

The Energy Crisis

The following statement was adopted in 1977 at the 30th National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party and approved by a general vote of the party's membership.

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The so-called “energy crisis” is yet another striking example of the antisocial character of the capitalist economic system. As with other manifestations of this deteriorating system, the full brunt of this crisis will fall on the working class.

To elucidate this view, let us make a comparative advantage case—let us compare what we workers *could* do if we owned and controlled the industries, with what we are forced to do, so long as we accept capitalist ownership and control of industry.

Under capitalism oil and natural gas are extracted only so long as they can be sold at a profit. Being an increasingly mechanized industry, the energy companies have experienced a fall in the *rate* of profit over the years (although their profits in absolute terms have been astronomical). There has thus been a tendency towards progressively smaller energy company investments in domestic oil and gas extraction, and more capital invested in other activities. One such activity is investment in *foreign* oil and gas extraction, which makes these supplies subject not only to the monopolistic market manipulations of the energy companies, but of the political cartel known as OPEC as well.

The only way that the capitalist system can continue to produce domestic supplies of oil and natural gas is to increase profit incentives by using their monopolistic stranglehold on the market to withhold supplies and force the price up. This has led to an absurd situation: They can only *extract* additional oil and gas by *providing* less of it, at a higher price. Moreover, this rising price does not merely reflect the rising *cost* of extraction, but also an increase in required profit incentive for each *increment* of cost increase, as the process continues to become more mechanized.

Thus, the shortages we face today do not result from the accepted fact that these resources are in finite supply, but rather from the fact that the capitalist controllers of the energy industry benefit from *creating* shortages before they occur naturally. According to all estimates that are undistorted by corporate interests, we *could* extract enough petroleum from the earth beneath the U.S. alone to last at least 50-60 years at present rates of consumption, and enough natural gas to last at least another 30 years at present rates of consumption.

On the energy demand question, we workers *could* design far more efficient methods of using these finite resources such that they could last far longer than the above estimates. These methods could readily be applied in transportation and industrial processes, home and building heating, and products for consumption.

But under capitalism, it is now more profitable to have us use trucks instead of trains, cars instead of mass transit, electrical heating instead of a variety of less wasteful methods, etc. Here again, the limits of nature are circumscribed by the limits of our economic system.

In addition, if we workers established socialism, we *could* use far more efficient methods of extracting and transporting the fuels themselves. But under capitalism, cutting costs to the minimum brings profits to the maximum, and we are forced to act accordingly. Also, we workers could allocate both our research and production labor time toward a serious effort to apply solar energy to perform various tasks, but since it is not presently profitable enough to the big energy companies, it is not being done on a major scale.

In short, we workers *could* very easily use our existing supplies of nonrenewable energy sources for a long enough period of time to effect the transition to safe and renewable sources of energy, without any appreciable inroads being made on our quality of life. But under capitalism, inroads on our quality of life will be the only appreciable type of “conservation” that we are likely to see, the extraction of fossil fuels will cease long before the recoverable supplies have been exhausted, and the transition to safe, renewable sources of energy is a doubtful proposition at best.

The “energy crisis,” then, is an artificial situation engendered by the conditions of capitalism. Under these conditions, the workers of this

country have been asked to accept not only more austerity, but accelerated construction of nuclear fission power plants, investments into an expanded breeder reactor program, and accelerated production of strip-mined coal. Nuclear fission reactors not only pose grave environmental dangers, but are economically viable only with subsidies from tax money, and will become still less viable as supplies of uranium diminish. Breeder reactors might be economically viable, but the potential environmental dangers are far more serious. As for accelerating the strip-mining program, we deal here not with potential dangers, but a practice that has spelled environmental disaster, of which we have seen considerable evidence.

Fortunately, many members of the working class have recognized that these alternatives are unacceptable, and have begun active resistance to the attempts to have them forced upon us. It is imperative that we of the Socialist Labor Party also raise our voices and state that these alternatives are not only unacceptable, but, based on the foregoing summary analysis, are also not in the least bit necessary. Therefore, be it resolved at this 30th National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party that:

1. The SLP declares that the continued calls for sacrifice on the part of the working class stem not from the empirical need to conserve natural resources, but rather from the fact that profit motivation precludes the possibility of conservation through restructuring industrial practices, and limits our ability to produce such resources.

2. The SLP is opposed to such methods of energy production as strip mining and nuclear power development as they are currently practiced under capitalism, where profit considerations are ranked above considerations of safety and logic.

3. These methods cannot be legislated out of existence, and capitalism in decay is incapable of providing an acceptable alternative energy policy. Therefore, the SLP shall make every effort to promote the one alternative that can both halt these practices and end the so-called “energy crisis” that makes them *appear* to be necessary. This solution can only consist of the establishment of democratic worker ownership and control of the industries as described in the socialist industrial union program of the SLP.

4. The SLP shall support movements such as those resisting current nuclear energy expansion and strip mining. Whenever and wherever possible, we shall encourage them to go beyond the narrow scope of their current activity, and work towards the socialist reconstruction of society.

Please report errors to

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