

Socialist Equality Party Statement of Principles

Adopted by the SEP Founding Congress

August 3-9, 2008

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The World Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

1. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is in solidarity with and accepts the political authority of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. The principles of the SEP incorporate the essential experiences of the revolutionary upheavals of the 20th century and the corresponding struggle waged by Marxists for the program of world socialist revolution. The socialist revolution, which signifies the forcible entrance of the masses into conscious political struggle, portends the greatest and most progressive transformation of the form of man's social organization in world history – the ending of society based on classes and, therefore, of the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. A transformation so immense is the work of an entire historical epoch. The principles of the SEP are derived from and necessarily reference the experiences of this epoch, which opened with the eruption of World War I in 1914, followed shortly thereafter by the conquest of state power by the Russian working class in the 1917 October Revolution.

2. The Fourth International, with which the SEP is aligned, emerged out of the implacable struggle waged by Marxist internationalists, led by Leon Trotsky, against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union and the betrayal of the program of world socialist revolution by the dictatorial regime headed by Stalin and his henchmen. The political source of that betrayal, which led ultimately, in 1991, to the dissolution of the USSR,

was the substitution of nationalism for internationalism by the Stalinist regime.

3. The socialist revolution is international in scope. As Trotsky wrote, “The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.” This fundamental principle of the Fourth International, which primarily defines the program and political identity of the SEP, was forged in the struggle against the Stalinist “theory” of “socialism in one country.” The strategy of the working class, in the United States as in all countries, must proceed from an analysis of world conditions. The era of national programs ended with the outbreak of World War I. Nearly one hundred years later, given the colossal growth of the world economy and its global integration, world economic conditions and the exigencies of inter-imperialist and inter-capitalist rivalries are the principal determinants of national life. Therefore, as Trotsky explained, “the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not vice versa.”

4. Wherever revolutionary struggles of the working class first break out, whether in an advanced or lesser-developed capitalist country, in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia or Australasia, the social conflagration will inevitably assume global dimensions. The socialist revolution will not and cannot

be completed within a national framework. It will, as foreseen by Trotsky in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, be completed on the world arena.

5. The program of the Socialist Equality Party expresses the interests of the working class, the leading and decisive international revolutionary social force in modern capitalist society. The central task of the SEP is to win the support of American workers for the program of international socialism. The SEP strives, on the basis of this program, to unify and mobilize the working class for the conquest of political power and the establishment of a workers' state in the United States. It will create, thereby, the objective preconditions for the development of a genuinely democratic, egalitarian and socialist society. These objectives can be realized only within the framework of an international strategy, the goal of which is the global unification of the workers of all countries and the creation of a United Socialist States of the World.

The Crisis of Capitalism

6. Capitalism, and the imperialist system that develops upon its economic foundations, is the main cause of human poverty, exploitation, violence and suffering in the modern world. As a system of socio-economic organization, capitalism long ago exhausted its historically progressive role. The blood-drenched history of the twentieth century – with its two world wars, innumerable “local” conflicts, the nightmare of Nazism and other forms of military-police dictatorship, eruptions of genocide and communal pogroms – is an unanswerable indictment of the capitalist system. The number of victims claimed by capitalist-inspired violence runs into the hundreds of millions. And this figure does not include the consignment of the peoples of entire continents to unrelenting poverty, with all its attendant miseries.

7. The gigantic scale of the existing productive forces and the extraordinary advances in technology are more than sufficient not only to abolish poverty but also to guarantee every human being on the planet a high standard of living. Culture should be flowering amidst unprecedented material wealth. But, instead, conditions of life are deteriorating for the working class, and human culture, deprived of perspective and hope for the future, is in deep crisis. The source of the contradiction between what *is* and what *should be* is a global economic system based on private ownership of the means of production, and the irrational division of the world into rival nation-states.

8. All efforts to raise the living standards of the working class and address serious social problems run up against the barrier of private ownership of the means of production, the anarchy of the capitalist market, the economic imperatives of the profit system, and, last but not least, the insatiable greed and money-madness of the ruling class itself. The claim that the capitalist market is the infallible allocator of resources and the supremely wise arbiter of social needs stands utterly discredited amidst the endless series of speculative scandals and multi-billion dollar bankruptcies that have rocked the world economic system during the past decade. The boundary lines between “legitimate” financial transactions and criminal fraud have narrowed to the point of being almost invisible. The separation of the process of personal wealth accumulation from the production and creation of real value is an expression of the general putrefaction of the capitalist system.

