‘Hot’ U.S. Economy No Boon to Workers


Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan was at press time expected to ratchet up interest rates again, to slow investment and thus employment. At 3.9 percent, Greenspan considers unemployment too low to be healthy for the capitalist system. Mr. Greenspan knows that supply and demand figure into the price of a commodity, and that the labor power of workers is a commodity like any other. He knows that if there are too few unemployed, wages will rise and profits must fall.

Indeed, with what Karl Marx called the “reserve army” of unemployed labor reported to be at its lowest levels in a generation, there is not much room for further economic expansion without sparking a cutthroat competition.

(Continued on page 6)

‘Justice for Janitors’ Goals: Were They Set High Enough?

By Ken Boettcher

As the last issue of The People went to press, the Service Employees InternationaI Union was working to ex- pand its Los Angeles strike of 8,500 members of Local 1877 to SEIU locals in seven other major U.S. cities. Now, weeks later, the SEIU’s so-called Justice for Janitors 2000 Campaign is coming to a close as several of those strikes, including the one in Los An- geles, have ended in what the union has trumpeted as “victories.”

In city after city, new labor agree- ments between the janitors and the building maintenance contractors who are their employers provide wage in- creases and, in some cases, benefit im- provements.

But are these increases really “vic- tories”?

There is no question that the work- ers deserve victories. They labor under often adverse conditions at hard work usually considered demeaning in exist- ing society. In many cases, they fought long and hard to become part of a union. They courageously voted to go on strike despite the increased hardships involved, and then conducted themselves with courage and honor when they were out on the picket lines. When the new labor contracts expire three years from now, however, must will still be making less than $10 an hour. They will still be strug- gling to make ends meet and still suf- fering because that is about all that $10 an hour can guarantee these days.

Here are the actual figures:

• In downtown Chicago, the strike had barely gotten under way when em- ployers agreed that 5,000 SEIU Janitors should receive a pay increase of $1.10 spread over the three-year life of the new contract.

• In suburban Chicago, where em- ployers resisted for two weeks, 4,500 SEIU janitors will receive family health care coverage and an increase of $1.35 per hour over three years. Three long, hard years from now they will reach the glorious wage of $8.00 per hour.

• Fifteen thousand New York City SEIU members who work for residen- tial building service contractors will receive pay increases of 3.5 percent per year over three years, improved health

(Continued on page 6)
Legacy of Colonialism Must Be Buried by Socialism

By B.B.

O

consider the current turmoil among such former colonies of European influence as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Angola, Uganda, Congo, Pakistan and India, etc. Consider the AIDS epidemic sweeping Africa, the starva-

tion and the poverty that are debilitating

scorces of “Third World” countries. It is a world immersed in misery, and much of

that misery is the direct legacy of five cen-
turies of colonial rule by European capital.

The notion popularly propagated is that with the end of the Cold War the

fraction and direct political rule in Africa, Asia and elsewhere, free nations have emerged to pick up where they left off centuries ago, just as theoga their campaign for

had never existed. Stephen Slemen, a

Professor of English at the University of Alberta, writing in The Dallas Morning News

of March 11, challenged this view.

The occasion for Slemen’s article was Portugal’s quiet departure from Macau on Dec. 20, 1999, and the tiny enclave’s return to Chinese control after 442 years of Portuguese occupation. Portugal’s depar-

ture from the last of its overseas colonies

state. I am in a quandry as to what to do.

Besides, we already have this “law” in

operation, and the world has never known that must be dealt with or it will

devastation, if not extinction! The Battle of Seattle gave me hope, and the young people today may yet free themselves.

Our Pleasure

Thank you for continuing to send us this fine publication.

P. Thompson Lee

Periodicals Manager

Selby Public Library

Sarasota, Fla.

About Letters

The People welcomes your letters and comments. Letters intended for publica-

tion should be brief; longer letters may be shortened. Unsigned letters will not be considered for publication. Names and addresses will be withheld upon re-

quest. Send your letters to: The People, P.O. Box 218, Mountain View, CA 94042-

0218.

Do You Belong?

Do you know what the SLP stands for?

Do you understand the class struggle and why the SLP calls for an end of capitalism and of its system of wage labor? Do you understand why the SLP does not advo-
cate reforms of capitalism, and why it calls upon workers to organize Socialist Indus-

tial Unions?

