

The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party—Part 11

10 October 2008

The Socialist Equality Party (US) is publishing here the final part of The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party. The document was discussed extensively and adopted unanimously at the Founding Congress of the SEP, held August 3-9, 2008. (See "Socialist Equality Party holds founding Congress") The WSWS will serialize the publication over two weeks. (Click here for Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.)

The WSWS has published the Socialist Equality Party Statement of Principles, which was also adopted at the Founding Congress. Click here to download a PDF version of the Statement of Principles.

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Globalization and the National Question

229. Among the political consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the proliferation of nationalist and separatist movements demanding the creation of new states. Multinational states that had been maintained within the post-World War II geopolitical framework were exposed, in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, to a resurgence of various national, ethnic, and religion-based communal tensions. In most cases, these tensions were exacerbated by the United States and the European imperialist powers in pursuit of their own geo-strategic goals. The breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, with all its horrifying consequences, was the outcome of the strategic objectives of American and German imperialism. Especially for the United States, the breakup of the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the creation of new "independent" states provided extraordinary opportunities for the projection of American power into the Caucasus and Central Asia. And even within the borders of Russia, separatist movements, such as that which developed in Chechnya, were seen by the US State Department as potential assets in the drive for global hegemony.

230. However, it was not only political considerations that underlay the intensification of communalist agitation. The development of globalization, the ICFI explained, provided:

... an objective impulse for a new type of nationalist movement, seeking the dismemberment of existing states. Globally-mobile capital has given smaller territories the ability to link themselves directly to the world market. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan have become the new models of development. A small coastal enclave, possessing adequate transportation links, infrastructure and a supply of cheap labor may prove a more attractive base for multinational capital than a larger country with a less productive hinterland.[141]

231. The International Committee insisted that it was necessary, in the interests of the international unity of the working class, to take an extremely critical, and even hostile, attitude toward the separatist movements. The dogmatic repetition of the slogan, "The Right of Nations

to Self-Determination," was not a substitute for a concrete historical, socio-economic, and political analysis of national demands. This was all the more essential at a time when contemporary national-separatist movements generally were characterized by socio-economic and political perspectives that were blatantly reactionary. Comparing national movements in different historical periods, the ICFI wrote:

In India and China, the national movements posed the progressive task of unifying disparate peoples in a common struggle against imperialism — a task which proved unrealizable under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. This new form of nationalism promotes separatism along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines, with the aim of dividing up existing states for the benefit of local exploiters. Such movements have nothing to do with a struggle against imperialism, nor do they in any sense embody the democratic aspirations of the masses of oppressed. They serve to divide the working class and divert the class struggle into ethno-communal warfare.[142]

232. Predictably, the petty-bourgeois radicals of the Spartacist League, opportunistically adapting themselves to a variety of separatist tendencies, proclaimed that "David North 'abolishes' the right to self-determination." [143] Aside from the patently absurd formulation of this denunciation, the Spartacist attack was based on a falsification of the attitude of both Lenin and Trotsky to the question of self-determination. At no time did they define the self-determination demand as a sort of promissory note which Marxists were obliged to redeem at any time and under all circumstances. Moreover, they never elevated this demand above the interests of the proletariat as an international revolutionary class. Just as Lenin, in 1913, carefully defined the different historically-conditioned types of national movements, Marxists were obligated to be no less exacting in their evaluation of the objective content of the self-determination demands advanced by one or another political organization. As the ICFI explained:

It has often been the case in the history of the Marxist movement that formulations and slogans which had a progressive and revolutionary content in one period take on an entirely different meaning in another. National self-determination presents just such a case.

The right to self-determination has come to mean something very different from the way in which Lenin defined it more than eighty years ago. It is not only the Marxists who have advanced the right to self-determination, but the national bourgeoisie in the backward countries and the imperialists themselves. From the end of World War I on, this "right" has been invoked by one or another imperialist power to justify schemes aimed at the partition of existing territories.[144]