9. The irreconcilable conflict between the profit system and the very survival of humanity finds, in a literal sense, its most noxious expression in the crisis of global warming and the natural environment. The cause of this crisis lies not, as is falsely claimed by the bourgeois media, with population growth. Nor is it the result of science and technology – whose development is critical to the advance of human civilization – but, rather, with their misuse by an irrational and obsolete economic order. The impossibility of finding a genuine solution to the increasingly critical problem of climate change and other environmental problems within the framework of the profit system is an “inconvenient truth” that bourgeois politicians – even those who profess concern for the environment – deny. All scientific evidence points to the fact that nothing short of the socialist reorganization of the world economy – in which the planetary environment would no longer be held hostage to either the profit motive or destructive nationalist interests – will achieve the reductions in greenhouse gases necessary to prevent disaster.

10. The solution to the spreading economic crisis and the deteriorating social position of the working class lies not in the reform of capitalism, for it is beyond reform. The crisis is of a *systemic* and *historical* character. As feudalism gave way to capitalism, capitalism must give way to socialism. The key industrial, financial, technological and natural resources must be taken out of the sphere of the capitalist market and private ownership, transferred to society and placed under the democratic supervision and control of the working class. The organization of economic life on the basis of the capitalist law of value must

be replaced with its socialist reorganization on the basis of democratic economic planning, whose purpose is the fulfillment of social needs.

Imperialism and War

11. While the economic system operates on a global scale, with industry and finance controlled by transnational corporations, capitalism remains rooted in a system of nation-states. In the final analysis, the national state serves as a base of operations from which the ruling class of each country pursues its interests on the world stage. The uncontrollable drive of the main imperialist states – including, first and foremost, the United States – for geo-political dominance, spheres of influence, markets, control of vital resources, and access to cheap labor, leads inevitably to war. The doctrine of “preventive war” unveiled by the Bush administration in 2002 – in violation of legal precedents established at the Nuremberg war crimes trial of 1946 – legitimizes war as an instrument of policy and sets the stage for unending and escalating violence.

12. The Socialist Equality Party unequivocally condemns the “War on Terror” as a fraudulent pretext for the use of military violence by the American corporate and financial elite in pursuit of its global ambitions. Forgetting the revolutionary origins of the United States in the struggle against colonial tyranny, the government and media label as “terrorists” all those who resist the occupation of their country by foreign armies. The SEP denounces this imperialist-motivated slander, and defends the basic right of people to defend themselves, their homes and their countries against neo-colonial invaders. This principled stand does not lessen the SEP’s opposition to violent acts that target innocent civilians in either the occupied countries or any other part of the world. Such acts, which can be defined legitimately as terrorist, are politically reactionary. The murder of innocent civilians enrages, disorients and confuses the public. It deepens sectarian and communal divisions within the occupied country. When practiced internationally, terrorism undermines the struggle for the unity of the working class, and plays into the hands of those elements within the US establishment who seize on such events to justify and legitimize the resort to war.

13. The SEP demands the immediate withdrawal of all US military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, and calls for an end to threats against Iran and other countries, which, for one or another reason, are seen by the White House and Pentagon as

obstacles to US imperialism’s global interests. The SEP encourages and supports the widest mass protests against US militarism and its plans for war. But given the fact that the causes of war are embedded in the economic structure of society and its political division into nation-states, the struggle against imperialist militarism and war can be successful only to the extent that it mobilizes the working class on the basis of an international revolutionary strategy and program.

The Capitalist State and Democracy

14. The essential precondition for the implementation of socialist policies is the conquest of political power by the working class and the establishment of a workers’ state. While the working class must make use of all democratic and legal rights available to it in the struggle for power, vast historical experience has demonstrated that it cannot carry out the socialist reorganization of society within the framework of the existing institutions of bourgeois democracy and the capitalist state. The classic Marxist definition of the state as an instrument of class rule, consisting “not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds” (Engels), is even truer today than it was a century ago. The state is not, as reformists habitually assert, a neutral arbiter of social conflict. Its very existence testifies to the fact that society is split into irreconcilably antagonistic classes. The bourgeois state is an instrument that upholds the political dictatorship of the capitalist class. Even as a matter of law, the bourgeoisie reserves the right to sweep aside basic constitutional protections and procedures when it perceives “a clear and present danger” (in the words of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes) to its fundamental class interests.

