people cannot be achieved without a scientifically grounded awareness of the complex and life-threatening problems confronting the ecology of our planet.

18. None of these problems can be addressed in a country and a world where all important economic decisions are made by privately owned corporations. The crazed speculation in subprime mortgages that precipitated the worldwide financial crash of 2008 demonstrated how the world economy is at the mercy of the ravenous and socially criminal pursuit of personal wealth. And, if that lesson was not sufficient, the ecological catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico—polluted by hundreds of millions of gallons of crude oil—is a historic exposure of the socially toxic character of privately owned corporations. It has already been established that BP either ignored or consciously violated even the most basic safety procedures in its pursuit of profit. BP's criminal behavior was abetted by successive US administrations, Republican and Democratic.

19. Despite the magnitude of the disaster produced by the explosion of BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig, the Obama administration remains paralyzed in the face of the massive power, economic and political, exerted by BP and other transnational corporations. In a telling and predictable demonstration of his obeisance to corporate power, the president declared that he has no wish to undermine the financial viability of BP. Just as the Wall Street financiers were never held criminally liable for the economic devastation caused by their reckless speculation, BP too has been sheltered from the consequences of its actions. More important than the fate of BP and its executives are the deeper economic roots of this catastrophe. The basic source of not only the catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico, but of the innumerable forms taken by the expanding economic crisis, lies in the ruthless subordination of the economic and social interests of the masses of working people to the pursuit of profit and personal wealth by capitalist corporations that own and control the means of production.

The Bankruptcy of Liberalism and the Democratic Party

20. The economic crisis that exploded in the autumn of 2008 continues, with no end in sight. The Obama administration has sought to cover up the

ineffectiveness of its pathetic half-measures with hollow rhetoric. More and more, its response to the crisis recalls that of Herbert Hoover after the 1929 crash. In that earlier period of economic crisis, a liberal journal commented: "For eighteen months unemployment has been spreading poverty and acute suffering through industrial and agricultural areas alike. No one yet knows when the present economic disaster will be brought to an end. The illusory years have given way to fearful economic insecurity and to widespread despair. These eighteen months have revealed the hypocrisy of the President's pledge of cooperation toward the attainment of economic security. The Administration's efforts to attain economic security have consisted of attempts to minimize the seriousness of the depression, of bold assurances that steps which would restore prosperity were about to be taken, and of a woefully unsuccessful program to stimulate private or local agencies to undertake tasks which the Administration was determined to shirk."¹

21. These words, written in 1931, were an indictment of the policies of the Hoover administration. They serve just as well as a description of the Obama administration's response to the economic and social disaster. The failure is not merely that of a president, but of an entire political system and the capitalist economic order that it defends. There remains no small number of liberal Democrats who hope against hope that the administration will suddenly change course and proclaim with appropriate fanfare the second coming of Roosevelt's "New Deal." Their dreams are in vain. The corporate and financial oligarchy that dictates policies to the Democrats and Republicans is demanding the application of ever more savage doses of austerity.

22. When American capitalism was approaching the pinnacle of its global power and influence, its leaders acknowledged that the political rights enumerated in the US Constitution were, by themselves, insufficient to guarantee equality and allow the "pursuit of happiness." In his State of the Union address delivered in January 1944, President Roosevelt declared: "We cannot be content ... if some fraction of our people—whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth—is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed and insecure." He stated that it had become "self-evident" that "true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence." As part of his efforts to refurbish capitalism, which had been so thoroughly discredited by the Great Depression, Roosevelt proposed the adoption of a "second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be guaranteed for all—regardless of station, race and creed."

23. During the next 20 years, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the United States and the global economy realized historically unprecedented rates of growth. Living standards rose significantly within the United States. But Roosevelt's second Bill of Rights remained a dead letter and the economic security that he proclaimed as a "right" never came close to being realized. Even in this most prosperous period of US history, nearly 20 percent of Americans remained mired in poverty. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed his "War on Poverty." But the promises of that campaign were abandoned as the global and internal contradictions of American capitalism mounted. From the 1970s onward, the Democratic Party shifted steadily to the right and abandoned its previous policies of liberal reform. This process corresponded to the decline in the world position of the US. During the last 40 years, the living standards of the working class have steadily declined. Major recessions in 1979-80, 1981-83, 1991-93, and 2001-03 inflicted immense economic harm to working people, even before the latest disaster began.

24. American capitalism proved incapable of realizing the promise of economic security and the elimination of poverty during the decades of its greatest successes. What, then, can be expected of this economic system in a period of breakdown and crisis?

American Workers and Socialism

25. There is no denying the fact that there exists a vast disparity between the historic character of the political and social tasks that confront American workers and their existing level of consciousness. But the program of a genuinely revolutionary party must be based on a scientific analysis of objective reality, not on impressionistic and usually false conceptions of what workers may or may not be prepared to accept. As Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International, explained: "Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the workers. That is what the program should formulate and present before the advanced workers." Moreover, the Socialist Equality Party emphatically rejects the claim, advanced by all sorts of demoralized skeptics, that the American working class is incapable of mounting a revolutionary challenge to capitalism and will never accept the need for socialism. This politically bankrupt outlook, infused with the sickly spirit of defeatism, is based on a rejection of the laws of history and the lessons of past struggles.