233. The national-separatist movements embraced by the Spartacist League — in Bosnia, the Indian states of Kashmir and Punjab, Quebec and Sri Lanka — were precisely those in which the reactionary character of the self-determination demand found its clearest expression. In the case of Bosnia, the imperialist manipulation of the religion-based nationalism of a section of the population, the Moslems, served the interests of the wider campaign to dismember Yugoslavia. In promoting national separatism in

the Punjab and Kashmir, the Spartacists chose to ignore the thoroughly reactionary character of these religion-based movements and, particularly in the case of Kashmir, their links to broader geo-strategic conflicts between the major national states in the region. As for Quebec, the national movement has for decades served as a means by which the conflicting interests of various sections of the Canadian bourgeoisie have been fought out. In relationship to the working class, the Quebecois ruling class has been no less ruthless than the Anglophone bourgeoisie in Ontario or Saskatchewan. Finally, the Spartacist promotion of Tamil nationalism represented a political capitulation to the separatist perspective of the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) and repudiation of the decades-long struggle of the Trotskyist movement to unify the Sinhala-speaking and Tamil-speaking working class in a common struggle against the Sri Lankan bourgeois state. Investing national movements with a mythic and supra-historical character, petty-bourgeois tendencies such as Spartacist choose to ignore the impact of the political betrayals carried out by the opportunist organizations of the working class in fomenting national sentiments among oppressed minority communities. In the case of the Tamil community, the growth of nationalist tendencies in the 1960s and 1970s was bound up with the political betrayals of the LSSP — above all, its entry into the bourgeois coalition government in 1964 and, subsequently, its participation in the drafting of a constitution, adopted in 1972, that institutionalized discrimination against the Tamil language.

234. The International Committee's clarification of the significance of the self-determination demand, and its struggle against bourgeois nationalism and its petty-bourgeois apologists, contributed immensely to the strengthening of the revolutionary internationalist foundations of the Fourth International. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR and the immense political confusion generated by this event, the ICFI's analysis confirmed that a genuinely internationalist program for the working class could be developed only on the basis of the Theory of Permanent Revolution.

Globalization and the trade unions

235. At the same time as the Stalinist bureaucrats were transforming themselves into capitalist oligarchs, the former Labor and Social-Democratic Parties of Europe and Australia were ditching their formal allegiance to socialism, becoming the vehicle for sharp attacks on living conditions and social programs. Bourgeois nationalist parties that had once been nominally identified, in one way or another, with socialism or national reform — such as the Congress Party of India — began to actively collaborate with global finance capital in imposing austerity measures and privatizing state industry.

236. The degeneration of the trade union bureaucracies, including the AFL-CIO in the United States, was one example of this international process. While many of the unions that made up the AFL-CIO had been formed in mass struggles that had led to real gains for the working class, the unions accepted the political hegemony of the Democratic Party and the profit system. During the ascendancy of American capitalism, the unions were still able to increase the living standards of their members on the basis of a policy of national reform. However, under the impact of globalization and the deepening crisis of American capitalism, this perspective became unviable. The policy of the trade unions assumed an ever-more openly corporatist character. Even the semblance of independence from corporate interests was abandoned. Throughout the 1980s, the AFL-CIO in the US had worked systematically to isolate and defeat strike after strike. The bureaucracy increasingly separated the sources of its own income from that of the workers it was supposedly

representing. In this process, the bureaucracy assumed a social identity distinct from and hostile to the working class. Ritualistic references to the unions as "working-class organizations", which failed to take notice of the changing social nature of its ruling apparatus, became increasingly hollow. In reality, the unions were not "workers organizations" but organizations controlled by, and serving the interests of, a distinct petty-bourgeois constituency, alienated from and deeply hostile to the working class.

237. The 1993 Workers League perspectives document, *The Globalization of Capitalist Production and the International Tasks of the Working Class*, explained:

The basic orientation of the old labor organizations — the protection of national industry and the national labor market — is undermined by globally integrated production and the unprecedented mobility of capital. The role of these bureaucratic apparatuses in every country has been transformed from pressuring the employers and the state for concessions to the workers, to pressuring the workers for concessions to the employers so as to attract capital.[145]

238. On the basis of an historical analysis of the role of the trade unions and their recent development, the Workers League concluded:

The Workers League rejects tactical opportunism and trade union fetishism and does not counterpoise to the betrayals of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy a syndicalist perspective. It addresses itself first and foremost to the advanced, vanguard elements of the working class and seeks to educate as Marxists a new generation of workers, who have largely been cut off from the traditions of Marxism. Therefore it insists on explaining directly and bluntly to the working class the political character of its old organizations and the social forces which they represent.

