

For a socialist alternative in the 2006 US elections

**Statement of the Socialist Equality Party
12 January 2006**

The Socialist Equality Party will run candidates for federal and state office in the 2006 US mid-term elections. The SEP will campaign in as many states as possible to build a mass political movement in opposition to the two parties of the ruling elite and big business, the Democrats and Republicans.

The SEP campaign will give voice and leadership to the opposition of millions of working people and youth within the United States and internationally to the Bush administration's policies of war, repression and exploitation.

The United States is in the throes of a profound political, economic, social and moral crisis. It is a nation whose global imperial aims have become odious to millions of its own citizens.

During the more than four years that have passed since the Bush administration unleashed its so-called "War on Terrorism," the policies of the United States have assumed an ever more openly unconstitutional, illegal and even criminal character. The events of 9/11 have been employed as a pretext for unbridled militarism and a brazen contempt for human life and dignity.

A nation whose revolutionary founders proclaimed the "inalienable rights" of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is now led by a cabal of political gangsters who are attempting to abolish "the great writ" of habeas corpus and are conducting massive and illegal spying operations against American citizens. The leaders of the American Revolution proclaimed their "decent respect for the opinions of mankind." The present occupant of the White House and his henchmen unashamedly flaunt their contempt for international law and defend the use of torture. Whereas Lincoln appealed as president to the "better angels of our nature," the Bush administration appeals to the basest instincts of the most reactionary sections of the population.

This appeal to reaction includes a relentless assault on the secularist, Enlightenment foundations of the American republic and the cultivation of religious bigotry and intolerance. The Bush administration has unleashed a systematic attack on the past achievements of culture and thought, including science itself, opposing stem-cell research, rejecting the findings of environmental studies, and encouraging religious fundamentalist attacks on the Darwinian theory of evolution.

There exists within the United States immense and deep-rooted opposition to the Iraq war and the right-wing domestic policies of the Bush administration. Yet there exist no means within the political framework of the two-party system for this opposition to find genuine and independent political expression.

Far from being a serious political opposition to the ultra-right Republican administration, the Democratic Party functions as its cowardly accomplice. Whatever differences the Democrats have with

the Republicans are insignificant when compared to what the two parties agree upon—that is, their shared determination to uphold the domestic and global interests of the American corporate and financial ruling elite.

The struggle to stop the war in Iraq, put an end to American imperialist militarism, defend democratic rights, eradicate poverty and establish social equality requires the building of a new mass political movement, based on a socialist program and perspective.

The need for an international program

The SEP is the only party whose program expresses the common interests of working people all over the world and opposes every form of nationalism, ethnic and religious chauvinism, and racism.

The problems that confront workers in the United States are, in essence, the same as those which confront workers in every other part of the world. War, the attack on democratic rights, exploitation, unemployment, poverty and the destruction of the natural environment are not simply American problems. They are world problems and require global solutions.

The overriding economic and social fact of our time is the failure of the international capitalist system. On a planet inhabited by more than 5 billion people, all aspects of economic and social decision-making are subordinated to considerations of corporate profit and the irrational accumulation of ever-greater personal wealth by a small ruling elite.

The spectacular advances in science, technology and the productivity of labor should have made possible a dramatic improvement in the living standards of every human being. Instead, conditions of life are deteriorating for the broad mass of working people all over the world.

The year 2005 demonstrated conclusively—from the indifferent response to the Asian tsunami to the US government's incompetence in the Hurricane Katrina disaster—the inability of this system to ensure even the most elementary physical needs of the people.

In the epoch of world economy, the problems of mass society can be resolved only on the basis of an international socialist program. The rational, planned and humane mobilization of the world's resources conflicts at every point with the interests of national ruling elites whose wealth and power are based on the existing capitalist system.

Big business justifies its assault on the working class by invoking the specter of globalization. But the global integration of all aspects of economic life is not, in itself, the real cause of deepening social distress. The global expansion and unification of the productive forces have the potential to vastly improve living standards. However, social progress is blocked by the subordination of these powerful economic processes to the private profit interests of the ruling elites in competing national states.

When employers in the US tell workers that they must accept massive wage cuts or lose their jobs to low-wage regions, 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.

Socialism means the reorganization of economic life on the basis of social need and the common good. Its goal is the elimination of poverty and oppression and the elevation of the living standards of the world's people on the basis of social equality. It means the fullest extension of democratic control over the policies and priorities of society and the processes by which wealth is produced and distributed.