26. The history of the American working class is one of difficult and relentless struggle. The story of its slow advance, in the face of the brutal resistance of the capitalist class, is written in blood. From the earliest class battles of railroad workers in the 1870s and the fight for the eight-hour day in the 1880s, to the establishment of mass industrial unions in the 1930s, the working class shed its blood and gave up its martyrs to end the naked tyranny of the employers. In the aftermath of World War II, the great wave of strikes that swept over every sector of industry wrested concessions from employers that led to a rapid rise in living standards. These struggles, in turn, inspired the great battles of African-American workers for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, which found broad support among working people and youth.

27. But the Achilles heel of the working class lay in the absence of an independent mass socialist movement, guided by Marxist theory. Even during the period of the most violent class battles, the working class remained, through its allegiance to the Democratic Party, under the political control of the capitalist class. From its earliest days, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) did everything in its power to maintain the political subordination of the working class to the big business parties. This remained the policy of the trade unions during and after the mass struggles for industrial unionism that swept across the United States in the 1930s.

28. There are many factors that underlay the failure of American workers to develop a politically independent mass socialist movement against capitalism: the sheer vastness of the American continent, the heterogeneity of a working class drawn to the United States from all over the world, the unscrupulous use of racism by the employers to "divide and conquer," the notorious corruption and criminality of large sections of the trade union bureaucracy, and the ferocity of the anti-communist red-baiting campaigns of the government, big business and the trade unions. Moreover, the crimes of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union gravely undermined the appeal of socialism in the eyes of American workers.

29. In the final analysis, the vast wealth and power of American capitalism was the most significant objective cause of the subordination of the working class to the corporate-controlled two-party system. As long as the United States was an ascending economic power, perceived by its citizens as "the land of unlimited opportunity," in which a sufficient share of the national wealth was available to finance rising living standards, American workers were not convinced of the necessity of socialist revolution.

30. The change in objective conditions, however, will lead American workers to change their minds. The reality of capitalism will provide

workers with many reasons to fight for a fundamental and revolutionary change in the economic organization of society. The younger generations of working people—those born in the 1980s, 1990s, and the first decade of the twenty-first century—do not know, and never will know, capitalist "prosperity." They are the first generation of Americans in modern times who cannot reasonably expect to achieve a living standard equal to, let alone better than, their parents' generation. Young auto workers born in 1990 are paid less than half what their parents were once paid for doing the same work. As for the parents, many have lost their jobs and pensions. American working people are being drawn into the global maelstrom of a developing class struggle and are becoming aware of the emerging spirit of social resistance around the world, from Greece to Bangladesh. For decades, American workers were told that the Asian workers were their enemies, the producers of low-cost products that deprived them of their jobs. But now they read and hear of strikes in China, and begin to realize that the workers of Asia are not their foes, but their brothers and sisters.

31. A new world situation exists. The struggles of the working class must be based on an understanding of objective reality—that is, on a scientific understanding of the capitalist crisis and the lessons of history. The American working class requires a new perspective, a new program and a new leadership.

32. In his summary of the materialist conception of history, Karl Marx, the founder of modern socialism, wrote: "At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. ... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution."² These productive forces, comprising not only factories, offices, tools and scientific knowledge, but the working class itself, are being strangled by the social relations of capitalism—private ownership and the division of the world into nation-states. The global financial crisis, the decline in production, the contraction in world trade, the gargantuan budgetary deficits, the instability of national currencies, the deterioration of relations between countries, the growth of militarism and, above all, the plunging living standards of the working class—all these interconnected processes signify the beginning of a new era of revolutionary upheaval. The needs of mass society cannot be met within the framework of a system based on private ownership of the means of production. The global development of the productive forces is being strangled by the capitalist nation-state system.

The Revolutionary Potential of the Working Class

33. Only through the struggle of the working class, the main revolutionary force in modern society, can a progressive solution be found to the crisis created by the breakdown of capitalism. The working class is revolutionary because 1) it is the principal productive force in society; 2) the historical and political logic of its resistance to capitalist exploitation and oppression leads to the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, the replacement of the profit motive with the satisfaction of social needs as the driving principle of economic life, and the realization of genuine social equality among all people; and 3) it is an international class whose victory will break down the barriers of national states and unite humanity in a truly global community devoted to the protection and development of its common home, the Earth.

34. Never before in history has the working class comprised such a large proportion of the world's population. In countries, particularly in Asia, where modern industry hardly existed only 50 years ago, the massive inflow of capital has financed an immense growth in the industrial infrastructure and the working class. Within the historically advanced

centers of capitalism of Europe and North America, the working class is the overwhelming majority of the population. Technological advances, shifts in the international division of labor, and the decline in the global position of American-based manufacturing have altered the composition of the working class. But the economic and social transformations in the United States have either expanded or created new categories of workers. In 1960, the year John F. Kennedy was elected president, women were still a relatively small percentage of the workforce. The “service industry” was in its infancy. “Programming” was the occupation of a small number of skilled specialists. No one yet spoke of “IT workers.”

