

May Day 2012: Unite workers around the world against austerity and war

Statement by Jerry White, SEP candidate for US president

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As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for president in the 2012 US elections, I want to express my solidarity with workers throughout the world on May Day. The marking of this holiday—which has its origins in the bitter struggle by American workers to win the eight-hour day in the 1880s—takes on a special relevance this year.

On May Day 2012, the international working class is confronting an unprecedented crisis of the world capitalist system. Workers around the world are beginning to enter struggles that pose the need for a revolutionary transformation of society.

Nearly four years after the failure of the Wall Street investment house Lehman Brothers set off a global financial panic, the world remains mired in the worst economic breakdown since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The measures taken by big business governments around the world to bail out the financial speculators have not resolved any of the contradictions that prompted the Crash of 2008. The distribution of unlimited and virtually free money to the banks has bankrupted governments around the world. The austerity measures they instituted to satisfy the global financial markets have only exacerbated the crisis.

Far from recovery, the economic situation is entering a new downturn. The United Kingdom and Spain are now in a double-dip recession. Economic activity is slowing in China, and chronically high levels of unemployment remain in Europe, Japan and the United States.

While the world stock markets and corporate profits have rebounded, at least for now, there has been no recovery for the working class. On the contrary, the capitalist class has utilized the crisis to wage a social counterrevolution whose aim is the utter destruction of the gains won over the course of more than a century of

struggle. The model, thus far, has been Greece, where attacks on the working class have led to the slashing of real wages by up to 65 percent, an official youth unemployment rate of over 50 percent and long queues at soup kitchens, homeless shelters and free health clinics.

No matter who wins the 2012 US elections, Barack Obama or Mitt Romney, both big business parties are committed to imposing brutal budget cuts, including gutting Medicare and other social programs. In so far as they have any “jobs policy” it is a further reduction in taxes and regulations on big business and slashing the wages and living standards of US workers.

According to a new report by the United Nation's International Labour Organization, more than 50 million jobs around the world have disappeared since 2008. Warning that the “global job crisis has entered a new, more structural phase,” the ILO predicted that the ranks of the jobless would reach 202 million this year and rise to 210 million by 2016. On average, more than 36 percent of jobseekers in advanced economies have been without work for more than one year.

Pointing to the grim prospects for the next generation of workers—including the college-educated students with little or no hopes for a job, let alone one that pays a living wage—the ILO warned of the danger internationally of increased “social strife” and “riots.”

Its warnings, however, are falling on deaf ears. Far from retreating from these anti-social measures every capitalist government in the world—from Washington to Paris to Berlin and Tokyo—is preparing ever-greater attacks on the working class.

In addition to this staggering level of social inequality, the breakdown of the capitalist profit system is once again leading to a mad scramble between the US and other countries for control of world markets, raw materials and

spheres of influence. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US has sought to use military preponderance to offset its economic decline and take control of the most geo-strategic areas of the world.

That is what is behind the wars in the oil-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia, and the plans for new wars against Syria, Iran and ultimately Russia and China. At the same time, old European powers are asserting their own imperialist interests in their former African and Middle Eastern colonies. Like the years leading up to World War I and World War II, the stage is being set for a global conflagration, this time with nuclear weapons, that threatens the very survival of mankind.

Workers have no interest in slaughtering one another on the battlefields of a new imperialist war. Nor do we have anything to gain by competing against each other to see who will work for the lowest wages and worst conditions. Workers in every country confront the same oppressor—vast global banks and corporations—and must unite in a common struggle against the profit system.

The immense problems of modern society—the growth of poverty and disease, global warming and environmental threats, the provision of housing, health care, nutrition and education to more than seven billion people on the planet—require a collective response and ever-greater planning and cooperation. But under capitalism the rational allocation of resources is impossible because all economic decisions are subordinated to the profit interests of a tiny minority.

The claim—repeated by every capitalist politician—that there are not enough resources to meet society's needs, is a contemptible lie. A recent report on so-called Ultra-High Net Worth Individuals—those with a total worth of \$30 million or more—revealed that their combined fortunes have now surpassed \$26 trillion. In other words, some 186,000 people (.002 percent of the world's population) have amassed wealth equal to nearly half of all the goods and services produced around the world each year!

The systematic redistribution of wealth from the majority to the wealthy elite, which has accelerated since 2008, has produced widespread anger. After decades in which the media pundits, academic dunderheads and demoralized former leftists declared an end of the class struggle, 2011 saw the reemergence of the massive social upheavals on a world scale.

From Tunisia and Egypt, to Greece, Spain, Israel, the UK and the United States, the working class announced its return in mass protests, strikes and other battles. In

every case, however, these struggles revealed that “The historical crisis of mankind,” as Leon Trotsky declared in the founding document of the Fourth International nearly three quarters of a century ago, “is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”

In the US, last year's mass demonstrations in Wisconsin and the wave of anti-Wall Street protests were betrayed by the trade unions and pseudo-left groups, which tied these movements to the Democratic Party. Having rejected a political struggle to break the working class from the Democrats and capitalist politics, the leaders of what remains of the Occupy movement are organizing various May Day protest stunts today. Aligned with the AFL-CIO trade unions, these protests have largely been incorporated into the campaign to reelect President Obama.

None of the social and economic impulses that gave rise to last year's momentous struggles have gone away—they have only grown stronger. But to wage a struggle for its rights, the working class must free itself from the political parties, trade unions, and organizations of the upper middle class, which subordinate it to the profit interests of the capitalist class.

My running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I are contesting these elections not primarily to win votes, but to build a new revolutionary leadership to give voice to the masses of working people who are ignored by this corporate-controlled political system.

From the outset of our campaign, we have insisted there is no national solution to the problems confronting the working class. What is needed is an international strategy to unite workers throughout the world to replace the profit system with socialism. Only in this way can workers achieve genuine social equality, peace and the democratic control of the economy.

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