The critical issues in 2006

The 2006 elections are dominated by three critical and inter-related issues: (1) the on-going wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the advanced preparations of the Bush administration for new and even more bloody military actions; (2) the assault on the democratic rights of the American people; and (3) the government-backed assault on working class living standards and the massive growth of social inequality in the United States.

The stance of the SEP on these critical issues is unequivocally and diametrically opposed to that of the parties of the corporate elite.

*** The SEP demands the immediate withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan!**

It is an indisputable fact that the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 was launched on the basis of out-and-out lies. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the regime of Saddam Hussein was not collaborating with Al Qaeda in the preparation of attacks on the United States.

The war was launched not to fight terrorism, but to secure US domination of the crucial oil resources of Iraq and project American power throughout the Middle East and Central Asia.

The official debate on the Iraq war within the political establishment is conducted entirely within the framework of the so-called "War on Terrorism." The SEP completely rejects this exercise in political deceit, contrived by the Bush administration to justify the strivings of the American ruling elite for world domination. To the extent that there is a terrorist threat, it is the result of US imperialist policies that have produced poverty and oppression around the world and generated immense anger and hatred.

SEP candidates will campaign for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Our campaign will demand that all those responsible for the illegal and unprovoked invasion of Iraq be compelled to face trial before a war crimes tribunal, and that the US government compensate the Iraqi people for the destruction and suffering it has caused, as well as the families of American soldiers killed in the war and the men and women who have been wounded, both mentally and physically.

*** The SEP calls for the defense and expansion of democratic rights!**

Democracy is ultimately incompatible with the levels of wealth concentration and social inequality that exist in the US.

The greatest refutation of Bush's claim that the invasion of Iraq is a war to spread democracy is the fact that the war has been accompanied by an accelerating attack on democratic rights within the United States itself. In the name of defending "freedom" against "terrorism," the Bush administration has erected the institutional and legal framework for a police state in America, assuming military

and police powers that no previous US government has claimed, not even during World War I or World War II.

The Bush administration has repudiated international law, the Geneva Conventions and all legal restraints on executive power. Under Bush, the United States has asserted the right to attack and occupy any country it chooses; to establish a worldwide network of prisons where those targeted by Washington can be kidnapped, tortured and even murdered with impunity; and to erect a vast apparatus of domestic spying, surveillance and provocation.

The Socialist Equality Party demands the revocation of the Patriot Act, the dismantling of the Homeland Security Department, the abolition of the Pentagon's Northern Command, the closing down of the Guantánamo concentration camp and all similar facilities, and an end to torture, renditions and similar atrocities committed in the name of the American people.

The defense of democratic rights requires a counteroffensive against the attempts by the Bush administration to whip up the most reactionary political and social forces and roll back progressive reforms won in the past. The Socialist Equality Party is indefatigable in its defense of past democratic and social gains—civil and voting rights, universal public education, health care for seniors, etc.—as well as constitutional guarantees of civil liberties.

The SEP demands equal rights for all and opposes all discrimination in employment, housing, education or any other field based upon race, national origin, religion, sex or sexual preference. We defend the unrestricted right of women to abortion on demand and uphold the right of gay people to marry and to receive the same medical, legal and employment benefits as heterosexual couples. We oppose the death penalty as a barbaric measure which sanctions the taking of human life by the state—a penalty that is imposed almost entirely on the poor and disproportionately on racial minorities.

But the defense of democratic rights cannot be limited to the purely negative task of beating back attacks on civil liberties and constitutional norms. The working class needs a great expansion of democratic rights, beginning with a radical restructuring of the US political system itself, one of the most restrictive and undemocratic among the advanced industrialized countries.

This should include abolishing such archaic institutions as the Electoral College, ending the numerous restrictions on the right of all citizens to vote, and eliminating the myriad obstacles to third parties and independent candidates who wish to challenge the Democrats and Republicans. These barriers range from restrictive and arbitrary ballot access laws to federal subsidies for Democratic and Republican campaigns, to media censorship of third-party candidates. All together, they amount to state sponsorship of a two-party system that is increasingly discredited—and narrow to the point of irrationality, given the vast diversity of a country of nearly 300 million people. The SEP advocates a system of proportional representation in which all parties that receive a significant share of the vote are represented in legislative bodies.

