

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

Program of the Socialist Equality Party

6 September 2010

The following document was adopted by the First National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US), held August 11-15, 2010 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Order the pamphlet version from Mehring Books.

Sign up to learn more about joining the Socialist Equality Party.

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.

The Basic Social Rights of the Working Class

44. Every man, woman and child is entitled to live and enjoy his or her life and develop his or her potential to the maximum, without the curse of poverty and material want. The fact that tens of millions of people in the United States are “ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed and insecure”—nearly 70 years after President Roosevelt declared that such conditions are

intolerable—is an unanswerable indictment of American capitalism. The Socialist Equality Party proposes that the working class adopt the concept that there exist social rights that are essential to life in a complex modern society and, therefore, “inalienable.” Working people must resolve to secure these rights through the mobilization of their strength as a class, independent of and in opposition to the corporate-controlled political parties and the institutions of the capitalist state. These rights are:

The right to a job

45. The right to employment is the most basic of all. Without a steady, good-paying job, it is impossible to satisfy all other needs. The loss of a job means the loss of self-esteem and social connection, immense psychological distress, along with the elimination of health care coverage, the destruction of life savings, and vulnerability to poverty and homelessness for oneself and one’s family.

46. Millions of Americans confront this desperate situation. What was once considered unacceptable in the US is now proclaimed the “new normal.” The official unemployment rate is close to 10 percent, while real unemployment is much higher. Half of the jobless have been without work for more than 27 weeks, and the average length of unemployment is nine months—a level of long-term unemployment unseen since the Great Depression. Some 26 million people are unemployed or underemployed. In some states, official unemployment is over 14 percent, while real unemployment in urban centers can approach 50 percent.

47. Chronic unemployment is robbing an entire younger generation of its future. Sixty percent of college students are graduating with no offer of a job, and more than half of workers 16-24 years of age have no job, the highest level since World War II. It is universally acknowledged that today’s youth will live significantly worse than their parents.

48. An emergency public works program must be launched immediately to provide employment for all. There is plenty of work to do—rebuilding schools, hospitals, public housing, roads, mass transportation, water and sewage systems, communications networks and other public facilities, and improving the conditions of life for working people.

49. Against mass unemployment, layoffs and workplace shutdowns, the working class must defend unconditionally the right to a job. Every worker who is laid off and all those entering the workforce must be guaranteed paid job training and employment.

The right to a livable income

50. Wages have been under attack for decades. The dismantling of industry has wiped out “middle-class” manufacturing jobs, with decent wages, benefits and job security. In the auto industry, which long set the standard for manufacturing wages, new workers are hired at \$14 an hour, barely above the grossly inadequate official poverty line for a family of four. Mass unemployment is deliberately used to drive down labor costs and boost profits. The Obama administration’s strategy for economic growth is based on turning the US into a cheap labor platform for exports.

51. The current federal minimum wage (\$7.25 an hour) condemns millions to poverty. It must be replaced by a guaranteed annual income that covers all needs. The many people unable to work because of old age, disability or ill health must also receive this income.

52. For decades, credit cards, second mortgages and other forms of debt have concealed the decline of living standards. The same big banks bailed

out with public funds are tightening the screws on working people. To ensure economic security, there must be immediate debt relief for the millions of Americans who work as virtual indentured servants to giant financial institutions. This should include reducing debt payments to affordable levels and abolishing usurious interest rates, bank fees and overdraft fees.

The right to leisure

53. Workers have been subjected to a relentless increase in the workweek, with millions dependent upon overtime and multiple jobs to make ends meet. The eight-hour day, the demand raised by the workers’ movement nearly 150 years ago, is now a thing of the past. American workers put in 340 hours more a year on the job than workers in France—nearly nine full weeks. While millions remain on the unemployment lines, employers seek to cut costs by increasing the hours of those still working, rather than hiring the jobless. This is intolerable. To improve conditions of life and provide jobs for the unemployed, the workweek must be shortened. Workers should earn a full-time income based on a 30-hour workweek.

54. Out of the world’s 33 richest countries, the US is the only one in which workers receive no legally mandated paid vacation. Nearly half of all workers have no paid sick days. Workers have a right to sufficient time for family, leisure and cultural activities. This must include the right to five weeks paid vacation annually, together with adequate paid sick days and paid family leave. To relieve the burden on families, society must provide free childcare and after-school activities.

The right to decent and affordable housing

55. An estimated 3.5 million people, including 1 million children, become homeless every year. Over 1 million houses are repossessed, and tens of thousands face eviction from rented homes and apartments every year. The emergence on the outskirts of major cities of tent cities, the modern equivalent of the “Hoovervilles” of the Great Depression, is among the most damning indictments of the profit system.