15. While employing democratic rhetoric to legitimize its rule within the United States and to justify its use of violence all over the world, the contemporary American state retains at its disposal repressive mechanisms of unparalleled scope: a prison system that, with more than two million people behind bars, is the largest in the world; a massive and heavily armed police force; a judicial system that processes over 14 million arrests annually and that has the power to inflict capital punishment; an immensely powerful and lavishly funded military force, imbued with militaristic and anti-democratic sentiments; and a vast “national security” apparatus, which has been given extraordinary latitude in spying on and prying into the private affairs of the people. Over all these institutions the American people exer-

cise virtually no effective supervision or control. Torture has become state policy, *habeas corpus* has been drastically restricted, and the state operates, in addition to its public prisons within the United States, an international gulag network of secret prisons into which nameless individuals, deemed “enemy combatants,” are made to disappear.

16. Democratic rights established in an earlier historical period have been drastically eroded. Lincoln’s democratic vision of a government “of the people, by the people, for the people” has long since degenerated into rule of, by, and for the rich. The right to vote means little in a political process regimented by an institutionalized bipartisan “two-party” system that guarantees the monopolization of election campaigns by the two corporate-backed political parties. The existing electoral set-up excludes effective participation by parties opposed to the Democrats and Republicans. Ballot access laws have been designed to prevent challenges to the two-party dictatorship. Likewise, freedom of the press means little when the major media outlets are controlled by powerful corporate interests. Moreover, there are many indications that the Internet, which has created the possibility for alternative opinions to be heard, will be subjected to increasingly heavy-handed regulation.

The Fight for Workers’ Power

17. The defense of democratic rights is inseparably bound up with the struggle for socialism. As there can be no socialism without democracy, there will be no democracy without socialism. Political equality is impossible without economic equality. Like the struggle against war, the fight to defend and expand democratic rights requires the independent political mobilization of the working class, on the basis of a socialist program, to conquer state power.

18. The establishment of workers’ power requires far more than the election of socialist candidates to the existing institutions of the bourgeois state. New forms and structures of genuine participatory democracy – arising in the course of revolutionary mass struggles and representative of the working class majority of the population – must be developed as the foundations of a workers’ government; that is, a government of the workers, for the workers, and by the workers. The policy of such a government, as it introduces those measures essential for the socialist transformation of economic life, would be to encourage and actively promote a vast expansion of democratic working class

participation in, and control over, decision-making processes. It would favor the abolition of existing institutions that either curtail democratic processes or serve as centers of conspiracy against the people (such as the imperial Presidency, standing army, and national-security apparatus). These and other necessary changes of a profoundly democratic character, to be determined by the masses themselves, are possible only in the context of the mass mobilization of the working class, imbued with socialist consciousness.

The Political Independence of the Working Class

19. The struggle for power requires the unconditional political independence of the working class from the parties, political representatives and agents of the capitalist class. The working class cannot come to power, let alone implement a socialist program, if its hands are tied by politically enfeebling compromises with the political representatives of other class interests. First and foremost, this means unwavering rejection of the timeworn and fraudulent myth that the Democratic Party represents, as compared to the Republican Party, a “lesser evil.” The subordination of the working class to this reactionary capitalist party – which traces its lineage to the slave-owning class in the pre-Civil War era – has been, historically, the Achilles heel of the labor movement in the United States. Despite its tradition of violent class conflict and industrial militancy, the labor movement’s dependence upon the Democratic Party – promoted for decades by the trade union bureaucracy, the Stalinists of the Communist Party, and innumerable middle-class political tendencies – effectively blocked the development of an independent and politically class conscious movement of the working class, fighting for its own class program, under its own banner. Among the paramount political responsibilities of the Socialist Equality Party is to advocate, encourage and promote a decisive and irrevocable break by the working class with the Democratic Party and the whole two-party system.

20. However, the SEP’s opposition to the Democratic and Republican parties does not imply an obligation to support, regardless of program, any political opposition that might emerge to these two established parties. The United States has a long history of third “protest” parties, which appeal to popular discontent with the two-party system without offering a genuine political and *programmatic* alternative, from the standpoint of the interests of the working class, to the Democrats and Republicans. In recent years, the Reform Party movement

of Ross Perot, which gathered substantial support, provided an example of how, given sufficient financial resources and media attention, mass discontent can be manipulated by the bourgeoisie and rendered politically impotent. As for the Green Party, which has contested several national and numerous state and local elections, it is an organization that advocates, on behalf of sections of the middle class, limited reforms of the existing society – primarily in the area of environmental issues. Many of its political operatives function within or on the periphery of the Democratic Party. Moreover, beyond the borders of the United States, Green politicians in other countries have worked within bourgeois governments and rendered valuable service to the capitalist state.

21. In evaluating political tendencies, the SEP considers the decisive criteria to be not their episodic position on one or another question, but, rather, their *history, program, perspective, and class* basis and orientation. History provides countless examples of the working class being led into a political blind alley through the formation of electoral alliances that required, for the sake of ephemeral gains at the ballot box, that workers sacrifice their most essential political, social and economic interests. The “Popular Front” alliances formed by the Stalinists and Social-Democratic parties in the 1930s provide the most tragic examples of the consequences of the short-sighted and treacherous sacrifice of historic and long-term interests in the pursuit of broad-based, multi-class and, therefore, debilitating coalitions of incompatible social interests.

Against Opportunism

22. In its approach to all political questions and in its selection of the appropriate tactics, the Socialist Equality Party upholds the fundamental interests of the working class, based on a scientific understanding of the law-governed nature of the capitalist system and the political dynamics of class society, and a systematic assimilation of the lessons of history. It is this approach that places the SEP in irreconcilable opposition to opportunist politics, which, in the pursuit of short-term tactical gains, sacrifices the long-term interests of the working class. Time and again opportunists have defended their betrayal of principles by claiming to be realistic politicians, not guided by “inflexible” dogmas and who understand how to adapt their practice to the requirements of any given situation. Time and again, such “realistic” politics have led to disaster – precisely because they were based on superficial, impressionistic, non-Marxist and, consequently,

unrealistic and false appraisals of objective conditions and the dynamics of the class struggle.

23. But opportunism is not merely the product of an intellectual and theoretical error. It has substantial socio-economic roots in capitalist society, and develops within the workers’ movement as an expression of the pressure of hostile class forces. All significant manifestations of opportunism – from that of Bernstein, which arose within the German Social Democracy at the end of the 19th century, and that of Stalin, which grew inside the Bolshevik Party in the 1920s, to that of Pablo and Mandel, which developed in the early 1950s inside the Fourth International, and, finally, to the opportunism of the British Workers Revolutionary Party that led to its break from the ICFI in the mid-1980s – can be traced to the influence exerted by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois social forces upon the working class. This is the underlying cause and significance of revisionism and opportunist politics. The struggle against such tendencies is not a distraction from party building, but, rather, the highest point at which the fight for Marxism in the working class is engaged.

Socialist Consciousness and the Crisis of Leadership

24. The Socialist Equality Party, in political solidarity with the ICFI, defends the classical Marxist conception – developed systematically by Lenin in the construction of the Bolshevik Party and carried forward by Trotsky in the struggle to found and build the Fourth International – that revolutionary socialist consciousness does not develop spontaneously in the working class. Socialist consciousness requires scientific insight into the laws of historical development and the capitalist mode of production. This knowledge and understanding must be introduced into the working class, and this is the principal task of the Marxist movement. This was precisely the point that Lenin emphasized in *What Is To Be Done?* when he wrote: “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” Apart from the efforts of the revolutionary party to introduce Marxist theory into the workers’ movement, the predominant form of mass working class consciousness will remain at the level of trade unionism, defined by Lenin as the “bourgeois consciousness” of the working class. Denigration of the struggle for revolutionary consciousness, which is usually combined with demagogic attacks on intellectual and Marxist “elitism,” is the stock-in-trade of reactionary academics and political opportunists.