The Workers League does not ignore the unions or the workers in them. We do not hold the workers responsible for the reactionary character of the organizations within which they are trapped. Wherever it is possible, the party intervenes in these unions (as it would even in fascist-controlled unions) with the aim of mobilizing the workers on the basis of a revolutionary program. But the essential premise for revolutionary activity inside these organizations is theoretical clarity on the character of the AFL-CIO (and its associated unions) and brutal honesty in explaining the unpleasant facts to the workers.

The Workers League rejects entirely the idea that the AFL-CIO, as the organizational expression of the interests of the labor bureaucracy, can be "captured" and turned into an instrument of revolutionary struggle...[146]

239. The Workers League withdrew its demand for a labor party based on the trade unions. This tactical demand had been appropriate during a period when the unions had the support of masses of workers, and still functioned, if only in a limited way, as defensive organizations of the working class. This was no longer the case by the 1990s.

The Formation of the Socialist Equality Party

240. In June 1995, the Workers League initiated a process of transforming itself into the Socialist Equality Party. It was anticipated that this transformation would be carried out over a substantial period of time; for this process involved not merely a change of name, but the altering of longstanding forms of work and the development of the revolutionary socialist movement's relationship to the working class, within the United States and internationally. The transition from a league into a party was begun and developed in the closest collaboration with the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which began to implement the same transitional process in the countries in which they worked. The transition from a league into a political party was determined

by changes of a fundamental character, not only in immediate objective conditions, but also in the historical context within which the ICFI conducted its activity. The decision expressed the judgment of the Workers League and the ICFI that the discrediting and breakdown of the old mass organizations of the working class, rooted in the breakdown of the post-World War II equilibrium, had set into motion a process of political realignment by the working class on an international scale:

It is the development of the contradictions of world capitalism and the class struggle as an objective historical process that determines the organizational forms within which our activity develops. These forms, and the relation to the working class that they express, bear a specific relation to the historic conditions under which they arose and initially developed. The formation of leagues, from the Socialist Labour League in Britain in 1959, the Workers League in 1966, the Revolutionary Communist League in 1968, to the formation of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter in 1971 and the Socialist Labour League in Australia in 1972, was bound up with definite historical conditions and strategic conceptions of the development of the revolutionary movement of the working class.

The central strategic problem that confronted the Trotskyist movement in this early period in the development of the ICFI was the active and militant allegiance given by the most advanced sections of the working class to the mass Stalinist and Social-Democratic parties and trade unions.

The political activity of our sections therefore assumed, despite variations in tactics, that the starting point of a great new revolutionary reorientation of the working class would proceed in the form of a radicalization among the most class-conscious and politically-active elements within the ranks of these organizations. Out of that movement, in which the sections of the International Committee would play a catalytic role as the most intransigent opponents of Social Democracy and Stalinism, would arise the real possibilities for the establishment of a mass revolutionary party.[147]

241. The formation of the SEP anticipated a change in the relationship between the Marxist movement and the working class:

We must draw the appropriate conclusions from the collapse of the AFL-CIO and correctly formulate the new tasks of the party. If there is to be leadership given to the working class, it must be provided by our party. If a new road is to be opened for the masses of working people, it must be opened by our organization. The problem of leadership cannot be resolved on the basis of a clever tactic. We cannot resolve the crisis of working class leadership by "demanding" that others provide that leadership. If there is to be a new party, we must build it.[148]

The Significance of Equality

242. The selection of the name "Socialist Equality Party" expressed both a conception of the essential vision of socialism — the realization of genuine human equality — and an attitude of intransigent revolutionary opposition to the conditions of modern-day capitalism. In calling for the formation of the Socialist Equality Party, North stated:

Objective conditions lead in the direction of revolution. But the development of revolutionary consciousness is not, as we know from history, an automatic process. The impulses generated by the subterranean contradictions of capitalism do not directly translate themselves into socialist forms of thinking. The response of the working class to a given objective situation is bound up with a vast complex of historically-given conditions. These may and, indeed, do vary from country. But in each case the Marxists must find the path to the minds and, I might add, the hearts of the working class.

In transforming the league into a party, we must consider the form in

which the crisis of the capitalist system reveals itself to the broad mass of working people. To put it most simply, millions of working people have experienced a protracted and ongoing decline in their standard of living. They live their lives in permanent fear for the security of their jobs, struggling to make ends meet as wages decline and prices rise.

The dominant feature of American life is the widening gap between a small percentage of the population that enjoys unprecedented wealth and the broad mass of the working population that lives in varying degrees of economic uncertainty and distress...