The very concept of democratic rights must be expanded beyond the narrow framework of equality before the law and due process. It must encompass the social realities of life for the broad mass of working people. It is therefore inseparable from a struggle against the concentration of private wealth.

There is a fundamental hypocrisy in the conception of equal rights before the law in a society permeated with economic and social inequality. The right to vote every two or four years means little when a financial oligarchy dictates the most important issues of daily life: whether people will have a job, how much they will be paid, under what conditions they will work.

Democracy must be infused with a profound social content, beginning with the democratization of the workplace, where most people spend the bulk of their time and effort. Industrial democracy means real control by working people over their working lives. 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 ratification of corporate leadership by a democratic vote of all employees.

We support full democratic rights and citizenship for all immigrants, including the estimated 12 million undocumented workers who are branded as “illegal aliens.” We demand an end to the anti-immigrant attacks—dragnet-style sweeps, detentions and deportations—that the government has mounted as part of its “War on Terrorism.”

*** The SEP fights for the defense of jobs, the expansion of social benefits, and the raising of the living standards of working people and youth!**

The US ruling elite claims that decent-paying jobs, pensions, health benefits and social services such as public education have become unaffordable. It asserts that they must be sacrificed to provide ever more obscene levels of personal wealth for the top 1 percent in American society.

The SEP replies that working people bear no responsibility for the corporate bankruptcies that have devastated working class communities, while executives walk away from the disasters they created with additional millions in their bank accounts. The dramatic failure of such icons of American business as General Motors and United Airlines, to mention only two of the best known companies, is overwhelming proof of the general crisis of American capitalism.

For decades, the apologists for Big Business claimed that the American system of “free enterprise” could guarantee workers high wages, generous social benefits, and a secure and comfortable retirement. There was no need for socialism, proclaimed these corporate con-artists, when capitalism could provide workers with a high standard of living.

These fatuous nostrums have been refuted by the economic facts of American life.

The Gross Domestic Product of the US has grown by 50 percent since 1972, in real terms. Per capita GDP has likewise risen substantially. This means that, as a society, it should be easier, not harder, to meet the basic needs of working people—good-paying jobs, health benefits, secure pensions, decent public services. Yet the real hourly wages of American workers have declined, family income has stagnated, pensions have been gutted, and vital social services such as health care and education have been starved of funds.

Economic output has grown enormously over the past 30 years, but those who do the work have gained little or nothing from it. Instead, the increased wealth has been monopolized by a small fraction at the top of American society. Since 1979, the wealthiest 1 percent of the American population has more than doubled its share of the national wealth, from 19 percent to over 40 percent.

Corporate CEOs now make on the average 431 times the wage of an average worker. Last year the salaries of top executives rose by 91 percent, compared to 4 percent for workers.

A study by the Internal Revenue Service, reported in the New York Times in October of 2005, documents the staggering level of income inequality in the United States. In 2003, the latest year for which comprehensive figures are available, the top 1 percent swallowed up all of the increase in real income for the whole of the

United States.

A far-reaching redistribution of the wealth, taking it away from the super-rich and using these resources for the good of all, has become an urgent social necessity. We demand the reorganization of economic life on rational and humane—that is, socialist—foundations: that the wealth produced by the working class be used to meet the needs of the people, rather than the profit interests of giant corporations and the accumulation of personal wealth by a privileged elite.

Economic security is a basic human right, not a privilege to be enjoyed by the few who are rich. The SEP demands the organization of economic life to guarantee all working people a comfortable standard of living.

*** The SEP fights for social equality!**

The Socialist Equality Party advances a program whose aim is the reorganization of the US and world economy in the interests of the working class. The present capitalist setup, in which all of the forces of industry and finance are privately owned and controlled, must be replaced by a socialist system of public ownership and democratic control of the economy. We advocate the creation of an economic system whose organizing principle is the satisfaction of human needs, not the creation of profit and the accumulation of vast personal wealth.

To establish the economic foundation for the reorganization of economic life in the interests of the broad mass of the working people, we advocate the transformation of all privately owned industrial, manufacturing and information technology corporations valued at \$10 billion or more—companies that, taken together, control the decisive share of the US economy—into publicly owned enterprises, with full compensation for small shareholders and the terms of compensation for large shareholders to be publicly negotiated. The SEP also proposes the nationalization of the health care and pharmaceutical giants, as well as all large banking and insurance institutions. In addition, the SEP advocates the nationalization of the railroads, airlines, telecommunications and power utilities, and the placement of all critical natural resources under public ownership and control.

