

Science and Socialism

The Socialist Equality Party
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Hundreds of thousands of scientists and other professionals, together with students and working people who support them, will take part this Saturday in the worldwide March for Science. The demonstration has evoked a significant response, in large measure because it is seen as a way to protest the Trump administration's attacks on scientific knowledge and investigation.

The Socialist Equality Party welcomes this demonstration. We call for the mobilization of working people throughout the world against the destruction of the environment by giant chemical and energy corporations; attacks on public education that threaten access to all aspects of human culture for an entire generation of young people; the subordination of science to the profit requirements of the ruling class and the military; and all censorship and restrictions on research and teaching.

The call for the March for Science refers to these issues, but it has definite limitations, summed up in its declaration that the attacks on science “are not a partisan issue.” This question must be understood correctly. The defense of science is only “nonpartisan” in the sense that both Democrats and Republicans are responsible for the attack on public education, the deteriorating environment, the growth of militarism and the effort to censor and suppress scientific research.

The defense of science is, however, profoundly political, as it has been throughout history, as far back as Galileo Galilei's trial by the Roman Catholic Inquisition. Every reactionary government and class persecutes scientists and seeks to suppress and subordinate science to its own ends. The progress of science and reason has always depended upon the progress of society and social relations—and this is a political question.

The challenge today is to recognize the source of the attack on science, which did not suddenly arise from

the limited brain of Donald Trump. He is only the crudest and most backward representative of a social system in which all human activity, including science, is subordinated to private profit. While science and technology have immensely developed the power of social production, this production remains trapped within the increasingly irrational forms of private capitalist ownership.

The defense of science is therefore inseparable from the revolutionary struggle of the main progressive force in modern society, the working class, against the corporate ruling elite.

Science and technology have made it possible to abolish hunger, cure disease, banish ignorance and secure a decent standard of living for every person on this planet. But under the profit system, vast wealth is monopolized by a tiny handful of the super-rich. Just eight mega-billionaires possess greater wealth than the poorest half of humanity, while hundreds of millions go hungry; millions die of preventable diseases; and schools, roads, water systems and other public infrastructure are crumbling.

Modern technology, from revolutionary developments in transportation to the creation of the Internet, has shattered the barriers to human interaction and made possible the integration of all humanity. Science itself is the most international of human enterprises, developing through global collaboration.

However, because of the division of the world into rival nation-states, technology is made the instrument of repression and persecution: the hounding of refugees and immigrants throughout the world; the building of walls against immigrants on the US-Mexico border; China's “great firewall,” separating one billion people from the rest of the world; and the development of the NSA's vast apparatus of global spying directed against the population of the entire world.

Most ominously, in the hands of the rival nation-

states, with US imperialism taking the lead, science and technology have been perverted into means of mass destruction. The April 22 demonstration takes place under conditions of a growing threat of world war, with the Trump administration, backed by the US media and Democratic Party, firing missiles at Syria, dropping the largest bomb since Hiroshima and Nagasaki on Afghanistan, and threatening a preemptive military strike against North Korea.

The danger of a direct military conflict involving nuclear-armed powers is very real. More than anyone else, scientists know that this would mean the extinction of civilization, if not life on planet Earth.

What is the way forward? Those who wish to defend and advance the work of science must confront a contradiction in their own ways of thinking. They are accustomed to applying scientific methods to the processes of nature, but not to the workings of society, still less to politics.

In part, this derives from the greater complexity of social life, where the number of variables—including human beings—makes scientific analysis more complicated. More importantly, it reflects the ideological domination of the corporate ruling elite, which opposes efforts to apply rational standards to the operations of a social system that affords them unparalleled wealth and privilege. Within academia, the attack on objective truth and reason spearheaded by postmodernism and other forms of irrationalism is directed at all forms of scientific knowledge, above all at the science of society and history.

Scientists must find their way back to insights of their greatest predecessors like Albert Einstein, who were drawn to socialism as the application of reason to the development of modern society—and as the only means of ending war and dictatorship. This means taking up a study of Marxism, which bases its revolutionary politics on an analysis of objective reality and class interests.

The working class is the revolutionary force that has the capability to put an end to capitalism and establish a socialist society based on equality, democracy and social ownership of the wealth created by collective labor. In the Russian Revolution, whose centenary we mark this year, this scientific understanding was vindicated in practice, with the working class coming to power under the leadership of a Marxist party.

The working class cannot advance without the aid of science. But science itself requires the advance of the working class, which will provide science with the necessary mass base in society. In the final analysis, the progress of science—and the progress of humanity as a whole—depends on the resurgence of a new revolutionary movement of the working class. The socialist movement unites under its banner both the pursuit of scientific truth in all its forms and the struggle for human equality.



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