The deterioration in the economic position and social conditions of the working class is directly related to the technological revolution and the globalization of production that it has fueled. Under the regime of the private ownership of the productive forces, the working class is victimized by technology...

The aim of our party should be stated in its name and in a manner that the workers can both understand and identify with. ...

Briefly, in presenting this party to the working class, we must explain that its goal is the establishment of a workers' government: and by that we mean a government for the workers, of the workers and by the workers. Such a government will utilize the political power it intends to gain through democratic means, if possible, to reorganize economic life in the interests of the working class, to overcome and replace the socially-destructive market forces of capitalism with democratic social planning, to undertake a radical reorganization of production to meet the urgent social needs of the working people, to effect a radical and socially-just redistribution of wealth in favor of the working population, and thereby lay the basis for socialism.

We will stress that these aims of the Socialist Equality Party are realizable only in alliance with, and as an integral part of, a consciously internationalist movement of the working class. There cannot be social equality and social justice for the American worker as long as multinational and transnational corporations exploit and oppress his class brothers and sisters in other countries. Moreover, there exists no viable national strategy upon which the class struggle can be based. The working class must consistently and systematically counterpose its international strategy to the international strategy of the transnational corporations. There can be no compromise on this essential question, which is the cutting edge of the socialist program. ...

...The demand for social equality not only sums up the basic aim of the socialist movement; it also evokes the egalitarian traditions that are so deeply rooted in the genuinely democratic and revolutionary traditions of the American workers. All the great social struggles of American history have inscribed on their banners the demand for social equality. It is no accident that today, in the prevailing environment of political reaction, this ideal is under relentless attack.[149]

The World Socialist Web Site

243. The establishment of the World Socialist Web Site in January 1998 marked a milestone in the history of the ICFI and the international workers' movement. It was the outcome of the development of the International Committee, in the aftermath of the 1985-86 split with the Workers Revolutionary Party, into a politically unified world party. Moreover, the underlying conception of the WSWS — that the ICFI would play the decisive role in the political reorientation of the working class on the basis of Marxism — was derived from the perspective that motivated the transformation of the leagues into parties. The technological preconditions for the launching of the WSWS came in the form of the revolutionary advances of communication, which the ICFI had been

carefully following as part of its analysis of the significance of globalization. It was consciously seeking ways to integrate the different sections of the movement in common collaborative work (including the early use of modems to send files across oceans and continents). It was highly attuned to the significance of the Internet. This revolutionary advance in global communications created favorable conditions for both the dissemination of revolutionary ideas and the organization of revolutionary work. For many decades the production of newspapers had played a central and critical role in the building of the revolutionary movement. Lenin had devoted a substantial section of his seminal work, *What Is To Be Done?*, to explaining the role of the All-Russian newspaper. Since its founding in 1966, the Workers League had published a newspaper. But its circulation was dependent on the number of party members physically available in any given location to organize its distribution. As long as there existed no viable alternative to the newspaper as a means of circulating its ideas, the Workers League and the different sections of the ICFI had to confront the limitations as well as they could. The development of the Internet created new conditions for overcoming old limitations and expanding the audience of the SEP and the International Committee.

244. The WWSWS was not merely the product of technological developments. It was based on the accumulated theoretical capital of the world Marxist movement. Upon launching the WWSWS, the editorial board explained:

The World Socialist Web Site, published by the coordinated efforts of ICFI members in Asia, Australia, Europe and North America, takes as its starting point the international character of the class struggle. It assesses political developments in every country from the standpoint of the world crisis of capitalism and the political tasks confronting the international working class. Flowing from this perspective, it resolutely opposes all forms of chauvinism and national parochialism.

We are confident that the WWSWS will become an unprecedented tool for the political education and unification of the working class on an international scale. It will help working people of different countries coordinate their struggles against capital, just as the transnational corporations organize their war against labor across national boundaries. It will facilitate discussion between workers of all nations, allowing them to compare their experiences and elaborate a common strategy.

The ICFI expects the world audience for the World Socialist Web Site to grow as the Internet expands. As a rapid and global form of communication, the Internet has extraordinary democratic and revolutionary implications. It can enable a mass audience to gain access to the intellectual resources of the world, from libraries and archives to museums.