56. The economic crisis of 2008 was precipitated by a speculative binge in subprime mortgages. Mortgage lenders exploited people’s need for a home in a filthy scheme designed to extract as much as possible from those least able to pay. In the process, home prices shot up to record levels. As housing prices have collapsed over the past two years, millions of people now find themselves “under water,” owing more to the banks than their homes are worth.

57. A major factor in homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. Due to the surge in housing costs and the decline in income, the average American consumer spends 34 percent of income on housing and another 30 percent on transportation. This leaves very little for food, utilities, health care, education and other basic necessities.

58. There must be an immediate halt to all foreclosures and evictions. All mortgages should be restructured to affordable levels, indexed to income and employment status.

59. The right to decent housing for all can be assured only by placing the home-building and financing industry under public ownership, and pouring hundreds of billions of dollars in public funds into the construction of new homes and apartments and the renovation of existing buildings.

The right to utilities and transportation

60. Every year, millions of households in the US have their utilities turned off for non-payment. Shutoffs, which serve the profit interests of the giant utility companies, lead directly to deadly fires, people freezing to death in their homes and other social horrors.

61. The deregulation and privatization of utility companies throughout the country has led to sharp increases in electricity and heating bills. Worst affected are the poor. On average, an individual on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) now spends about 20 percent of income on utilities. Many workers face unpaid utility bills in the thousands of dollars. Federal and local programs for low-income energy assistance are grossly inadequate and underfunded, and the Obama administration is planning another \$1.8 billion cut in assistance this year.

62. All the basic utilities—including electricity, gas, phone and Internet access—must be made available to everyone as a basic right, not subordinated to the profit needs of the utility companies.

63. Similarly, mass transportation systems have been starved of public investment and allowed to decay, where they exist at all. This has particularly severely impacted those who are elderly, disabled or otherwise unable to provide their own transportation. All people must have access to safe and affordable public transportation.

The right to high-quality health care

64. Advances in medical technology make possible an enormous improvement in the health of the world's population. Yet more than 46 million people in the US lack any health insurance, while at least 25 million more are "underinsured"—unable to bridge the gap between insurance coverage and medical bills. Existing federal health care programs, including Medicare and Medicaid, are inadequate, underfunded and under relentless attack.

65. Despite health care costs that are double or more those in other advanced capitalist countries, the US ranks last among them in conditions of health. According to a 2009 study by Harvard researchers, there were nearly 45,000 deaths in the US in 2005 associated with lack of health insurance. High medical bills are responsible for 62 percent of all personal bankruptcies, and 80 percent of these are among families that have health insurance.

66. The response of the ruling class to this health care crisis has been to cut costs for the corporations and the government and ration health care for the vast majority of the population. The Obama administration is spearheading this campaign under the fraudulent banner of a health care "reform" that was drafted in close consultation with the insurance companies and drug manufacturers. At the same time, the Obama administration has created a bipartisan budget deficit panel tasked with cutting federal health care programs and Social Security. At a state level, governments starved of resources are slashing coverage and eligibility for Medicaid benefits for the poor, elderly and disabled.

67. The solution to the health care crisis lies in putting an end to the privately owned health care corporations, which rake in \$200 billion a year in profits from human suffering, and establishing socialized medicine. This means an end to medicine-for-profit and the establishment of free, high-quality state-run health care for all. This must include the right to preventive care, prescription drugs, mental health care and

advanced tests and procedures, as well as the right to an abortion, which is under attack throughout the country. A multi-billion-dollar program must be launched to train new doctors and other health care providers and establish new facilities in order to meet the needs of all. Existing personal debt accumulated through massive health care expenses must be abolished.

The right to a secure retirement

68. Millions of retired workers and the elderly are thrown onto the scrap heap by American capitalism, forced into poverty once they can no longer produce profits for their employers. Cutbacks or the unavailability of elder care means that aging parents are thrown back on the resources of their adult children.

69. Over 7 million older Americans—about one in five—are living below the poverty line, due in part to rising health care costs. About 60 percent of the elderly depend entirely upon Social Security for survival. Because Social Security benefits are inadequate, more and more older workers are forced to delay retirement or go back to work, often competing with younger workers for minimum-wage jobs. Older workers also face age discrimination, with a nearly 10 percent increase in reported cases between 2004 and 2009.

70. Those workers who were able to win decent pensions in an earlier period are seeing their benefits scaled back, and newer workers are getting jobs with few or no benefits. The past three decades have seen a proliferation of defined-contribution pension plans, including 401(k) plans, rather than defined-benefit plans. This has substantially reduced the cost to businesses, while serving as a means of funneling money into the stock market, where it is at the mercy of financial speculators.

71. All workers must be guaranteed pensions that allow for a secure retirement, with an income that covers all necessities of life. Workers should be allowed to retire at the age of 60, with a full pension. Elder care programs must be expanded and fully funded.

The right to education

72. With the growing complexity of society and work comes the need for all workers to have a quality education. Yet the state of education is abysmal and getting worse. Starved of funds, states and localities throughout the country are shutting public schools and ending critical programs. Teachers are victimized for the crisis in education, and have been forced to accept mass layoffs, cuts in benefits and wages, and increased class sizes. The decay of the schools, combined with the social crisis, has led to a surge of high school dropouts. The inevitable result is a decline in educational achievement.

73. The catastrophe facing the public schools is the product of three decades of attacks and budget-cutting, as well as the privatization of school services, the draining of public resources into for-profit schools, and the proliferation of "performance-based" testing. These have been combined with an assault on the separation of church and state through the introduction of religious indoctrination into the schools in place of the teaching of evolution, cosmology and other sciences. Obama's "Race to the Top" program has deepened the right-wing policies promoted by the bipartisan "No Child Left Behind Act," signed into law by Bush. Districts are pushed to compete for meager funds by expanding charter schools, firing teachers at "underperforming schools" or shutting these schools

down altogether.

74. While education in the US has always been plagued by inequality, the expansion of American democracy was accompanied by increasing access to education—including the introduction of public education following the American Revolution, the expansion of public high school education spearheaded by reformer Horace Mann, the extension of education to African-Americans after the Civil War, and desegregation in the 20th century. These earlier reforms are now being reversed. It is precisely the egalitarian aspect of public education that makes it the target of the right-wing politicians and the corporate interests they represent.

75. At the college and university level, young workers are increasingly priced out of access to education, or forced to take out tens of thousands of dollars in loans to pay outrageous tuition costs. Students graduating with a bachelor's degree from public four-year institutions owe on average \$20,000 in debt, even as they face an increasingly bleak employment outlook. Total college student loan debt is approaching \$1 trillion, and exceeds total credit card debt. This debt should be abolished.

76. All discussion of equality in a society where access to education is largely determined by income is a fraud. A public works program must include a plan to hire tens of thousands of teachers and staff at quality wages and benefits, reduce class sizes, repair older schools and build new ones, and equip all schools with the most up-to-date books and learning technology. Higher education, including continuing education for adult workers, is a necessity in modern society and must be guaranteed to all free of charge.

The right to a healthy and safe environment

77. The health and well-being of humanity depends on a healthy environment. However, addressing environmental degradation is impossible in a society in which every decision is dictated by the pursuit of profit.

78. The oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico has destroyed the economic and environmental basis of the entire region. It is a graphic expression of the deadly consequences of deregulation, corporate cost-cutting, and the reckless pursuit of profit by giant corporations. In the face of the greatest environmental catastrophe in US history, the Obama administration has left everything in the hands of BP, unconditionally defended the profit interests of the company, and held no one accountable. The immediate victims of the disaster—workers and small business owners in the Gulf region—will receive grossly inadequate compensation for the devastation of their livelihoods.

79. Among the many environmental disasters confronting mankind—including pollution of cities and waterways, the devastation of rainforests and coastal regions and the destruction of biological diversity—perhaps the most dangerous is global warming, which threatens to disrupt the world's climate, destroying agricultural production, increasing the spread of diseases, and jeopardizing all life on the planet. Despite urgent warnings from world scientists, capitalist governments the world over are incapable of responding. Even inadequate international treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol are now declared unfeasible.

80. An emergency response to the environmental catastrophe must begin with the expropriation of the global energy giants under the democratic control of the working class. This is the necessary first step in the implementation of a rational global plan for the production of energy in a way that can meet social needs while protecting the environment, including a massive social investment in alternative forms of energy and public transportation. The expropriation of these companies will also free up resources to ensure that regions affected by environmental disasters are

restored and those who have seen their livelihoods destroyed, including by the BP oil spill, are made whole.

81. Included in the right to a healthy environment is the right to a safe work environment. Decades of cost-cutting and government deregulation have made for an increasingly treacherous workplace, from stress disorders affecting about 1 million workers a year to deadly accidents like the Upper Big Branch mine explosion that killed 29 miners in the worst coal mining disaster in 40 years. The capitalist system treats workers as disposable commodities, whose injury or even death is of little consequence measured against the relentless drive for profit and individual wealth accumulation.