If you have been reading The People steadily for a year or more, if you have read the literature recommended for be-
imaging Socialists, and if you agree with the SLP’s call for the political and econom-
ic unity of the working class, you may qualify for membership in the SLP. And if you qualify to be a member you probably should be a member.

Do not hesitate to sign up, if you belong, and to apply for its membership en-
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Health Care 'Safety Net' Crumbling in California

By Bruce Cazzoni

“Open door” health providers, hospitals and clinics that accept patients regardless of their ability to pay, are on the verge of collapsing. In California, the last resort for millions of working-class families, their demise means the end of one of the “safety nets” that capitalism has made available to them in the face of capitalism’s social instability. But as medical care has increasingly been treated as a commodity, these once essential parts of the health care system, are becoming too expensive for workers to afford.

An April 30 editorial in the San Jose Mercury News said, “For the most part, nonprofit and public health facilities, along with the rest of the health care system, are failing. For one thing, most job growth is in fields with relatively low wages—scarcely enough to pay the high cost of living in California. As the health care of the uninsured and the near-poor gets worse, the demand for a service also has the demand for the money to pay for it. In fact, the ‘marketplace’ has come to a standstill, with patients covered by state Med-Cali and federal money to managed-care providers, leaving the ‘open door’ providers with the uninsured and the Medi-Cal patients with chronic illnesses and needing special services, and with no subsidies that used to pay for their care.

Increasingly, medical centers in poor communities or neighborhoods are being forced to close. One such case is the planned closing in May of the Alviso Health Altavista in Alviso, an isolated, mostly Latino section of San Jose on the southern margin of the San Francisco Bay.

According to an April 28 news report in the same newspaper, the clinic serves about 3,000 patients a year, many uninsured, some eligible for Medi-Cal or Medicare. Run by the nonprofit Gardner Community Health Systems (CHS), assured the community that the poor would continue to be served. Now, less than two years later, as reported by the Santa Cruz Sentinel on April 27, the new owners find them- selves in a similar situation, cutting staff by 20 to 25 workers.

The cuts are not the result of too many staff, said a spokesperson for the clinic, but because of the cuts staff that the hospital have complained privately about short staffing. According to Barry Schnei- der, the hospital’s CEO, the hospital is los- ing too many doctors because it is offering physicians for specialty referrals, and because income in some service areas has fallen. The number of patients coming for “open door” and “mental planned,” according to the spokesperson for the hospital, has been increasing. Of course, the hospital has been doing better, and staffing and paying were planned according to certain goals,” a hospital spokesperson said. “If we don’t meet those goals, we have to reduce the number of patients and level of spending to the real volumes.”

Conspicuously absent from the report is any mention of how the cuts will affect service to the community. It can readily be surmised that CHS is finding that there is little money to be made in a small and relatively poor community and is pursuing its profits at the expense of workers.

The San Jose Mercury News editorial correctly observes that the system of subsidized care is insufficient to begin with and is subject to being siphoned off by managed-care HMOs. It also notes that the expenses required to employers to provide insurance have not worked and that tax credits suggested by presidential candidates wouldn’t come close to the costs. “In the medical field, health coverage has proven to be a political im- possibility,” it concluded. Inconsistently, it then went on to lend its support to a program with its own wish list of futile reforms.

In fact, it is a political and economic im- possibility to provide the level of health care that workers at all economic levels re- quire as long as health care is a commodi- ty that must be sold for a profit in the capi- talist marketplace. As long as protecting the interests of drug companies, HMOs, for-profit hospitals and other “health care” organizations is the goal, the health and well-being of workers will suffer.

New York Data Shows Increased Poverty Among Educated Workers

By B.G.

We hear much about the booming econ- omy and the good times Americans are having now that the wealth is supposedly being spread around. Unfortunately for the majority of college graduates, New York City is revealing a steep rise in poverty rates among families with children. In New York City. In comparing the years 1996–1998 with the most favorable years for “prosperity” in the late 1980s, the poverty trend for the fathers was upward, or 32.3 percent compared with 29.3 percent for the 1980s.