In the fifteenth century Gutenberg's invention of the printing press played a critical role in breaking the control of the Church over intellectual life, undermining feudal institutions, and fostering the great cultural revival that began with the Renaissance and ultimately found expression in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. So today the Internet can facilitate a renewal of revolutionary thought. The International Committee of the Fourth International intends to use this technology as a tool for the liberation of the working people and oppressed all over the world.[150]

During its first decade of publication, the WWSWS posted over 20,000 articles, covering a wide range of political, economic, social, cultural, and historical issues. Work on this scale has only been possible because the ICFI had accumulated over many decades an immense capital of historical experience. Moreover, its theoretical work has been deeply rooted in the traditions of classical Marxism, which strives to establish, on the basis of dialectical and historical materialism, the most precise and accurate alignment of subjective consciousness with objective reality — not merely for the sake of interpreting events, but with the goal of preparing the

working class for revolutionary struggle.

The Explosion of Militarism and the Crisis of American Society

245. The WWSWS demonstrated a level of insight in its analysis of the unfolding crisis of American and world imperialism unequaled by any other publication. What distinguished the analysis presented in the WWSWS was its historical character, its ability to situate events in a broader context, and see through and beyond their surface appearance. On this basis, the SEP detected, amidst the displays of American military power, the contradictions that were eroding the foundations of the entire imperialist order. It insisted that the United States' repeated use of military power was a sign of weakness:

The United States presently enjoys a "competitive advantage" in the arms industry. But neither this advantage nor the products of this industry can guarantee world dominance. Despite the sophistication of its weaponry, the financial-industrial foundation of the United States' preeminent role in the affairs of world capitalism is far less substantial than it was 50 years ago. Its share of world production has declined dramatically. Its international trade deficit increases by billions of dollars every month. The conception that underlies the cult of precision-guided munitions — that mastery in the sphere of weapons technology can offset these more fundamental economic indices of national strength — is a dangerous delusion...

Indeed, the infatuation with the "wonders" of weapons technology and the "miracles" they promise is most common among ruling elites who have arrived, whether they know it or not, at a historical dead end. Bewildered by a complex array of international and domestic socioeconomic contradictions which they hardly understand and for which there are no conventional solutions, they see in weapons and war a means of blasting their way through problems.[151]

246. The analysis presented by the SEP related the eruption of imperialist violence to the deepening social contradictions of American society:

The growing chasm between the privileged strata that comprise capitalism's ruling elite and the broad mass of working people denotes an objectively high level of social and class tensions. It may appear that this assessment is contradicted by the absence of militant labor activism in the United States. But the low level of strike activity and other forms of mass social protest do not indicate social stability. Rather, the fact that the last decade has seen so few open manifestations of class conflict, despite rapidly growing social inequality, suggests that the existing political and social institutions of the US have become unresponsive to the accumulating discontent of the working class. Established social organizations such as the trade unions no longer function even in a limited way as conduits of popular grievances. ...

... What the working class now requires is a new revolutionary international organization, whose strategy, perspective and program correspond to the objective tendencies of world economy and historical development.

There are, we know very well, legions of pessimists who are convinced that there exists no possibility whatsoever of building such an international revolutionary movement. One might note that the most incorrigible of these pessimists are to be found precisely among those who not so long ago placed full confidence in the trade unions and believed deeply in the permanence of the USSR. Yesterday they were convinced that bureaucratically administered reformism would last forever. Today they believe with no less conviction in the eternal triumph of capitalist reaction. But underlying the giddy optimism of yesterday and the

demoralized pessimism of today is a certain type of intellectual and political superficiality, whose characteristic features are an unwillingness and inability to examine events within the necessary historical framework, and a disinclination to investigate the contradictions that underlie the highly misleading surface appearance of social stability...

Confidence in the revolutionary role of the working class and the objective possibility of socialism is not a matter of faith, but of theoretical insight into the objective laws of capitalist development and knowledge of history — particularly that of the twentieth century...[152]

247. Subsequent developments, especially those which followed the strange and unexplained events of September 11, 2001, have substantiated the SEP's warnings of the global eruption of American imperialism. Neither the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 nor the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 caught the WSWS by surprise. Its analyses have stood the test of time. Within 24 hours of the attack in Iraq, the SEP foresaw the likely consequences of the invasion:

The twentieth century was not lived in vain. Its triumphs and tragedies have bequeathed to the working class invaluable political lessons, among which the most important is the understanding of the significance and implications of imperialist war. It is, above all, the manifestation of national and international contradictions that can find no solution within 'normal' channels. Whatever the outcome of the initial stages of the conflict that has begun, American imperialism has a rendezvous with disaster. It cannot conquer the world. It cannot re-impose colonial shackles upon the masses of the Middle East. It will not find through the medium of war a viable solution to its internal maladies. Rather, the unforeseen difficulties and mounting resistance engendered by war will intensify all of the internal contradictions of American society.[153]

The Crisis of World Capitalism and the Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

248. The crisis of American capitalism is only one expression of a general crisis of the world capitalist system, a process which the WSWS has analyzed in detail. The eruption of the so-called Asian financial crisis in July 1997, and the collapse of the dot.com bubble in the US, revealed the explosive contradictions arising from the creation of a global financial system and ever-increasing financialization of the American economy. As a report delivered by Nick Beams, the national secretary of the SEP in Australia, to a conference in Sydney in January 2000, noted:

Over the last 10 years we have seen a series of deepening crises in global financial markets. First there was the recession of the early 1990s which opened a period of corporate job destruction that has continued unabated, despite claims that unemployment levels are being reduced. In 1992 we saw the crisis of the British pound and the European Exchange Rate Mechanism and the crisis of the Scandinavian banking system. Then came the bond market crisis of 1994, followed by the Mexican crisis of 1994-95 and the emergency \$50 billion bailout organized by the Clinton administration on behalf of the US banks. No sooner had the Mexican crisis been 'resolved' than it was followed by the so-called Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, which led to the Russian default, the bankruptcy of the US hedge fund Long Term Capital Management in September 1998, and the intervention of the US Federal Reserve to head off the threat of a systemic crisis of the US and global financial system. Of course the designation of these events as the Mexican crisis, the Asian crisis and the Russian default is something of a misnomer. What we are witnessing are different manifestations of a crisis of the global financial system. Just as gout first strikes at the extremities of the body before reaching the heart, the global financial crisis is now expressing itself in the events now

unfolding in the United States.

249. After the recession of 2000-2001, the US and world economy enjoyed a period of expansion, with some of the highest global growth rates since the post-war economic boom. But this capitalist upswing was based on increasingly unstable foundations, manifested above all in the growth of debt in the US and the creation of a series of bubbles-stock market, dot.com, property. The contradictions of capitalism erupted in open form once again in the financial crisis of 2007-2008. A report by Nick Beams explained in January 2008:

The financial crisis in the US and the expanded growth of the world economy, especially over the past seven years in the less developed countries, are not separate events, but different sides or aspects of a single process. ... The expanded growth of China (along with other countries) would not have been possible without the massive growth of debt in the US. But this growth of debt, which has sustained the US economy as well as global demand, has now resulted in a crisis. At the same time, low-cost production in China and other regions, and the integration of these regions into the world economy, lowered inflationary pressures. This process created the conditions for lower interest rates, thereby fueling the expansion of credit that has played such a vital role in sustaining the US economy and the world economy as a whole.[154]

250. Sixteen years after the collapse of the USSR, world capitalism is in a state of crisis, concentrated, above all, in the center of imperialism, the United States. As it entered 2008, the SEP drew a balance sheet of the objective crisis and the tasks of the party. It was noted that the extraordinary growth of social inequality over the last three decades "is rapidly approaching the point of open and violent class conflict."

The sclerotic American political system, administered by two political parties that serve as instruments for the implementation of the interests of the ruling plutocracy, is organically incapable of responding in any sort of credible, let alone progressive, manner to the demands of the people for significant social change. In the final analysis, the demand for social change, even of a reformist character, runs up against the unyielding determination of the ruling elite to defend its wealth and social privileges...

Regardless of who is ultimately nominated by the bourgeois parties and elected president, the logic of social and political developments is leading inexorably toward an intensification of class conflict. Moreover, the protracted deterioration in the social position and living standards of the working class, its ever-decreasing share of the wealth of society, and the unrelenting intensification of its exploitation by those who own and control the means of production have laid the foundations for a profound change in the political orientation and allegiances of the working class. Those who fail to see or who even deny that the profound changes in economic life over the past 30 years have left deep marks in the social consciousness of the American working class expose not only their demoralized skepticism, but also their ignorance of history. Indeed, the absence of open social and class conflict during the past quarter century stands in sharp contradiction to the general pattern of American history. But this prolonged period of social quiescence, rooted in a complex and exceptional interaction of national and, above all, international economic and political processes, is now drawing to a close. The central task of the Socialist Equality Party in 2008 is to prepare in all aspects of its work — theoretical, political and organizational — to meet the challenges posed by the eruption of class conflict....

