

**Update**

# **THE WORKER**

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## **For a Modern Definition of Rights**

Rights are something that arise from the very social being of humans and assert themselves as claims made by individuals and groups on society. The Workers Party says that the very act of being born into society gives the individual a claim. Especially in the modern world, when human existence has become completely socialized, no individual can assert even such elementary human rights as the right to a livelihood without making definite claims on the society.

Defenders of the status quo often vehemently object to our conception of rights. They insist that “society doesn’t owe anyone a living,” and they replace the demand for equal, human rights with the slogan of “equality of opportunity.”

“Equality of opportunity?” Nothing could be further from the truth!

Under the capitalist system, individuals are not born with or guaranteed equal economic, political or social opportunity. On the contrary. A tiny percentage of the population own the means of production – the very tools which humans use to create their material conditions of existence. By force of arms, the capitalist class has monopolized these tools (and the land and natural resources.) In so doing, the capitalists have forcibly disenfranchised the vast majority of the population.

The individual is not “free” to “make” his or her own place. The human individual does not live, like Robinson Crusoe, on an island by herself or himself. Humans lead a

social existence and the ability of the individual to live and develop her/his personality is completely linked with the social conditions into which she/he is born. In the modern world, the individual does not and cannot secure her/his livelihood by staking out territory or by gathering wild berries or hunting. In fact in the contemporary economy, all the necessities of life – including food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, etc., – are produced and distributed through a vast social division of labor. The life of the individual is dependent on the way the economy and society is organized and on the individual’s place in this social organization.

According to the “logic,” of the “equality of opportunity” myth, those who experience poverty and oppres-

sion do so because of their own “personal responsibility.” In this way, the capitalists try to obscure the fact that every individual exists only within and as part of society. It is an attempt to obscure the fact that the possibilities open to the individual in terms of securing his or her livelihood, getting an education, enjoying good health and access to medical care, etc., are dependent upon the social environment into which the individual is born, upon definite economic and social relations, the laws of the country, etc., etc. So too, it is an attempt to obscure the fact that the avenues through which the individual can influence and help shape his or her social environment are dependent on already existing relations and institutions, such as the

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## **What is Blocking the Way?**

It is simply the ABC of modern life that society is divided into classes and that classes organize themselves into political parties to carry on the struggle for their interests. Today in the U.S., despite the fact that the capitalist class and its propagandists try to ban even the use of such words as classes and class struggle, nothing can hide the division of American society into capitalists and workers and no amount of propaganda can change the reality that the polarization and struggle between these two classes is sharpening every day. In the present conditions of the permanent and deepening crisis of capitalism, the capitalist class, well-organized in its state machine (government),

political parties, etc., is waging an all-sided struggle against the working people.

The role of the state and the capitalist monopoly on political power is reflected in the bi-partisan political agenda of the government. In the first place, Obama’s aggressive war program, which is based on serving the interests of the monopoly capitalist class, illustrates the extent to which the current political power is used against the interests of the people. This program will not disappear after Trump’s inauguration. So too, take the issue of economic policy. Despite the worsening economic situation and the

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# From the Draft Program of the Working Class Guaranteeing the Economic and Other Inalienable Rights of the People

Today the Workers Party has initiated the *Campaign for Economic Rights* (CER) as a program for unifying and strengthening the resistance to the capitalist offensive and as part of the work to carry through the

struggle for the political economy of the working class under contemporary conditions.

The CER asserts that every human being simply by virtue of his or her humanity is entitled to certain

inalienable economic and human rights including:

- the right to food, clothing and shelter.

- the right to a job or livelihood commensurate with our country's level of development. This includes the right to income-security in the event of loss of capacity to work, retirement, etc.

- the right to comprehensive and free medical and health care.

- the right to the best possible education, from infant care through the university.

These demands, which correspond with the centuries long struggle of the American people to create a society which genuinely guarantees equal rights for all human beings, are already on the lips of millions of people. The high degree of socialization of economic life, as well as the consciousness of the people created in the course of struggle, have brought the program of economic rights to the fore as a practical problem taken up for solution.