Along with the growing gap between rich and poor, the survey revealed some additional trends. Higher education was no insulation against poverty. There was a rise in poverty rates of 16.5 percent for families whose heads had some college education. For families headed by a college graduate, the rate of poverty increased by 4 percent.

Even broken families and welfare fami- lies seemed to fare somewhat better in the statistics than intact, two-parent working families. A broken family that has no worker present, poverty rate by 8.2 percent; while it fell 6.9 percent for families with at least one worker present. But the lone-parent family, poverty rise by 6.7 percent- ages while it declined by 5.1 percentage points for families with a woman-headed household.

For those who are working regularly, the jobs are often in the low-wage cate- gory of $6–$8 an hour—scarcely enough to support a family.

Mark Levinson, the author of the Com- munity Service Study, saw the emergence of a “new poor” as those with more education—a group long thought to be insulated against poverty—slipping onto the treadmill of insecurity and low-paying jobs.

Marcia Van Wagner, chief economist for New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall, noted, “At the low end, you have lots of jobs and declining real income. At the high end, you have not that many jobs, but increases in inflation-adjusted earnings.” The highest rewards therefore go to the very few who have the best pay- ing jobs.

The Fiscal Policy Institute had caught this trend in New York City in a study re- leased last year. There was an increase of 60 percent in working poor families in New York in the 1990s, whereas nation- wide the increase was 24 percent. This was due to a rise in poverty rates of 10.6 percent for families whose heads had some college education. For families headed by a college graduate, the rate of poverty increased by 4 percent.

What is happening is really no news at all to knowledgeable Socialists. A decline in living standards for college-trained workers is just another “profanity” of the capitalist commodity to be bought and sold on the labor market as that of any other worker. As the supply of college-trained workers increas- es in relation to capitalism’s demand for them, their prices—their wages or salaries—will be forced down. The effects of this trend have already been felt among doctors, nurses and other highly trained professionals. “The interests of the ‘white collar’ class are identical with the interests of the manual proletariat in shops,” Daniel De Leon once observed. “The circumstance that the ‘white collar’ division of the prole- to-management ‘imagine they will some day draw big salaries’ does not draw any economic class difference between them and the ‘col- laborers’ division. Far from it, there are also those who ‘imagine’ miracles and live in a fool’s paradise. The identical eco- nomic process, that disenchant the latter and throw them into the mire, will render the same service to the former.”

Wherever you have capitalism you have an armed poor society. A few rise to the top, but many more must be kept at the bottom to make businesses more “profit- able” and to support those on the top rung of society. Only a well-organized, well-coordinated movement of workers and other well-meaning organizations come out with these sta- tistical studies that reveal the precarious, treadmills existence of large sectors of workers who have no economic security. These studies mere- ly reiterate what Socialists have been say- ing all along, that our capitalist society is unfair. Lenin was very much commented on his study “The problem is, we are telling people to climb out of poverty on a downward-moving escalator.” True enough, but neither the tax cut nor any solution. Socialism does. It is time to scrap the downward-moving escalator toward downward-moving, capitalist-style economic justice, equality and socialist economic democracy.
Add the voice of the Western Shoshone Nation to those raised against the opening of the proposed federal facility for the “long term” storage of high-level nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, Nev. For the Shoshones, whose struggle against the plant is one of the most prominent of a few still heard in The New York Times, the mountain itself and the land around it are sacred.

But that’s not the only reason the Shoshones are against the plan. "The Shoshones say, reports the Times, “they are opposed to the transportation of the national and state capitalism of any kind. It means a complete end to all capitalist social relations. It means workers cease to be commodities bought and sold on the labor market and forced to work as appendages to tools owned by someone else. It means a chance to develop all individual capacities and potentials within a free community of free individuals. To work as appendages to tools owned by someone else. It means a chance to develop all individual capacities and potentials within a free community of free individuals.

Thanks for the Reminder (Daily People, June 27, 1912)

The New York Times of the 12th of this month announces that “many planks of the Bull Moose platform are only a para-

Socialism is the collective ownership by all the people of the factories, mills, mines, railroads, land and all other instruments of production. Socialism means production to satisfy human needs, not, as under capitalism, for sale and profit. Socialism means direct control and management of the industries and social services by the workers through a democratic government based on their nationwide economic organization.