25. The victory of socialism – and, therefore, the survival and progressive development of human civilization – requires the construction, on the foundations of Marxist theory, of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution. Socialism will not be realized merely as the inevitable outcome of an unconscious historical process. The entire history of the 20th century testifies against such fatalistic “inevitabilism,” which is a caricature of historical materialist determinism and has nothing in common with the dynamic interaction of cognition, theory and practice exemplified in the work of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Capitalism survived the 20th century not because objective conditions were insufficiently mature for socialism, but rather because the leadership of the mass working class parties was “insufficient” for socialist revolution. The working class again and again entered into epic struggles. But these struggles, misled by the Stalinists, social democrats, centrist and reformist organizations, ended in defeats.

26. Capitalism exists today because of the betrayals of the working class by its own organizations – the mass political parties and the trade unions. “The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” These words, with which Leon Trotsky began the founding document of the Fourth International, remain supremely relevant as a definition of contemporary political reality. There is not a single mass organization in the world today that presents itself as an opponent of the existing world capitalist order, let alone summons the working class to revolutionary struggle. This has created a surreal environment, in which the anger and discontent of the working class is suppressed by the old, politically sclerotic organizations. But as Trotsky also wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International, *The Transitional Program*: “The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers’ organizations. Of these factors, the first of course is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus.”

Marxist Theory and the Working Class

27. The contradictions of the capitalist system will drive the working class into struggles that pose the revolutionary reorganization of society. These struggles will assume an explicitly international character, arising objectively from the advanced level of the global integration of the productive forces. Therefore,

the great strategic task of the modern epoch is the forging of the political unity of the workers of all countries as the decisive international revolutionary force.

28. The Socialist Equality Party bases its activity on an analysis of the objective laws of history and society, particularly as they are manifested in the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. Rooted in philosophical materialism, Marxism insists on the primacy of matter over consciousness. “The ideal is nothing else than the material world,” wrote Marx, “reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.” The materialism of Marx is dialectical, in that it regards the material world and the forms of its reflection in thought not as an aggregate of fixed objects and concepts, internally undifferentiated, but, rather, as a complex of processes, in constant movement and interaction, with antagonistic and divergent tendencies.

29. The SEP seeks to develop, within the advanced sections of the working class, a scientific understanding of history, a knowledge of the capitalist mode of production and the social relations to which it gives rise, and an insight into the real nature of the present crisis and its world-historical implications. The SEP strives to transform the material potential for social revolution created by an objective historical process into a class-conscious and self-confident political movement. Applying the method of historical materialist analysis to world events, the SEP anticipates and prepares for the consequences of the intensification of the world capitalist crisis, lays bare the logic of events, and formulates – strategically and tactically – the appropriate political response. The SEP insists that the progressive and socialist transformation of society can be achieved only through the *mass struggle* of the politically conscious working class. The actions of isolated individuals, resorting to violence, can never serve as a substitute for the collective struggle of the working class. As long political experience has shown, acts of individual violence are frequently instigated by provocateurs and play into the hands of the state.

30. The SEP upholds under all conditions the essential revolutionary socialist principle: *to tell the working class the truth*. The program of the party must be based on a scientific and objective assessment of political reality. The most insidious form of opportunism is that which justifies itself on the grounds that the workers are not ready for the truth, that Marxists must take the prevailing level of mass consciousness – or, more precisely, what the opportunists imagine it to be – as their point of departure, and adapt their program to the prejudices and confusion exist-

ing among the masses. This cowardly approach is the antithesis of principled revolutionary politics. “The program,” declared Trotsky in 1938, “must express the objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers. It must reflect society as it is, and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness. That is why we must express in our program the whole acuteness of the social crisis of the capitalist society, including in the first line the United States.” The first responsibility of the party, Trotsky continued, is to give “a clear, honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which flow from this situation, irrespective of whether or not the workers are today ripe for this. 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 advanced workers.” These words define precisely the approach taken by the SEP.

The Betrayal of the Trade Unions

31. The opportunists’ aversion to telling the workers the truth is virtually always connected to their efforts to provide political cover for, and preserve the authority of, the old reactionary, bureaucratized and thoroughly corporatist trade unions and political organizations that maintain the subordination of the working class to the capitalist system. The SEP, in opposition to the opportunists, aims to develop within the working class an understanding of the nature of the old organizations – principally, in the United States, the trade unions – which claim to represent the working people. The AFL-CIO and its factional rival, the so-called “Change to Win” coalition, are controlled by and serve the interests of a substantial stratum of middle-class functionaries whose personal income is derived from their active and conscious role as facilitators of the corporate exploitation of the working class. During the past quarter century, the trade unions have played a major role in breaking strikes, lowering wages, eliminating benefits, cutting jobs and shutting down factories. During this process, despite the loss of membership, the revenues of the trade unions and the salaries of their functionaries have continued to rise. Insulated from and indifferent to the hardships suffered by their membership, and protected by the “dues check-off” and labor laws from rank-and-file protests, the unions are tied by a thousand threads to the corporations and the capitalist state, including its intelligence agencies. The Socialist Equality Party calls for a rebellion against and break with these corrupt organizations, which do not represent the working class. This does not mean that the SEP abstains from working