35. The size of the traditional middle class—“independent” small businessmen and farmers—has declined drastically. More significantly, its collective economic significance is a small fraction of what it was 50, let alone 80 years ago. American society has been “proletarianized” to an extraordinary degree. The vast majority of the people—whether they work in factories and on construction sites, or in offices, medical centers, shopping malls, primary and secondary schools, university complexes or scientific laboratories; whether they drive trucks, buses and trains or fly commercial aircraft—live from paycheck to paycheck. These workers share common problems and face a common enemy: the gigantic financial and corporate institutions that hire, fire and exploit them in the pursuit of profit.

36. There is a staggering contradiction between the economic and social significance of the working class and its negligible influence on the political direction of society. The concentration of wealth is accompanied inevitably by the concentration of political power. Within the United States, the financial and corporate oligarchy has monopolized political power to an extent that has no equal in any other advanced capitalist country. The American working class has never succeeded in establishing its own mass political party. The present crisis has exposed the enormous price that the working class is paying for its subordination to the Democratic Party.

37. In the course of the great industrial strikes of the 1930s, which included the occupation of factories and pitched battles with the police in many major cities, American workers built a powerful national trade union organization, the CIO. In 1955, following its merger with the older federation of craft-based unions, nearly one-third of workers in privately-owned companies were members of the AFL-CIO. And yet even during its post-World War II heyday—which coincided with the international economic dominance of the United States—the AFL-CIO was crippled by its reactionary politics. The AFL-CIO accepted wholeheartedly the legitimacy of the capitalist profit system, was ferociously hostile to socialism, and sought to purge the unions, frequently with the use of violence, of left-wing, anti-capitalist influences. In keeping with its loyalty to capitalism, the AFL-CIO aligned itself with the Democratic Party, bitterly opposing all efforts to free the trade unions from the political domination of big business. Finally, the trade unions were ferociously nationalistic and identified the interests of the working class entirely with the imperialist policies of the ruling class.

38. Resting on these rotten foundations, the trade unions have proven incapable of defending even the most minimal interests of the working class, let alone improving its standard of living. For the last 30 years, the policies of the trade unions have brought workers nothing but defeats. The percentage of union-affiliated workers employed in the private sector is at its lowest level since the early 1900s! But the revenues of the union bureaucracy, composed of middle-class functionaries, are guaranteed by the services it performs for the corporations. In terms of policies and aims, there is no significant distinction between the corporations and the unions.

39. To hope that these corrupt, corporate-controlled organizations can be transformed, after decades of betrayals, into instruments of social struggle is to indulge in futile illusions. The failure of the AFL-CIO exposes, in the final analysis, the bankruptcy of its nationalist, capitalist and class-

collaborationist program. A resurgence of working class struggle can be based only on a program that recognizes that the capitalist system has failed. The answer to this crisis will not be found in appeals to the corporations and the politicians they control for the reform of capitalism. Rather, the Socialist Equality Party insists on the struggle for workers’ power and the socialist reorganization of society, within the United States and internationally.

Socialism is the Only Way Forward

40. Capitalism has failed the working class of the United States and the entire world. The time has come for the working class to fight for a different approach to the economic organization of society. The only viable alternative to capitalism is socialism: the reorganization of all economic life under the democratic control of the working class, to serve social needs, not private profit.

41. But socialism will be achieved only through the establishment of workers’ power. This will require a difficult struggle. But the “final goal” of socialism—the abolition of economic exploitation, all forms of inequality, the oppression of one group of human beings by another group, and, consequently, the removal of all restraints on individual creativity and the flowering of human culture—is not the outcome of a mythical quest. The revolution that will lay the political basis for socialism is prepared in the course of countless struggles by the working class, in the US and internationally, to defend its interests and oppose the efforts of the financial and corporate aristocracy to impose the burden of the crisis on the masses. Socialism is not a gift to be given to the working class. It must be fought for and won by the working class itself.

42. The program of the Socialist Equality Party begins with the pressing needs of the working class. The SEP’s demands and policies start not with what capitalism can “afford,” but with what the working class and our complex and global mass society require. Nor does the SEP tailor its program to what small-minded opportunists and pragmatists may consider immediately “achievable.” What can or cannot be achieved, in any given situation, is determined in struggle. Those not prepared to fight will never win anything. The demands of the SEP play an essential role in raising the social and political consciousness of the working class, and, as a result, strengthening its ability to fight.

43. The demands raised by the SEP are not separate from the goal of socialist revolution. Rather, each demand by its very nature raises a challenge to the material interests of the corporate aristocrats. As they encounter the resistance of corporations and the capitalist state to their legitimate demands, working people will see ever more clearly the need for the revolutionary transformation of society. The fight for these demands strengthens the working class, unifies its disparate struggles, and in each case poses the necessity of taking political power and establishing socialism in the United States, as part of the socialist reorganization of the world economy.

To be continued.

[1] The Nation, July 15, 1931, p. 61.

[2] Marx-Engels Collected Works, Vol. 29 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), p. 263.



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