The right to culture

82. Access to art and culture is a basic component of a healthy society. Yet, like everything else, it is under relentless attack. American culture—film, television, music—was once a pole of attraction because of its innovation and powerful democratic and humanistic spirit. The subordination of culture to the profit motive has led to an immense degeneration.

83. Culture has suffered from funding cuts for the arts, a right-wing ideological assault on artistic expression, and the general brutalization of American society. 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, and education funding cuts have included the closure of school libraries. The media, owned by giant corporations, function as mouthpieces of the government and the wealthy, polluting public airways and spreading lies. The damage to the intellectual and moral fabric of society resulting from such a mercenary and philistine approach is impossible to quantify.

84. To enable all working people to have full access to art and culture requires massive public funding and the creation of new schools and centers for 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.

The Social Rights of Workers vs. Corporate Power and the Capitalist State

85. The social rights enumerated above represent the essential needs of the working class. But it would be utopian to believe that they can be achieved without a fundamental reorganization of economic power and the redistribution of wealth within the United States. The Socialist Equality Party states openly that the realization of these rights requires a frontal assault on the hitherto unchallenged prerogatives of the corporations and the rich. The vast wealth created by the labor of generations of workers must be taken out of the hands of a privileged few and put at the disposal of the people as a whole. Workers will achieve nothing if they seek to avoid such a direct attack on the economic and political power of the capitalist class. Accordingly, the SEP raises a series of additional demands that arise logically from the fight for the social rights of working people. These demands include:

For the expropriation of the banks and financial institutions

86. All the basic needs of the working class come into immediate and direct conflict with the dictatorship of the giant banks and financial institutions over every aspect of political and economic life. These corporations, the commanding heights of the economy, control vast social resources, the product of the collective labor of billions of people all over the world. These immense sums are employed not to benefit society, but to increase the wealth of a tiny layer, buy off governments and dictate policies.

87. Over the past 40 years, the power of the banks in the US has grown enormously. A wave of finance-driven corporate consolidation during this period has been used to slash wages, downsize companies and raid pension and health care funds. The stock market boom of the 1990s was accompanied by an ever more obsessive focus on the immediate return on investment for Wall Street. This often proceeded alongside, and was in fact dependent upon, the destruction of the real productive forces, the shutting down of factories and the elimination of jobs.

88. This parasitism of the financial aristocracy, whose wealth is increasingly divorced from the production of real value, was a principal factor behind the financial meltdown of 2008. In some cases, as in Goldman Sachs' bets on the collapse of the housing market, the crisis was deliberately provoked in order to transfer wealth into the hands of Wall Street speculators. The gospel of the "free market" did not prevent the banks and their political representatives from looting the public treasury to guarantee the bad debts of the financial aristocracy. These debts, transferred to government balance sheets, are now to be paid through cuts in critical social programs.

89. The actions taken by the financial elite and its political representatives in response to the crisis have vastly expanded the power of the banks. Thanks to a series of bank failures, the top four commercial banks in the US—Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America and Wells Fargo—now control about 70 percent of the country's bank assets, up from less than 50 percent at the end of 2000.

90. There is not a single social need that can be met so long as these institutions remain under private control. The banks and other big financial institutions must be expropriated, with full protection for small depositors, placed under public ownership, and operated under the democratic control of the working class. This will make available enormous resources for a public works program to eliminate poverty and meet social needs in the US and internationally.

For the nationalization of major corporations

91. Next to the banks stand the giant corporations. The extent of monopolization in the US is greater than at any point in history. Decades of deregulation and corporate consolidation have created conditions in which a few massive businesses—such as ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco in energy, Archer Daniels Midland and Monsanto in agribusiness, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer in pharmaceuticals, and Microsoft, Apple, Google and Intel in computer technology—dominate markets, dictate government policy, and exploit hundreds of thousands of workers around the world.

92. The claim that these giant corporations are most efficiently run when under private control is a fraud. These corporations work tirelessly to defend their own narrow interests at the expense of society as a whole—from preventing the development of alternative sources of energy and public transportation, to maintaining monopolies in computer operating systems.

93. All privately owned industrial, manufacturing and information technology corporations valued at \$10 billion or more must be transformed into publicly owned enterprises, with full compensation for small shareholders and guarantees for all pension and health care fund investments. Industries critical to the basic functioning of society—including telecommunications, agriculture, education, health care and transportation—must also be subject to public ownership and democratic control.

94. This does not mean the nationalization of everything. Small and medium-sized businesses, which employ millions of workers, are themselves in desperate need of reliable sources of credit and relief from the unfair monopolistic practices of the large corporations.