The reorganization of the American economy along these lines would make available immense resources to implement programs that would significantly improve the living conditions of the working class.

We call for an extensive program of public works to guarantee employment for all those who are presently unemployed and able to work. The urgent need to raise the income level of millions of working Americans must be tackled by establishing a guaranteed federally funded annual income, indexed to inflation. To create jobs and make possible the increased participation of workers in political and cultural life, the workweek should be reduced to 30 hours, at 40 hours' pay. Full-time workers should receive at least five weeks annual vacation.

We call as well for a massive investment to ensure high-quality public education and access to free higher education for all; universal, comprehensive medical coverage; state-subsidized housing construction to build comfortable and affordable homes; a guaranteed right of workers to join a union and control the union democratically; the outlawing of union-busting tactics and wage-cutting; retirement security at a decent income for all working people; and government support for small and medium-sized businesses.

The social rights outlined here can be realized only on the basis of concrete measures to promote social equality. Tax policy must be stood on its head: from a means of plundering the people to enrich the millionaires and big business, it must become the instrument for

a radical redistribution of wealth. This means repealing the tax cuts for the rich enacted under Ronald Reagan, the elder George Bush and George W. Bush, restoring direct taxes on wealth, such as the estate tax, and abolishing the loopholes and accounting gimmicks that allow most large corporations to pay only a tiny fraction of tax on their profits. Taxes should be reduced for the vast majority of the population and sharply increased for those with the highest incomes and levels of accumulated wealth.

Particular attention must be paid to investigating the speculative activities of the past 25 years and the criminal misappropriation of corporate resources by CEOs, at the expense of the workers and small shareholders. This stolen wealth must be returned and used to improve social services and working class living standards.

Property rights must be subordinated to social rights. This does not mean the nationalization of everything, or the abolition of small or medium-sized businesses, which are themselves victimized by giant corporations and banks. Establishing a planned economy will give such businesses ready access to credit and more stable market conditions, so long as they provide decent wages and working conditions.

The Socialist Equality Party opposes the various strains of identity politics, including cultural nationalism and feminism, whose essential role is to obscure the most fundamental division in capitalist society, that between the social classes. We stand firmly in support of integration and the unity of all working people. We oppose racial politics, which are fundamentally inimical to the interests of working people and the need to build a mass international movement against capitalism. Those who claim to politically represent racial constituencies invariably do so in the interests of narrow and privileged social layers, whether among blacks, Latinos, or other ethnic groups, which seek positions and perks within the framework of the capitalist system.

In that context, we oppose affirmative action policies, which pit white and minority workers and students against one another in a divisive struggle for jobs and college admission. Such programs benefit only a privileged few, not the masses of minority people. We insist on full and genuine equality of opportunity, within the framework of a massive social investment to guarantee good-paying jobs, quality K-12 and college education, affordable housing and all other social needs. 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, not one where limited opportunities are rationed out on the basis of race or gender.

The Socialist Equality Party calls as well for measures to enable working people to have full access to art and culture. American popular culture was once one of the wonders of the world, a pole of attraction because of its innovation and powerful democratic and humanistic spirit. As in other spheres, the subordination of culture to the profit motive has led to an immense degeneration.

Popular culture has suffered under the impact of funding cuts for the arts and a right-wing ideological assault on artistic expression. 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. The damage to the intellectual and moral fabric of society resulting from such a mercenary and philistine approach is impossible to quantify. There is, however, an indisputable link between the glorification of militarism, brutality and egotism and hostility to the artistic and cultural heritage of previous generations.

The Socialist Equality Party demands massive funding for the arts

and the creation of new schools and centers to ensure that every section of the population has access to 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.

Only a socialist economic program can assure the rational development of the earth's finite resources. The subordination of all human activity to the drive for profit and the accumulation of personal wealth threatens to unleash an ecological disaster. The inability of the profit system to confront this or any of the other problems posed by the increasingly complex needs of mass society poses a mortal threat to mankind's survival. Socialist economic planning will create conditions for genuine global collaboration in the protection of the earth's environment.

For the political independence of the working class

The precondition for conducting a struggle within the US and internationally against war, repression and the attacks on living standards and democratic rights is the establishment of the political independence of the working class. The Socialist Equality Party campaign is centrally aimed at achieving this essential task by laying the political basis for the development of the SEP as the independent mass party of the American working class.

The SEP insists that the most pressing political task facing the working class is a complete break with the Democratic Party and the entire framework of the bipartisan "two-party system." To the extent that differences exist between the Democratic and Republican parties, they are merely of a tactical character—over how best to secure the interests of the capitalist elite within the United States and globally.

The Democratic Party offers no serious opposition to Bush's flouting of Congress, the law and the Constitution and the establishment of the framework for a presidential dictatorship. It long ago repudiated any policy of social reform and adopted policies designed to further enrich the wealthiest social layers at the expense of the working population.

The fundamental reason for the Democratic Party's complicity with Bush and the Republicans is the fact that it defends the basic interests of the same capitalist ruling elite. Its specific function within the framework of the two-party system is to pose as a party "of the people" in order to smother and neutralize any movement of social opposition from below.

Support the SEP campaign!

The Socialist Equality Party appeals to the many thousands of readers of the World Socialist Web Site, to supporters of the SEP and to all those who oppose the policies of war and repression and the assault on working class living standards to actively support our election campaign.

The SEP campaign does not have and does not want access to the billions in contributions from corporate America and the super-rich which finance the Democratic and Republican parties and their campaigns of mutual mud-slinging and lies. What we seek to achieve—raising the political consciousness of the working class—can be accomplished only by developing a grassroots political movement that will broadly mobilize workers, professionals, young people and students and extend beyond the election itself, laying the foundations for the building of a mass socialist party of the working class.

We place this challenge before our supporters: Join us in the effort

to publicize the SEP campaign, win support for its candidates, organize political discussion of our program among working people and youth. Set up meetings in your neighborhoods, at your workplaces and schools to hear from the SEP campaign. Distribute this campaign platform as broadly as possible. Help build the SEP as the new political party of the working people.

We recognize that we face enormous obstacles in mounting this campaign. The American political system is profoundly undemocratic. The two-party system perpetuates itself by seeking to exclude from the ballot all independent alternatives, especially those on the left. It does so through of a welter of election laws that impose arbitrary and prohibitive signature requirements for independent and third-party candidates, deadlines for filing nominating petitions that are designed to block rather than facilitate ballot access, and a corporate-controlled media that systematically excludes critical viewpoints—especially those of socialists.

We intend, nevertheless, to wage an ambitious campaign. We do so on the basis of a principled socialist and internationalist program and confidence that this program will find a growing base of support among working people. The extent of the campaign, the number of candidates we are able to run, the number of offices we can contest, the states and localities where we are able to mount campaigns depend on the support and participation of workers, students and youth who come forward to help put SEP candidates on the ballot.

Join the fight for socialism!

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 first task of socialism is the elimination of poverty—a goal that is eminently realizable, given the enormous development of man's productive forces and the tremendous advances in science and technology. Socialism will proceed to raise the living standards of the broad mass of humanity and create the conditions for full equality.

But man does not live by bread alone, and the perspective of socialism does not stop at the fulfillment—as crucial as it is—of immediate material needs. That achievement lays the foundations for an enormous flowering of culture, science and the intellectual and moral stature of individual men and women. Socialism envisions the fullest possible development of people's talents, interests and potentialities, in a world where social ownership of the means of production, international planning and cooperation, and a vast extension of popular participation and democratic control will enable man to overcome the demoralizing grind of economic insecurity and the dehumanizing effect of dog-eat-dog competition.

With the advent of Karl Marx, socialism became a science. With the 1917 October Revolution, it 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.

Like many great ideals, socialism has been abused and betrayed. In the Soviet Union, it was betrayed by the bureaucracy that arose under 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.

In the US, the struggles of the working class were betrayed by the bureaucracy that arose within the trade unions. The labor bureaucracy defended the capitalist system and politically subordinated the workers to American big business, primarily through its alliance with the Democratic Party. The betrayal of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy has led to the identification of the unions with corporate management and their transformation into instruments to suppress the working class, rather than defend it.

Our movement 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, a leader of the Russian Revolution who led the struggle against the betrayals of Stalinism 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.

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 re-appropriate 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.

We call on all those who oppose war and militarism and the assault on democratic rights, and who support the fight for social equality, to contact the Socialist Equality Party and the World Socialist Web Site and volunteer to organize petition drives to place SEP candidates on the ballot in their states and localities. We urge those who agree with the program of the Socialist Equality Party to come forward to run as SEP candidates themselves.

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To contact the WSWP and the Socialist Equality Party visit: <http://www.wswp.org>