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Under socialism, all authority will originate from the workers, integrally united in union organizations to unite all workers in a class-conscious industrial force and to prepare them to take, hold and operate the tools of production. You are needed in the ranks of Socialists fighting for a better world. Find out more about the program and work of the Socialist Labor Party and join us to help make the promise of socialism a reality.
The 1896 SLP National Platform

When the Socialist Labor Party held its 10th National Convention 100 years ago this month, the American Federation of Labor was a mere infant in the doctor’s office. The very name of the Labor Federation was associated with the bankrupting of capitalist employers. A class-conscious body, aware of its rights and determined to conquer them by taking possession of the productive means of the nation, the American Federation of Labor was formed.

The time is fast coming, however, when, in the natural course of social evolution, this system, through the destructive action of its failures and crises on the one hand, and the constructive tendencies of its trusts and other capitalistic combinations on the other hand, shall have worked out its own downfall. We, therefore, call upon the wage workers of the United States, and upon all other honest citizens, to organize under the banner of the Socialist Labor Party into a class-conscious body, aware of its rights and determined to conquer them by taking possession of the productive powers; so that, held together by an indissoluble spirit of solidarity under the most trying conditions of the present class struggle, we may put a summary end to that barbarous struggle by the abolition of classes, the restoration of land, and to keep up the American Federation of Labor.

RESOLUTIONS.

With a view to immediate improvement in the condition of labor we present the following demands:

The 1900 convention, was equivalent "to a declaration of war to the knife" against the labor fakers of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Knights of Labor (KofL). The reason for the endorsement was given in the 1896 convention’s resolution endorsing the ST&LA. "The policy of tolerating, or of coming to terms with, these organizations has been tried long enough by the progressive movement," the convention declared, "and is to a great extent responsible for this condition. These leaders have wielded in the protection of capitalism and the selling out of the workers."

The resolution added, "that the organization of labor can accomplish anything for the workers that does not proceed from the principle that an irrepressible conflict rages between the class-conscious body of the working class, a conflict that can only be settled by the total overthrow of the former and the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth."

The SLP’s decision to endorse the ST&LA was more than a declaration of war against the labor fakers of the AFL and KofL. It was also a smoking out of the anti-Socialists within the SLP. The anti-Socialists were the later creations of the so-called Socialist Labor Party. When in the SLP they were also organized in and around the Volkszeitung Corporation, the publisher of a German-language newspaper, to support the development of the SLP. This Volkszeitung was of interest in the preservation of the anti-Socialist factions within the SLP.

The SLP’s declaration of war against the AFL and its movement away from the idea of reform, endangered the economic interests of the members of the AFL and the members of the paper’s corporation. The corporation’s controlling members depended upon their contacts with the AFL and the union structure, as well as the workers’ organizations, sick-benefit societies, etc., for their incomes. Some held jobs in AFL unions; others received their incomes from the corporation.

The Anti-Socialists Smoked Out

The 1896 act of endorsing the ST&LA, which was carried by a convention vote of 71 to 6, brought this situation to a head. Following the presidential election of 1896, the opponents of the ST&LA inaugurred a policy of keeping the party in turmoil in an attempt to force it to reverse its stand on unionism. From 1896 to 1899, the Volkszeitung Corporation fought the declared policy of the SLP, in defiance of its stand on unionism. The corporation must support the “principles and tactics” of the SLP. The Volkszeitung Corporation tried to capture the SLP’s National Executive Committee, and to get itself its stand on unionism. Up to 1899, the corporation used physical force in July 1899 in an unsuccessful attempt to take over the offices of the party and The People. And, failing in that attempt, it manufactured a resolution endorsed by De Leon as editor of The People. This attempt was rebuffed by the party and the capitalist courts, to which the Volkszeitung Corporation appealed. The 1896 National Convention of the SLP followed soon after the party’s victory over the disrupters.

After De Leon, KofL leaders had kicked out of the SLP and when they were comfortably ensconced as the leaders of the so-called Socialist Party, the Volkszeitung Corporation appealed. In 1900, the Volkszeitung went so far in its defense of the American Federation of Labor that it acknowledged the split of the socialist movement in America in order to prevent a split in the trade union movement of the land, and to keep up the American Feder-
...‘Hot’ U.S. Economy

The alternative that concerns The Wall Street Journal and other bourgeois analysts is that unstrained continued expansion encouraged by low interest rates on borrowed capital would not only drain the labor market, push wages up and thereby press profits down, but also flood other markets with commodities having too few buyers.