For workers control

95. The expropriation of the banks and corporations must be accompanied by the establishment of genuine democratic control over production. This is the necessary basis for the development of a rational plan of global production and distribution to replace the anarchy of the capitalist market and ensure that all decisions are based on social need.

96. The aim of socialist policy is not to replace capitalist financiers with unaccountable bureaucrats. Industrial democracy means real control by working people over their working lives. What is democratic about a system in which the place where most people spend the bulk of their time—the work place—is run as a dictatorship? 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 broader public, and the ratification of corporate leadership by a democratic vote of all employees.

For social equality

97. One of the basic tests of whether a society is moving forward or backward is whether it is becoming more equal or less equal. The levels of inequality that exist in the US are virtually without precedent in history. The past four decades have seen a shocking growth of inequality. In the 1970s, the top 1 percent of the population took in about 8 to 9 percent of annual income. By 2007, its share had soared to 23.5 percent, a level not seen since the 1920s, on the eve of the Great Depression. During this same period, 58 percent of all income growth has gone to the top one percent of the population, and 35 percent to the top one-tenth of one percent. Income for the bottom 60 percent of the population declined by about 5 percent.

98. On a world scale, there are now more than one thousand billionaires, including more than 400 in the US. Collectively, this layer of the super-rich saw their wealth grow by 50 percent in 2009, to \$3.6 trillion. The wealth of this layer has grown amidst the greatest economic crisis in generations due to the policies of governments throughout the world, above all the Obama administration. The multi-trillion-dollar bailout of the financial system was accompanied by the rejection of any measures that would curb compensation for corporate executives and hedge fund managers.

99. The apologists for capitalism claim that inequality is not related to the economic crisis, as if the withdrawal of trillions of dollars from productive use has no economic impact. The continual and insatiable drive of the financial aristocracy for more and more money has bankrupted the

country and fueled one speculative binge after another. The same corporate CEOs who say they have no money to pay decent wages and who carry out massive job cuts somehow manage to pay themselves and their top executives millions or even tens of millions of dollars every year.

100. Immediate measures must be taken to promote social equality and a radical redistribution of wealth, including a progressive income tax that places the burden of taxation on the rich, while lowering taxes for the vast majority of the population. Taxes on the profits of all major corporations must also be sharply increased.

101. The expropriation of the rich is justified not only economically and politically, but also morally and legally. Balzac's adage that behind every great fortune stands a great crime is certainly true of today's aristocracy. From Enron to the subprime mortgage racket, so much of this wealth has been garnered through methods that have been thoroughly destructive and outright criminal. Yet only an insignificant handful of these corporate criminals have been held accountable, and those most culpable get off scot-free. The SEP advocates the investigation and prosecution of those involved in speculative activities and criminal misappropriation of social and corporate resources.

102. The fight for social equality includes opposition to all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin and sexual orientation. However, genuine equality does not mean the rationing out of limited education and job opportunities on the basis of race or other categories. Such affirmative action policies benefit only a privileged few, while pitting white and minority workers and students against one another in a divisive struggle for jobs and college admission. We insist on full equality, within the framework of a massive social investment to guarantee all social needs, including free and open admission to universities. 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.

Political and Democratic Demands

103. There are, finally, a series of democratic and political demands that are of critical importance to the future of the working class. Its struggle cannot be confined to demands of an economic character, however important they are in themselves. Working people must be continuously mindful of the broader political and international context in which the fight against "their" ruling class unfolds. The SEP includes in its program demands that address themselves to crucial political issues:

Defend democratic rights

104. The growth of social inequality is incompatible with democracy. The new aristocracy brings with it the aristocratic principle of government, in which the state functions ever more openly as an instrument of class rule. From ancient Rome to pre-revolutionary France and Russia and up to the present, those who have accumulated great wealth will use any means to keep it. Basic democratic rights in the US established by the American Revolution and Civil War—including the rights of free speech and political association, the right to vote, the right to due process safeguards in criminal proceedings, and protections against illegal searches and seizures—are today under relentless assault.

105. The attacks of September 11 have been used as a pretext to

massively expand domestic spying, restrict freedom of speech and association, and increase the powers of the executive branch. The American ruling class has erected a vast "national security state," including the Department of Homeland Security, backed by hundreds of separate government agencies and private companies. The powers of the FBI and the National Security Agency to spy on the population have been expanded through the Patriot Act and executive orders. The US government has declared the power to hold anyone, including US citizens, indefinitely without charge.