In addition to these rights which belong to everyone simply by virtue of being human, the workers, women, the youth, senior citizens, and the members of various nationalities all have rights which arise from their position in the society. The people have the right to work and live in a safe and healthy environment. All these rights also must be recognized and guaranteed.

One immediate step in terms of guarantying these rights is for the government to stop bankrupting the public treasury and dislocating the country's economy in order to guarantee privileges for the big capitalists.

## Rights

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type of government and political system.

Rather than recognize that human rights belong, by definition, to all human beings, the capitalist system tries to transform rights into privileges or "policy objectives" which may be granted or denied to various sections of the people depending on circumstances. According to this conception, the workers must divide themselves into competing interests groups and fight to be granted "privileges" from the ruling class. Today when capitalist politicians of both parties take aim at civil liberties and democratic rights as well as any and all entitlement programs, they are asserting their unspoken insistence that the workers and people have no rights which society must guarantee.

The root contradiction in the capitalist conception of rights, which gives rise to this discrepancy between theory and practice, lies in the fact that it has its basis in private property. The U.S. political system at its founding was based on the 17th century political theory of the "natural rights of man." The most basic "natural right" according to bourgeois thought, is the right to acquire and accumulate property. According to this theory, the state arises to protect the individual's property rights, to en-

sure that no individual or group of individuals interferes with the rights of the owners of private property in the means of production. The state protects the "natural rights" of men by treating all individuals as "equal before the law" and safeguarding various civil liberties, that is, the rights of individuals to participate freely in civil society based on private, capitalist ownership.

The concept of "individual liberty" then actually translates into the right of the individual owners of property to accumulate more property, and the "sovereignty of the individual" means the sovereignty of the individual owners of private property in the means of production, that is, the capitalist class. The function of the government is to ensure that nothing interferes with either the liberty or sovereignty of the capitalists to conduct business as they see fit. The state does not protect and uphold equal rights for all individuals, but rather it protects the class character of the property relations. Anything that attempts to restrain the rights of private property is considered an infringement on "individual rights."

This conception of rights recognizes no rights inherent in people as human beings; in essence, it rec-

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ognizes only the rights of property. In a society which is based on class inequality – where one class has a monopoly over property in the means of production – the formal declaration of “equality” is nothing but a fraud, a cruel deception for the workers. The very “rights” which the state protects – the rights of the capitalist owners – are based on the denial of rights for the workers. Workers are denied even the most basic right to a livelihood, because they are disenfranchised from the tools of production. The only way they can make a living is to sell their labor power to the capitalist owners. It is from this base that the social, political and economic inequality of our society grows. The result is that those who have money have access to the best education, the best housing, the best health care, and so on, while those who have no money are completely deprived of these rights.

The question which must be posed today is, whose rights are paramount? The rights of the people, or the rights of capital? The right of

the capitalists to exploit and plunder, or the right of the working class to live free of exploitation? We say that the rights of the people must come first.

And these rights include not only the civil liberties of the Constitution, they include economic rights. Every human being has the right to a secure economic existence. Private property interests cannot be allowed to supersede these rights of the people.

Furthermore, society must guarantee the means by which economic and political rights can be realized in practice. It is not enough to declare that these rights exist as an abstract principle. Economic rights must be backed up by real investments to provide for the needs of the people, from jobs to health care. Political rights must be guaranteed by the institution of mechanisms that ensure the real participation of the people in the governing of society. The people must have real power to nominate and elect their representatives, and to hold them accountable.

The rights of certain groups of people must also be recognized and guaranteed. These rights are based

on the objective position of the group members in society. These include the rights of women to reproductive health care and assistance with child care; the right of national minorities to use their native language, and be educated in their native language; the right of oppressed nations to self-determination; the right of workers to a safe workplace and healthy working conditions and to wages commensurate with our country's high level of development; the right of disabled persons to all assistance necessary to allow them to participate fully in society, etc., etc.