inside such organizations, to the extent that such activity is required to gain access to and assist the workers jointly oppressed by their employers and the union functionaries. But the SEP conducts such work on the basis of a revolutionary perspective, encouraging at every point the formation of new independent organizations – such as factory and workplace committees – that truly represent the interests of the rank-and-file workers and are subject to democratic control.

Class Unity Versus Identity Politics

32. Another form of opportunism, which has played a significant role in undermining the struggle for the unity of the working class and lowering class consciousness, is the promotion of innumerable forms of “identity” politics – based on the elevation of national, ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, gender, and sexual distinctions above class position. This shift from class to identity has been at the expense of an understanding of the real causes, rooted in the capitalist system, of the hardships that confront all working people. At its worst, it has promoted a competition among different “identities” for access to educational institutions, jobs and other “opportunities” which, in a socialist society, would be freely available to all people without such demeaning, dehumanizing and arbitrary distinctions. Affirmative action programs have benefited, for the most part, a relatively small layer of the middle class. The demand for legal and social equality, which dominated the historic civil rights movement of the African-American masses during the 1950s and 1960s, was undermined by a class shift in political focus, which replaced the fight against mass poverty with the securing of preferential treatment and privileges for a few. This shift, promoted by the Democratic Party and its allies among the advocates of petty-bourgeois identity politics, has had a devastating impact on the conditions of life for the broad mass of minority workers. The SEP demands full equality for all people, and defends unequivocally their democratic rights. All forms of discrimination based on national, ethnic, racial, religious, or linguistic heritage, or on gender or sexual orientation, must be abolished. The SEP advances this essential democratic component of its program within the context of the fight for socialism, based on the political unification of all sections of the working class.

For the Rights of Immigrants and Native Americans

33. An essential precondition for the forging of this unity is the unconditional defense of the democratic rights of im-

migrants living in the United States. The Socialist Equality Party stands for the unconditional right of workers of every country to live and work where they choose. We call for full democratic and citizenship rights for all immigrants, including the 12 million or more now classified as undocumented or “illegal.” Moreover, the Socialist Equality Party raises with special concern the plight of Native Americans, whose deplorable conditions of life are the legacy of American capitalism’s blood-soaked rise to continental power. Accounts of American democracy that evade the far-reaching implications of the crimes committed against the people already inhabiting the North American continent are shot through with hypocrisy. The social consequences of these crimes -- extreme poverty, a life expectancy 20 years below the national average, absence of adequate housing, and general neglect of the social needs of Native American reservations and communities by government agencies -- persist to the present day.

Socialist Policies Versus Protectionism and “Free Trade”

34. The claim made by national chauvinists, invariably endorsed by the trade unions, that the answer to the loss of jobs within the United States is to be found in protectionism, is false. As a practical matter, there can be no return, in the age of globalization, to economic nationalism. At the same time, the invocation of “free trade” by the pitchmen for the transnational monopolies is as fraudulent as all their other tributes to “freedom.” The SEP advocates neither protectionism nor “free trade,” but fights instead for social ownership of the productive forces, the elimination of national borders, and the creation of a planned, rationally-integrated global economy. A major step toward the achievement of that goal, advocated by the Socialist Equality Party, would be the establishment, on a voluntary basis, of a United Socialist Federation of North, Central and South America.