106. The attack on democratic rights is deeply rooted in the structure of American society, particularly its extreme levels of social inequality, and is not the product of one administration. This is proven by the actions of the Obama White House, which has deepened the anti-democratic policies of Bush. It has opposed the investigation of Bush administration officials for violations of the Constitution, continues to support the Patriot Act and other anti-democratic legislation, has suppressed the publication of photos depicting torture and other evidence of criminality, and has invoked the state secrets privilege to block lawsuits by victims of torture. Obama has also sharply expanded the persecution of government whistleblowers and is leading a campaign against WikiLeaks for publishing documents that reveal the criminality of US military operations.

107. Lacking any solution to the crisis besetting American society, the American ruling elite and its government resort to locking up a greater portion of the population than any other country on earth. The self-proclaimed leader of the "free world" holds 2.3 million people behind bars under conditions of extreme brutality, while more than 5 million are on supervised parole or probation. The US remains one of the few advanced countries to employ the death penalty, executing 1,216 individuals since the Supreme Court sanctioned the resumption of judicial killings in 1977.

108. The defense of democratic rights requires shutting down the national security state apparatus and its multiple agencies—the Department of Homeland Security, the CIA, FBI, NSA—and the repeal of the Patriot Act and other police-state measures imposed in the name of the "war on terror." The working class must launch a counteroffensive against the attempts by the ruling elite to whip up reactionary social and political forces in support of its attacks on basic rights. It must strive not only to defend the democratic and social gains of the past, but to democratize American society. This must include the repeal of the death penalty and the dismantling of the domestic police and prison complex.

Oppose militarism and war

109. The growth of militarism poses the starkest threat to democratic rights. Half a century ago, President and former World War II commander Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against the emergence of a "military industrial complex" with the "potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power." The American people, he cautioned, "should take nothing for granted." The military's power has grown uninterrupted in the intervening decades, while its transformation into an "all-volunteer" force has isolated it increasingly from the democratic sentiments of the population.

110. Today's soldiers, largely drawn from among working class youth, are subjected to continuous deployments. Tens of thousands suffer post-traumatic stress, horrific injuries or death in Washington's neo-colonial wars. They are taught that they are "warriors" in an attempt to create what amounts to a separate military caste. The officer corps has become increasingly politicized and right-wing, with its senior members openly challenging the civilian government on matters of policy. In its social

position and ideology, the American military has become more and more like its counterparts throughout the world that have carried out armed coups and imposed bloody dictatorships.

111. The military plays an ever more direct role in American political life. The Posse Comitatus Act, which prohibits the use of the military within the US, has been undermined through the open use of the military in domestic settings. The creation of the Northern Command has established for the first time a military command structure overseeing the US. All of these measures are the embryonic foundation for military-police rule in the United States.

112. The world economy is integrated as never before in a single system of production, and yet this has only exacerbated the conflicts between nation-states and heightened the danger of war. Bush's "wars of the Twenty-First Century" began with the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, now the longest military engagement in the country's history. This was followed by the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. These two wars have been accompanied by a series of smaller engagements and the growing threat of a much broader conflict between the major powers.

113. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans have been killed by US aggression, and millions more turned into refugees. About 7,000 US and other foreign occupation troops have lost their lives. All over the world, atrocities carried out by the American military against civilians have become routine, while the US openly upholds the right to assassinate its perceived opponents—including US citizens.

114. The Obama administration has expanded these wars, including a massive surge of US soldiers in Afghanistan. Bombing campaigns in Pakistan have increased, and the administration is expanding threats and sanctions against Iran.

115. Enormous resources are expended by the American state in producing the most advanced means of destruction imaginable. Adding together the military budget and direct spending for US war abroad (over \$700 billion total) to military-related spending outside of the Department of Defense, total annual military spending exceeds \$1 trillion.

116. Both Republican and Democratic administrations invoke the strange and unexplained events of September 11, 2001 as justification for an unending global "war on terror." In reality, this is merely a pretext for wars of aggression that are being fought to secure US hegemony over regions that are of vital geo-strategic importance and contain much of the world's oil, gas and other natural resources.

117. The economic crisis has sharply increased global tensions, which threaten at any point to break out into war. The US is actively preparing for a military conflict with China, while the old divisions in Europe that led to two world wars are reemerging. American imperialism's attempts to exploit the collapse of the Soviet Union to expand its influence in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics is leading to increasing tensions with Russia, which poses the threat of direct military conflict, as seen in the US-backed Georgian assault on South Ossetia in August 2008. And, just as in the 1930s, economic and trade conflicts exacerbated by the global capitalist crisis must inevitably lead to military tensions between the US and its erstwhile capitalist allies in Europe and Japan. With the major powers now armed with nuclear weapons, a new world war will threaten the future of civilization.

