

Resolution of the Socialist Equality Party Congress

Twenty-Five Years Since the Split with the Workers Revolutionary Party

30 August 2010

On August 11-15, 2010, the Socialist Equality Party (US) held its first regular National Congress in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The World Socialist Web Site is publishing resolutions and reports from the Congress. We continue with the resolution adopted unanimously on the first day of the Congress, "Twenty-Five Years Since the Split with the Workers Revolutionary Party." The WSWs earlier published the resolution, "On the Seventieth Anniversary of the Assassination of Leon Trotsky".

The first National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party sends its warmest revolutionary greetings to its co-thinkers and comrades in all the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

The SEP's congress is being held on the eve of an anniversary of decisive importance to the international working class and the development of Marxism. This year marks 25 years since the split between the International Committee and the British Workers Revolutionary Party. This political struggle paved the way for an extraordinary development of the ICFI and of Trotskyism. It defended and enriched the principled theoretical and political foundations upon which the work of our congress is based.

The split of 1985-86 was the culmination of more than 30 years of struggle against revisionism within the Fourth International. In 1953 the orthodox Trotskyists led by James P. Cannon, the founder of the US Socialist Workers Party, opposed the sweeping revisions demanded by Michel Pablo and Ernst Mandel in the program of the Fourth International. Confronted with the attempt by Pablo and Mandel to break up the Fourth International, Cannon wrote his "Open Letter," which established the International Committee to unite Trotskyists around the world against the revisionist program. The Pabloite tendency represented a petty-bourgeois and opportunist rebellion against the revolutionary program of the Fourth International. Openly proclaiming its intention to "junk the old Trotskyism," it repudiated the Fourth International's revolutionary Marxist program and its orientation to the working class. It rejected the struggle for power on the basis of

the historic program that guided the October Revolution and which had been defended and developed by Leon Trotsky. This revisionist tendency sought to reduce the Trotskyist movement to an appendage of the Stalinist, reformist and bourgeois nationalist movements that were politically dominant in the aftermath of World War II.

The SWP retreated in the 1950s from the principles it had upheld in the split with Pablo and Mandel. Refusing to discuss the critical programmatic issues that had led to the 1953 split, the SWP engineered an unprincipled reunification with the revisionists in 1963. This betrayal was opposed by the British section of the International Committee, led by Gerry Healy. Though the international political relation of forces favored the revisionists, Healy's fight against the unprincipled policies prevented the liquidation of the Fourth International and won new forces to the International Committee. The Workers League (forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party), which was founded in 1966, emerged directly out of the struggle waged by the British Trotskyists. Other sections of the ICFI developed in Sri Lanka, Germany and Australia. In the 1970s the British organization, renamed the Workers Revolutionary Party, began to drift back to political conceptions that closely resembled those of the Pabloites. The British leadership adopted an increasingly nationalist orientation. It came to see the international movement as a mere adjunct to the development of the party in England.

As it pursued this path, the Workers Revolutionary Party encountered determined resistance from the Workers League, the forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party, in the United States. The American Trotskyists had been developing along an opposite trajectory. Throughout the 1970s, the Workers League had placed the assimilation of the historical experiences of the Trotskyist movement, especially the struggle against the revisionism of Pablo-Mandel, at the center of its work as it carried out a determined turn to the working class.

Beginning in 1982, this opposition found explicit expression in a thorough-going critique developed by Comrade David North, then the Workers League national secretary, of the theoretical and political deviations of the WRP. North exposed the WRP's abandonment of the theory of permanent revolution

and its adaptation to bourgeois nationalism along lines that paralleled the degeneration of the Pabloite movement. He also analyzed the relationship between the WRP's political opportunism and Healy's subjective idealist distortion of the materialist philosophy developed by Marx and Engels. This theoretical degeneration was of a piece with a broader attack on Marxism, and especially historical materialism, carried out under the influence of the Frankfurt School and so-called "Western Marxism."

Healy's refusal to discuss the serious theoretical and political criticisms of this drift back to Pabloism raised by the Workers League between October 1982 and February 1984 foreclosed the possibility of overcoming the mounting political problems inside the WRP. This set the stage for the organizational crisis that erupted inside the British section in the summer of 1985. In this situation, the critique that had been developed by North over the previous three years rapidly gained support in the International Committee and became the basis of a crystallization of a new Trotskyist majority in the International Committee, which placed the opportunists in the leadership of the WRP on the defensive.

All those who broke with the International Committee moved rapidly to the right and disintegrated. The only viable political tendency to emerge from the breakup of the WRP was that created by the large group of British comrades, led by Dave Hyland, who rallied to support the majority of the International Committee and the perspective of internationalism.

The significance of the split for the international working class and for Marxism was demonstrated in its anticipation of the great historical events that erupted in its immediate aftermath. Just as the split with the Pabloites in 1953 took place on the eve of a historic crisis of Stalinism, marked by the workers' uprisings in East Germany in 1953 and in Hungary and Poland in 1956, together with the Khrushchev speech exposing many of Stalin's crimes, so the split with the WRP was carried out as Stalinism's crisis entered its terminal phase, leading to the bureaucracy's liquidation of the Soviet Union and restoration of capitalism.

The collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracies was part of a broader crisis that gripped every leadership in the workers movement—from the Stalinists to the reformists and the anti-communist AFL-CIO bureaucracy in the US—all of which based themselves on a national program. Changes in the world economy, above all the unprecedented global integration of capitalist production, exposed these national reformist programs as obsolete.

The basic dividing line of the split was between revolutionary internationalism on the one hand and national opportunism on the other. The defense of internationalism by the majority of the sections of the ICFI aligned the movement with the deep-going changes in the objective situation and their immense revolutionary potential. The split was followed by an enormous output of theoretical and political material by the International

Committee, which created the foundations for a powerful renewal of the perspective of revolutionary internationalism.

As it celebrates this important political anniversary, the SEP National Congress expresses its great appreciation of the contribution made by the comrades in the ICFI who played a central role in the struggle in 1985-86—in particular, Peter Schwarz and Uli Rippert of the German section, Nick Beams of the Australian section, and Dave Hyland and Chris Marsden, who led the British opposition to the WRP opportunists.

In marking the anniversary of the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party, the Socialist Equality Party pays tribute to the memory of Keerthi Balasuriya, the general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist League, forerunner to the Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party, whose death at the age of 39 in December 1987 took from the Trotskyist movement one of its greatest leaders.

Comrade Keerthi, whose political principles were forged in opposition to the great betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in 1964, was an implacable defender of the perspective of permanent revolution. Over the course of a decade, this had brought him into conflict with the leadership of the WRP as it adapted itself ever more openly to Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism. In 1985 Comrade Keerthi made his greatest contribution to Trotskyism by uniting with the majority of the sections of the ICFI against the national opportunist leadership of the WRP and bringing his own long experience in the battle against Pabloism to bear in this struggle. In the two years preceding his death, he played a decisive and irreplaceable role in the political renaissance of the International Committee.

The far-reaching implications of the split of 1985-86 have become clearer with each passing year. The split of 1985-86 made possible the transformation of the International Committee into a programmatically-unified international movement. This, in turn, led to the founding of the Socialist Equality Party, and the development of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The ICFI today is the only party on the planet that conducts its work on the basis of the traditions, theory, principles and program of Marxism. Under conditions of a deepening crisis of global capitalism and a new upsurge of international class struggle, the ICFI will attract to its banner the most conscious, militant and self-sacrificing sections of the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact