

# History and the revolutionary party

31 October 2008

The founding congress of the Socialist Equality Party was held August 3-9 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A critical document adopted by the congress, *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, has now been published in book form and can be ordered from the WSWS.

With the publication of *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, it is appropriate to consider the significance of this document, particularly in light of the global economic crisis that has erupted since the holding of the SEP congress.

The document insists that the building of a revolutionary socialist party must be based on a historical assessment of the nature of the epoch, an analysis of the crisis of capitalism, and an assimilation of the lessons of the strategic experiences of the working class and the international Trotskyist movement.

As the document states:

“Revolutionary socialist strategy can develop only on the basis of the lessons of past struggles. Above all, the education of socialists must be directed toward developing a detailed knowledge of the history of the Fourth International. The development of Marxism as the theoretical and political spearhead of socialist revolution has found its most advanced expression in the struggles waged by the Fourth International, since its founding in 1938, against Stalinism, reformism, the Pabloite revisions of Trotskyism, and all other forms of opportunism.

“Political agreement within the party on essential issues of program and tasks cannot be achieved without a common evaluation of the historical experiences of the 20th century and their central strategic lessons.... Only to the extent that the working class learns from history—the lessons of not only its victories but also its defeats—can it be prepared for the demands of a new period of revolutionary struggle.”

This fundamental conception of historical and theoretical principle separates the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International from all the petty-bourgeois and opportunist political tendencies on the left.

The Pabloite Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire of France, for example, advocates the building of a politically amorphous “anti-capitalist party.” By its very nature, this opportunist project is incompatible with either programmatic clarity or a serious attitude toward political principles. The LCR makes a virtue of its contempt for the theoretical foundations of Marxism and the historical experience of the Fourth International. Olivier Besancenot, the LCR’s principal public spokesman, has stated explicitly that an examination of the lessons of history should not be allowed to get in the way of building their “anti-capitalist” party:

“The discussion on the various ideological and historical ‘legacies’ can be interesting. It will also undoubtedly be long. But we cannot start with that!” He went on to declare that the LCR does not seek to “impose” upon potential supporters its past, “whether the general history of Trotskyism or the specific history of the LCR.”

In a similar vein, David Packard of the International Socialist Group has declared that his organization does “not need to impose on this discussion [of a new left party] our own historical terminology.”

*The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party* establishes that the SEP is at war with such opportunist conceptions. We make it absolutely clear that our movement is rooted in and inextricably tied to the historical conceptions that provided the foundations for the formation and development of the Fourth International.

The importance of these conceptions is underscored by the eruption of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the 1930s. How timely is the publication of a

document that incorporates the political lessons of that period and its tragic consequences!

We see the heritage of the Fourth International as the greatest strength of our party and the most powerful basis for the development of a revolutionary movement.

As the document states:

“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.”

*The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party* is a document that will have to be read, studied and debated by a new generation of workers and youth thrust into struggle by the crisis of American and world capitalism.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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