The result would not be the “recession” that the Journal seems willing to accept, but a full-fledged capitalist crisis of depression-level proportions.

Workers need none of this economy, hot or cold, “boom” or recession. There is only one real hope that workers can enjoy a life of economic security and abundance, of health, leisure and greater freedom than the world has ever known. That hope lies in their own understanding of the need for, and in their own efforts to build, a new social and economic system—a system in which the means of production will be the common property of all the people, operated not for profit but for human needs under the democratic administration of the workers themselves.

The logic of organizing to build such a system—a socialist system—grows more compelling by the day as it is being built, the facts and logic supporting the case for socialism must be disseminated ever wider among the working class. The necessary first step is education. If you, the reader, share our conclusion that socialism is the only solution to the problems afflicting the working class, you can be a part of that solution, helping to get the message of the Socialist Labor Party into more workers’ hands.

—Ken Boettcher

Earth Day & May Day: Two Pages of the Future

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...Justice for Janitors 2000

(Continued from page 1)
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• In Cleveland, SEIU janitors will receive 22-25 percent pay increases over three years, about the same as in Los Angeles.

• Portland SEIU janitors, according to the SEIU’s Web site, “secured” a citywide master contract with Portland building service contractors and won “significant pay increases.” Significant to whom, one wonders?

• The SEIU strike in San Diego ended shortly before this issue of The People went to press, with an increase of 50 cents per hour in the first year of a three-year contract, 40 cents per hour in the second, and $171 per month toward health insurance in the third. Even with these increases, in 2003 janitors in downtown San Diego will be earning only $7.90 per hour.

The workers, of course, deserve every penny of these increases and more. They deserve, Socialists say, the economic abundance and security that all workers deserve—something that requires the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism for them to get. What they got was, of course, nowhere near what they deserve. What they got was what they can expect from a business union like the SEIU. Because it accepts the capitalist system of exploitation, it, like so many others, cannot challenge capitalism. The SEIU, like other unions that port wage exploitation, merely want to horse trade with capitalists to keep their sacred positions to which they are accustomed. The labor power of the workers is the “horse” they trade.

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...100 Years Ago

(Continued from page 4)
Recently some trouble arose near Trenton, N.J., between the track laborers—mostly Italians—and the company. The men went on strike. The matter was kept out of the papers and was kept as quiet as possible. The officers of the company, when first informed, instructed to quietly gather as many unemployed as they could near Trenton, N.J., between the tracks.

100 Years Ago

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...the SLP Dropped Reform

(Continued from page 4)
split with the Republican Party, set up his own party and had himself com- mitted for president in 1912. His Bull Moose platform not only mimicked the SLP’s platform of 1896, it pro- voked a howl from the reformist Socialist Party, which accused Roosevelt of “stealing its thunder.” “Kangarusia” (Continued from page 1)

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—Ken Boettcher

...100 Years Ago

(Continued from page 4)
Recently some trouble arose near Trenton, N.J., between the track laborers—mostly Italians—and the company. The men went on strike. The matter was kept out of the papers and was kept as quiet as possible. The officers of the company, when first informed, instructed to quietly gather as many unemployed as they could that no Italians) on the representation of the workers themselves.

The logic of organizing to build such a system—a socialist system—grows more compelling by the day as it is being built, the facts and logic supporting the case for socialism must be disseminated ever wider among the working class. The necessary first step is education. If you, the reader, share our conclusion that socialism is the only solution to the problems afflicting the working class, you can be a part of that solution, helping to get the message of the Socialist Labor Party into more workers’ hands.