Democratic Centralism

35. The revolutionary struggle of the working class requires organization, and organization is impossible without discipline. But the discipline required for revolutionary struggle cannot be imposed bureaucratically from above. It must develop on the basis of an agreement, freely arrived at, on principles and program. This conviction finds expression in the organizational structure of the Socialist Equality Party, which is based on the

principles of *democratic centralism*. In the formulation of policy and the appropriate tactics, the fullest democracy must prevail within the party. No restraints, other than those indicated by the party’s constitution, are placed on internal discussion of the SEP’s policies and activities. Leaders are democratically elected by the membership, and are subject to criticism and control. Those candidates for leadership who cannot abide criticism should ponder the words of James P. Cannon, the founder of the Trotskyist movement in the United States: “The truth never hurt anyone, provided he was on the level.” But if the formulation of policy requires the broadest discussion and open and honest criticism, its implementation demands the strictest discipline. The decisions arrived at democratically within the party are binding on all members. Those who object to this essential element of centralism in the implementation of decisions, who see in the demand for discipline a violation of their personal freedom, are not revolutionary socialists but anarchistic individualists, who do not understand the implications and demands of the class struggle.

Class Consciousness, Culture and the World Socialist Web Site

36. The fight for socialism demands an enormous growth in the political, intellectual, and cultural stature of the workers’ movement, in the United States and internationally. In contrast to the practitioners of pragmatic and opportunist politics, the SEP is convinced that only a movement working at the highest theoretical level will prove capable of attracting the working class to its banner, preparing it for the struggle against capitalism, and, beyond that, the construction of a socialist society. While the bourgeois politicians seek to drag the working class down to their own intellectually debased level, the SEP strives to raise the working class up to the level required by its historic tasks. Not only politics but also science, history, philosophy, literature, movies, music, the fine arts, and all areas of culture fall within the domain of socialist education. The SEP’s most important instrument for the development of socialist consciousness within the working class is the *World Socialist Web Site* [www.wsws.org]. With its daily analysis of world political and economic developments, exposure of the social realities of capitalism, coverage of workers’ struggles, commentary on vital questions of culture, discussion of historical and philosophical themes, and examination of critical issues of revolutionary strategy, tactics and practice, the WSWS plays a decisive role in forging the contemporary world Marxist movement.

Revolutionary Strategy and Transitional Demands

37. The strategic aim of the Socialist Equality Party, in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International, is to educate and prepare the working class for the revolutionary struggle against capitalism, the establishment of workers' power and the creation of a socialist society. Our aim is not the reform of capitalism, but its overthrow. The attainment of this goal, however, requires the most careful and detailed attention to the conditions of life of the broad mass of workers, and the formulation of demands that address their needs. The SEP recognizes the necessity of establishing, in practice, a link between the perspective of socialist revolution and the concrete struggles in which the working class is engaged. In this effort, the work of the SEP is guided by the approach advocated by Leon Trotsky in the *Transitional Program*: "It is necessary," he wrote, "to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find a bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

38. Such demands include universal employment, unrestricted access to quality medical care and education, decent housing, the cancellation of foreclosures and evictions, automatic adjustment of wages in line with inflation, the democratization of the workplace, unrestricted inspection by the public of the financial records of corporations and financial institutions, establishment of restraints on executive salaries, reduction of working hours with no loss of pay, imposition of a genuinely progressive income tax and significant restriction on the transfer of massive personal wealth via inheritance, nationalization and the

establishment of democratic workers' control of large corporations vital to the national and global economy, dismantling of the national "volunteer" army and the transfer of authority to popular militias controlled by the working class and with elected officers, and other demands of a democratic and socially beneficial character.

39. Transitional demands will play an important role in the political mobilization of the working class to the extent that they form part of a broader campaign to develop socialist consciousness. The *Transitional Program* is not an *à la carte* menu, from which demands are arbitrarily selected, without the appropriate political context or reference to broader political goals. If the *Transitional Program* is to serve as a bridge to socialism, the destination cannot be kept a secret from the working class.

The Working Class and the Socialist Revolution

40. The work of the SEP is imbued with an unwavering confidence, grounded in advanced scientific theory and rich historical experience, in the revolutionary role and destiny of the working class. But the victory of the socialist revolution depends upon the conscious struggles of workers. The emancipation of the working class is, in the final analysis, the task of the working class itself. As Engels put it so well, "Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul." Thus, socialism can only be established when the workers themselves want it; and, conversely, when that decision is made, beneath the blows of crisis-stricken capitalism, there is no force on earth that will stop the American workers from taking their place in the vanguard of the world socialist revolution.

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Read the
World Socialist Web Site
www.wsws.org