118. The SEP calls for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US, British and other foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Those responsible for planning and waging aggressive war must be held accountable. The vast US military and intelligence apparatus must be dismantled, with the shutting down of the hundreds of US overseas military bases and the disbanding of the standing army. This will free up immense resources to pay reparations to countries ravaged by US militarism, as well as meet critical social needs at home.

119. The only progressive alternative to militarism is socialist internationalism—the struggle to unite the working class internationally in

the fight for a socialist future in which the world's resources can be utilized and developed cooperatively to eliminate the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance and to raise the living standards and cultural level of all mankind.

Defend the rights of immigrant workers

120. The working class as a whole must take up the defense of the rights of immigrant workers against the super-exploitation of the capitalist employers and the repression of the police and immigration authorities.

121. The corporate-controlled politicians and media scapegoat immigrants and whip up racist and chauvinist sentiments. They promote the contemptible lie that this oppressed section of the working class is to blame for rising unemployment, falling wages and attacks on social conditions—the product of the corporate-driven attack on the entire working class. Their aim is to divert rising popular anger and frustration away from the capitalist system and divide and weaken the working class as a whole.

122. Sections of the political establishment are proposing blatantly racist and anti-democratic measures that would facilitate the mass roundup of immigrants. There are also growing calls to modify the 14th Amendment of the Constitution to eliminate the guarantee of citizenship for all those born in the US. The attack on this basic democratic right—established after the Civil War not only to guarantee citizenship for freed slaves, but to guarantee equal protection before the law and due process for all citizens—is a threat to the entire working class.

123. The Obama administration, with the help of its liberal and supposedly "left" supporters, has exploited popular anger over these policies to push for its reactionary measures, under the banner of "comprehensive immigration reform." Obama is now leading the drive to increase the militarization of the border (including the use of unmanned Predator drones), expand workplace raids, and deport immigrant workers. Stepped-up policing along the border has led to a sharp increase in the number of workers who have died in the desperate attempt to cross into the US in search of employment. Among the proposals advanced by the administration is the introduction of a biometric ID card, a first step toward a national ID card that would facilitate government monitoring of the entire population.

124. The SEP fights for the repeal of all anti-immigrant laws and the disbanding of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the US Border Patrol. It calls for all undocumented workers to be guaranteed full legal rights, including the right to work and the right to travel to their home countries without the threat of being barred from returning and torn from their families. Against the attempt to militarize borders and persecute immigrants, not only in the US but all over the globe, the working class must uphold the principle of open borders—the right of workers to live and work in whatever country they choose with full citizenship rights.

The Political Independence of the Working Class

125. The fight for this program—for the social needs of the working class, for the defense of democratic rights, for an end to war—raises at every point the necessity for the independent political organization of the working class. It is impossible for the working class to advance its interests within the framework of the Democratic Party and the capitalist two-party system in the US.

126. The experience of the Obama administration has once again demonstrated the right-wing, pro-corporate nature of the Democratic Party. Every aspect of the administration's policy—the expansion of war, the bailout of the banks, the wholesale attack on the working class and the persistent calls for cutting social programs—has been dictated by the corporate and financial elite that controls the political system in the US. To the extent that differences exist between the two parties, they are of a tactical character—over how best to defend profits and prevent the development of an independent opposition in the working class.

127. The fight for the political independence of the working class means a struggle against all those middle-class organizations, including nominally “socialist” groups, which claim that the Democratic Party can be pushed to the left through mass pressure. This position is aimed at preventing the working class from establishing its own independent political party.

128. In fact, the Democratic Party long ago abandoned even a nominal commitment to social reform. The rightward movement of the Democratic Party has been accompanied by attempts on the part of its middle-class supporters to promote all manner of lifestyle issues and identity politics as a means of obscuring the question of class and social equality.

For new organizations of working class struggle

129. The interests of the working class can be secured only through mass struggle. All history demonstrates that nothing is handed down from above. Democratic rights, social reforms, the eight-hour day, the prohibition against child labor—even these gains won under capitalism were the byproduct of revolutionary upheavals.

130. New popular organizations of the working class must be built in opposition to the existing trade unions. The AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Coalition are not working class organizations, but auxiliary arms of corporate management. They work actively to increase the exploitation of the working class and to isolate and demoralize any opposition from among the workers themselves. They encourage nationalist sentiments, dividing different sections of the working class against each other. Politically, the unions work to channel the working class behind the Democratic Party and thereby subordinate it to the politics of the capitalist class.