It is easy to see that the struggle against racial discrimination can only be carried through to the end in the context of the demand for a modern definition of rights. Such a modern definition of rights which goes beyond the mere declaration of formal equality and which creates, in real life, the means necessary to guarantee that every member of the polity enjoys such basic, inalienable rights as right to a job and standard of living commensurate with our country's degree of development, the right to the best possible education available in society, etc. and so forth. Obviously the need facing our society is not to decide how to apportion a few higher

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bringing such elements into the “broad coalition?” Naturally all of the demands and positions of the working class and popular masses must be suppressed in order not to “turn off” the “big name” capitalist politicians. While the revisionist “coalition-builders” claim “political neutrality,” they always work to exclude Marxist-Leninist position and organization from their coalition. Thus, at the very foundation of the revisionists’ “broad coalition” is the negation of the proletarian party, the negation of the very concept of the working class as an

independent political force with a stand and policy of its own. In attacking the proletarian party, the revisionists are admitting that their allegiance is to the parties of the rich, the parties of the capitalist class.

The revisionist “broad coalition” is, in reality, not a coalition of progressive parties or forces, at all, but a vehicle for preventing the workers from drawing a clear line between their interests and the interests of the capitalists, a vehicle for keeping the struggling masses under the political domination of the capitalist class.

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# From the Draft Program of the Working Class **Democratic Renewal**

The working class strives for the democratic renewal of the political process and political system so that the decision-making power is placed in the hands of the people.

The program of democratic renewal demands the abolition of any and all political privileges and the creation of mechanisms which guarantee the masses of the people the right to participate fully and directly in the political process and in governance.

Political parties must be denied the privilege to nominate and select candidates for public office and this right must be returned to the people. The electorate must also retain the right to recall elected officials at any time.

Further, the chasm between the legislative and executive branches of government must be overcome and the arbitrary power of the executive branch must be broken. The entire operation of government must remain under the direct supervision of the people. Any power not expressly delegated by the people to the government remains with the people themselves.

Constituency committees comprising all citizens must be organized in workplaces, communities and wherever the people are concentrated. Such committees will have the right to nominate and select candi-

dates, to hold elected officials accountable, to set the agenda of government, and to participate directly in governance.

The program of democratic renewal recognizes the right to self-determination, up to and including the right to secession, for the Native peoples, the people of Puerto Rico and other oppressed nations.

The program of democratic re-

newal demands equality – equal rights and duties – for all regardless of race, national origin, sex, etc. This includes the right for all nationalities to develop their own culture, language, etc. Most importantly, equality means that everyone has the right to participate fully in the political process and governance, to take part as decision-makers in exercising control of their lives.

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growing hardships facing the working people, the government steadfastly and arbitrarily pursues an economic agenda of putting big business first, while attacking the economic rights of the people. At all levels of government, the Republican and Democratic program is to cut social investments in education, income-support for the poor, health care, etc., even while continuing to use the federal treasury to guarantee super-profits for the arms merchants and big bankers. But the people have not been consulted, much less allowed to decide on this agenda. Rather, the agenda is monopolized and dictated by the two big parties and the class forces that stand behind them. The voice and needs of

the people are completely excluded.

Precisely because there is so much opposition to their entire program – the program of war, robbery, racism and repression – the capitalists very much rely on revisionism and opportunism.

The favorite tactic of revisionism and opportunism for keeping the working class and popular struggles under the political domination of the bourgeoisie is the so-called broad coalition. In organizing these coalitions, the revisionists begin by finding the most reactionary elements possible and placing them at the head of the movement. Thus, for example, the revisionists and opportunists are not only boosting Jesse Jackson and Elizabeth Warren as the leaders of the spontaneous pro-social movement, but are also praising them to the skies for occasionally expressing verbal displeasure with some of the state's most blatant atrocities.

According to the revisionists, the success and “broadness” of an organization is measured precisely by how many reactionaries pay lip service to it. And what is the price for

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paying jobs or a limited number of educational opportunities amongst different races, nationalities, sex, etc. The need is to create a system which guarantees these things for everyone.

In the final analysis, individual and group rights can only be guaranteed when the collective right of the

people to sovereignty, to determine their economic and political system, is guaranteed. As long as society is ruled by the interests of a small minority of property-owners, as long as the majority of the people are oppressed under wage-slavery, there can be no real equality.