—Ken Boettcher
The first of Daniel De Leon's great quartet of "primary" lessons in Marxism, in which he makes crystal clear that the United States Congress, a body under the larger responsibilities of the so-called head of the republic, when the reform planks out of its platform, the SPL proclaimed that there is but one social choice for the American working party's choice between capitalism and socialism. The SPL has proclaimed this fact, with absolutely no concession to reformist qualifications, for 100 years. So far, as much as the workers, as a mass, have not responded to the party's urging that they choose socialism. Instead, they have followed the lure of reforms offered by the reformist parties and the two major parties of capitalism. The result has been that the working people have been trapped into the acceptation of capitalism. Capitalism has "rewarded" them with continual and accelerated exploitation, two world wars, the continuing threat of a third, environmental degeneration and "booms" that have brought only temporary relief from the hardships suffered during capitalism's "normal" periods and "depressions." By the standards of the would-be reformers of capitalism, the SPL's policy of calling for socialism now has been a failure. The upholders of this viewpoint are heirs to the Socialist Party that was formed by the Volkseitungs element of the SPL. These elements took as their hereditary from the SPL the "boring from within" tactic discarded in 1896 and readopted as more effective to inhibit the growth of the socialist movement than capitalism's straightforward opposition to socialism. The growth of the Socialist party's platform to the 10th National Convention of the SLP, National Secretary Kuhn voiced the determination of the local members when he declared: "The only safety lies, on the one hand, in the sharpest extraction of the property of the working class; and, on the other hand, in constitutionally provisions that will contribute, as far as possible, to the destruction of a designing element that will come in undefined by any declaration of ours for the purpose of "boring from within." Its decision to drop all reform planks from the National Platform...

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The following contributions to the Socialist Education Fund were received after our May issue and will be added to the Socialist contributions bringing the proceeds to $26,125.63.
Robert Burns $120; $10 each Lisaetae H. Stratford "In memory of Katherine Kapitz," Arthur Rouleau; Brenda Riggins $98; Shirley J. Parsons "In memory of Katherine Kapitz" $40; E.T. Janiewicz $25; each Rudolph P. Sulenta, Robert Stannard; $30 each William H. Fawcett & Helen Manos "In memory of Katherine Kapitz"; $10 each Robert Garavel, Guy Marsh; John & Mary Briss $6; each Kenneth E. McCartney, Joseph Belken.

Total: $612
T he Socialist Labor Party stands in unequivocal opposition to the deplorable treatment of the people of Vieques and Puerto Rico for an immediate cessation to the bombing of Vieques by the U.S. Navy and an end to the activities of militaristic, imperialistic and racist institutions that dominate the American working class and the political state of Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rican working class has been subject to decades of unrestrained plundering and imperialist exploitation by American capitalism. The tyranny has suffered the humiliations of vassalage. Today over 85 percent of its economy is owned and controlled by U.S. banks and corporations. Aside from its continuing importance as a source of cheap labor power and as a market for U.S. goods, discoveries over the last two years have resulted in the discovery of significant deposits of phosphates that could produce a vast occupation force whose influence pervades Puerto Rican society. Politically, the U.S. ruling class has sought to frustrate and dilute what it sees as the aspirations of the Puerto Rican people for economic and political independence in the face of "commonwealth" status and proposals for statehood that would merely produce a different form of U.S. capitalist control over the Puerto Rican economy and likely intensify the exploitation of an already suffering Puerto Rican working class.

The oppressive character of U.S. domination is evident in the misery and poverty of the Puerto Rican people. Mass unemployment and low wages have put a majority of the population under the official poverty line. Squatter and wretchedness reveal themselves everywhere in the country for U.S. capital's wholesale theft of tourism and misappropriation of the national patrimony. Therefore let this convention reafirm: (1) That the SLP gives its unsullied support to the right of the Puerto Rican people to independence, and (2) That the common class enemy of both the American and Puerto Rican working classes is the capitalist class of the United States and of every other nation, and (3) That the working class of the United States is urged to support the right of Puerto Ricans to national independence by opposing any attempt by the government of the United States to retard or combat the aspirations of the Puerto Rican people. Mass unemployment and low wages have put a majority of the population under the official poverty line. Squatter and wretchedness reveal themselves everywhere in the country for U.S. capital's theft of tourism and misappropriation of the national patrimony.

The people of Vieques deserve an end to this atrocity committed upon them and their island, and they and tens of thousands of other Puerto Ricans are demanding an end to it. The Socialist Labor Party wholeheartedly sympathizes with that demand, but calls upon its working class to raise its sights and to take up its task as a new target— the war-inciting capitalist system.

...Nathan Karp Dies...