The Socialist Equality Party, in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International, anticipates with confidence the resurgence of working class struggles. We are convinced that the objective crisis of the capitalist system will provide the impulse for the upsurge of the American and international working class. But the coming upsurge will not automatically solve the problems of developing socialist consciousness.

As the initial struggles of the working class in recent months demonstrate, there remains an enormous gulf between the objectively revolutionary implications of the crisis and the present level of political consciousness. Objective conditions will propel the working class into struggle and create the conditions for an immense leap in consciousness. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the degree of struggle that must be conducted by the party to raise the political consciousness of the working class and overcome the reactionary influence of the bureaucracies, which, while weakened, remain a dangerous and critical prop of capitalist rule. Nor can we ignore the role played by myriad "radical" petty-bourgeois tendencies, which persistently seek to disorient the working class and maintain its subordination to "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie. The influence of all these different political agencies of the ruling class can be overcome only by fighting for the assimilation of the strategic experiences of past revolutionary struggles and for an understanding of the implications of the developing crisis of world capitalism.[155]

The SEP, the ICFI and the Resurgence of Marxism

251. The instability of the world economy, the growth of global geopolitical tensions, the eruptions of military violence, the deterioration of the social conditions of the working class in all countries, the increase in class conflict and the alienation of the broad mass of the people from the established political organizations indicate the approach of a revolutionary crisis. In the final analysis, the source of this widening pattern of disequilibrium is to be found in the incompatibility of the social relations and political forms developed by capitalism with the new global expansion and integration of the productive forces. This incompatibility can only be resolved and transcended through the conquest of political power by the international working class and the socialist reorganization of the world economy. The alternative is barbarism.

252. At the very center of this global crisis is the breakdown in the world position of American capitalism. The vast wealth and dominant world position that underlay American "exceptionalism" — i.e., the absence of a mass political movement of the working class — have been substantially eroded. American society is polarized along class lines to a degree unequalled since the social conflicts of the 1930s. But American capitalism is unable to offer the reforms that saved the system 75 years ago. The unending series of financial scandals and business failures have profoundly eroded public confidence in "free enterprise." The theft of the 2000 election, the lies told by the government to justify the invasion of Iraq, and the horrors of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo have shaken the faith of the working class in the institutions of American democracy. The conditions for a radicalization of the social consciousness of the working class and an historic shift in its political allegiances are at an advanced stage. The United States is not exempt from the laws of historical development. It is entering into a period of revolutionary class conflict.

253. Only a party that is unequivocally oriented to and based on the working class, is guided by the most advanced political theory, has assimilated the lessons of the past struggles of the international working class, and developed a program that proceeds from a scientifically-grounded appraisal of the objective tendencies of socio-economic development, can meet the demands of a revolutionary epoch. The Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee represent and carry forward a vast historical tradition. There is not another political movement that can, or would even want to, retrace its own history. The opportunist organizations — the Social-Democrats, the Stalinists, the trade unions and the Pabloite tendencies — have no desire to be reminded of

their record of blunders and crimes. Nor do they wish to be constrained in the exercise of their opportunist maneuvers by the invocation of history and principles. The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only party that consciously bases its political work on great principles and, therefore, can present its history to the working class, without any gaps. It will attract to its banner the most determined, courageous and honest elements among the workers and youth.

254. Celebrating the founding of the Fourth International, Trotsky declared in 1938:

We are not a party like other parties. ... Our aim is the full material and spiritual liberation of the toilers and exploited through the socialist revolution. Nobody will prepare it and nobody will guide it but ourselves.[156]

255. Seventy years later, the work of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International invests these words with renewed significance.

Concluded

Notes:

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143. Cited in *Globalization and the Working Class*, p. 109.

144. *Globalization and the Working Class*, p. 112.

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147. David North, *The Workers League and the Founding of the Socialist Equality Party* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1996), pp. 18-19.

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149. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-37.

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155. D. North, "Notes on the political and economic crisis of the world capitalist system and the perspective and tasks of the Socialist Equality Party," 5 January 2009. <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/jan2008/rept-j11.shtml>

156. "The Founding of the Fourth International" in *Writings of Leon Trotsky [1938-39]* (New York: Pathfinder, 2002), p. 93.



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