131. Over the past four decades there has been a collapse in the number of strikes, the elementary form of class militancy—from 35 million lost man-days due to strikes in 1968, to 16 million in 1972, to less than two million today. This is due not to a decline in social tensions—social inequality has soared during this same period—but to the betrayals of the trade union bureaucracy. At the same time, the wealth of the union bureaucracy has become increasingly disconnected from the conditions of the membership, or even the number of unionized workers. From 2001 to 2008, the membership of the United Auto Workers fell from 701,000 to 431,000—a decline of about 40 percent—but the UAW's billion-dollar assets increased. This was a period that saw repeated concessions contracts imposed on auto workers, reducing wages and benefits and introducing multiple-tier wage systems.

132. To advance its interests, the working class must build genuine mass organizations—rank-and-file workplace, factory and neighborhood democratic action committees—animated by the spirit of revolutionary intransigence and opposition to the two parties of big business. These organizations must begin with the needs of the working class and must be democratically controlled by the working class. They must take ever greater responsibility for unifying the working class—employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled, native-born and immigrant, across

different industries and workplaces—and organizing their common struggles against the capitalist class.

For a workers government

133. These independent organizations of workers' power must be instruments for the revolutionary mobilization of the working class to take political power into its own hands, breaking the dictatorship of Wall Street and the corporate elite over political, economic and social life. This can be realized only through the establishment of a workers' government—that is, a government of the working class, by the working class and for the working class, which will implement the socialist policies that are required to meet the needs of working people.

134. Socialism cannot be achieved simply through the election of socialist candidates to the existing state institutions. The state and its institutions are democratic only in the most formal sense. In reality, they are instruments of corporate domination created by capitalism, in which the Democratic and Republican parties, the twin parties of the ruling class, exercise a monopoly.

135. Those who populate Congress, the White House and the major courts are representatives of one or another corporate interest and the financial aristocracy as a whole. Through various means—including egregious ballot access restrictions, the domineering influence of money in the electoral process, and the corporate control of the media—the ruling class seeks to exclude any genuine expression of the interests of the working class.

136. A workers' state must be based on new forms and structures of participatory democracy—arising in the course of revolutionary mass struggles and representative of the working class majority of the population. This will ensure that such a government is truly popular and democratic, based on bodies elected directly from the factories, offices and other workplaces as well as the working class neighborhoods.

137. The policy of such a government, as it introduces those measures essential for the socialist transformation of economic life, will be to encourage and actively promote a vast expansion of democratic working class participation in, and control over, decision-making processes.

The International Unity of the Working Class

138. The Socialist Equality Party is the only party whose program is based on the common interests of the international working class. It is aimed at forging a united movement of workers of every country.

139. The problems workers confront in the United States are, in essence, the same as those confronting workers in every other part of the world. War, attacks on democratic rights, exploitation, unemployment, poverty and environmental destruction are not merely American problems. They are world problems that require global solutions.

140. Capitalism is a global economic system. Vast transnational corporations scour the world for the cheapest labor and for raw materials, producing for a world market. The same banks and financial markets dictate policy in every country. Because production is global, the problems of mass society can be resolved only on the basis of an international socialist program.

141. The SEP rejects the position that globalization is itself the problem, and that the task is to reestablish a national economic framework and strengthen the nation-state. The immense growth of technology and

communications associated with globalization provides the basis for a dramatic improvement in the living standard of every human being. The problem is not globalization as such, but the subordination of the global economy to private profit and the interests of the wealthy.

142. When big business and its political representatives use low wages outside the US to justify the continual assault on wages and benefits in the US, this only underscores the need for American workers to unite politically with workers internationally in a worldwide struggle for socialism against the economic tyranny of the transnational corporations.

143. The SEP rejects all forms of nationalism, ethnic and religious chauvinism, and racism. This includes the deliberate promotion of anti-Arab and anti-Islamic sentiment to justify criminal US-led wars in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Build the Socialist Equality Party! Build the Fourth International!

144. 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 theoretical labors of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels established the historical necessity for socialism and laid the foundations for the creation of the modern revolutionary workers movement. With the 1917 October Revolution, socialism 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.

145. Like many great ideals, socialism has been abused and betrayed. In the Soviet Union, it was betrayed by a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy led by 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, executed 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.

146. The SEP 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, co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution. Trotsky led the struggle against the betrayals of Stalinism, dating back to the founding of the Left Opposition in 1923, 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. The Fourth International, led by the International Committee, is today the only genuinely revolutionary party of the working class on the planet.

147. 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 reappropriate this rich socialist heritage in order to organize the struggle

today to transform society in the interests of the people and put an end to poverty, exploitation and oppression in the United States and throughout the world.

148. We call on all those who agree with this program, support the fight for social equality, and oppose war and the assault on democratic rights to join the Socialist Equality Party and take up the fight for socialism.

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

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



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)