

Public meetings in Sydney and Melbourne to commemorate...

The 70th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International

9 September 2008

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution established by Leon Trotsky in September 1938. The founding of the FI and the adoption of its program was a historical milestone for the socialist movement and the international working class. It ensured the historical continuity of the struggle for socialist internationalism against the counter-revolutionary betrayals carried out, in the name of “socialism” and “Marxism”, by Josef Stalin and the bureaucratic caste he headed within the Soviet Union.

As Trotsky explained, the Fourth International arose out of great events: the greatest defeats of the international working class in history. On the basis of the nationalist program of “socialism in one country”, adopted by the Soviet bureaucracy in 1924, a series of revolutionary struggles, including the British General Strike of 1926 and the 1927 Chinese Revolution, were betrayed. In 1933, the criminal policies of the Stalinist Third International (Comintern) allowed Hitler to come to power in Germany without a shot being fired. When not a single section of the Comintern spoke out against the political line of the German Communist Party (KPD), which had actively blocked a unified struggle by the powerful German working class against Hitler’s fascist bands, on the basis of the complacent slogan “After Hitler, Us!”, Trotsky issued the call for a new, Fourth, International.

In the aftermath of the German debacle, the Stalinist bureaucracy carried out the bloody suppression of the working class. From 1936 to 1939 in the Soviet Union, Stalin orchestrated the extermination of an entire generation of Marxists—“Old Bolshevik” leaders, socialist workers and intellectuals—in his effort to destroy the socialist traditions of the October 1917 revolution. Internationally, the Stalinists played the key role in drowning the French and Spanish revolutions in blood.

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), was the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, socialist opponent of Joseph Stalin, founder of the Fourth International, and strategist of world socialist revolution.

The founding congress of the FI took place on September 3, 1938, in the teeth of efforts by Stalinist agents to assassinate the movement’s leading cadre. GPU killers, acting on Stalin’s orders, murdered Trotsky’s political secretary Erwin Wolf in July 1937, then Ignace Reiss, a defector from the GPU who denounced Stalin and declared allegiance to the FI, in September 1937. In February 1938, Trotsky’s son Leon Sedov was assassinated in Paris at the age of just 32. Two months before the Congress, Rudolf Klement, the secretary of the Fourth International, was brutally slain. Nevertheless the Congress was held in the suburbs of Paris, and adopted its program *The Death Agony of World Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*. In one of its most famous passages, Trotsky wrote: “All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet ‘ripened’ for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ‘ripened’; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.” The outbreak of World War II took place exactly one year later. Less than 12 months after that, on August 20, 1940, Leon Trotsky was attacked in his study by the Stalinist agent Ramon Mercador. He died the next day.

That such efforts were made to prevent the Fourth International’s founding was no accident. The revolutionary uprisings that followed World War I

remained fresh in the memory of the Soviet bureaucracy, which sought to prevent, on the eve of a new world war, a like response by the international working class to the deepening contradictions of world capitalism.

In the aftermath of World War II, the greatest mass slaughter in human history, all manner of opportunists claimed that the founding program of the FI had been rendered obsolete by the post-war expansion of world capitalism, under the auspices of the United States, and the apparent consolidation of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. But today, seven decades after 1938, the history, principles and program of the Trotskyist movement once again assume burning relevance. In every part of the world, millions of ordinary people confront the consequences of the breakdown of US and world capitalism in a new eruption of militarism and war, along with a ferocious assault on their social conditions and democratic rights.

Outside of the Fourth International, Trotsky wrote in 1938, “there does not exist a single revolutionary current on this planet really meriting the name”. We invite all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party to attend our commemorative meetings in Melbourne and Sydney.

Sydney

Sunday September 28

2 p.m.

Redfern Town Hall

73 Pitt Street

Redfern

Melbourne

Wednesday October 1

7.30 p.m.

Northcote Town Hall

189 High Street

Northcote

Roof Top Meeting Room



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact