

# The First National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party

Joseph Kishore  
6 September 2010

The Socialist Equality Party (US) held its First National Congress on August 11-15, 2010. The meeting was a milestone in the fight waged by the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International for a socialist movement of the working class.

In five days of intense deliberation, the congress analyzed the objective crisis of the world capitalist system; made a prognosis for a rapid development of the class struggle in the coming period; affirmed the revolutionary role of the working class, and particularly the American working class; and adopted a socialist program to meet the tasks of a new period of social upheaval.

The adoption of the SEP program, “The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Struggle for Socialism in the United States,” was preceded by two resolutions that link the program of the party with the decades-long struggle of the Trotskyist movement against Stalinism, reformism and national opportunism: “On the 70th Anniversary of the Assassination of Leon Trotsky” and “On the 25th Anniversary of the Split with the Workers Revolutionary Party.” All three resolutions were adopted unanimously.

The composition of the congress was itself a clear sign of a changing political situation. A new layer of workers and youth from across the US attended and participated actively in the proceedings. There was also a large international presence, including important delegations from Canada, Australia, Sri Lanka, Germany, England and France. Their participation underscored both the international perspective of the ICFI and the world significance of the fight for socialism in the United States.

Delegates elected a new National Committee and reelected David North as national chairman. The new National Committee reelected National Secretary Joseph Kishore, Assistant National Secretary Lawrence Porter, and WSWS National Editor Barry Grey.

The First National Congress was held two years after the Founding Congress of the SEP, which met on the eve of the Wall Street meltdown of 2008. Analyzing the revolutionary implications of the approaching crisis, signs of which were already evident, the SEP understood that it was necessary to strengthen the political, historical and organizational foundations of the party. The Founding Congress adopted the *Socialist Equality Party Statement of Principles* and *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*.

The SEP insisted at the time of the Founding Congress that the crisis of capitalism was not an episodic downturn. Rather, it was a product of the breakdown of the capitalist order, which would

bring with it a deepening of national tensions, the growing danger of world war, and a permanent restructuring of class relations.

Two years on, this perspective has been entirely confirmed. None of the measures taken by the ruling class have resolved the crisis. World governments stagger from bankruptcy to bankruptcy. After looting public treasuries to bail out the banks and the wealthy, the call from governments throughout the world is for austerity. At the same time, the flooding of the financial system with money has only created the conditions for new speculative bubbles and a renewed financial crisis. All suggestions that the crisis would be followed by a resumption of the status quo ante, or that a new equilibrium could be peacefully established, have been shattered.

In the United States, the Obama administration is pursuing a strategy aimed at reviving production through the destruction of working class living standards. Mass unemployment—the greatest jobs crisis since the Second World War—is deliberately used to drive down wages and eliminate benefits. At the same time, Obama, elected on the basis of the hope that he would reverse the hated policies of the Bush administration, has expanded US wars abroad and the attack on democratic rights at home.

There is an overwhelming sense among the broad mass of the people that the country is moving backwards. Even as a tiny aristocracy continues to enrich itself, factories are being closed, schools shut down, essential social services eliminated, and the basic necessities of life ever further out of reach. A “new normal” of double-digit unemployment and poverty-level wages is being proclaimed. The belief that the next generation would have a better life than the last—a centerpiece of the much vaunted but largely mythical “American Dream”—has evaporated.

The objective crisis has revolutionary implications. If the Founding Congress of the SEP anticipated the full eruption of the capitalist crisis, the First National Congress took place on the eve of enormous class battles.

The program of the SEP is a fighting revolutionary program for the American working class. It puts forward a series of basic social rights—the right to a job; a livable income; leisure; decent and affordable housing, utilities and transportation; high-quality health care; a secure retirement; education, a healthful and safe environment; and culture. The program explains how the fight of workers for these rights, as well the resolution of burning political issues—war, attacks on democratic rights, the victimization of

immigrant workers—requires a political struggle of the entire working class against the capitalist system.

What separates the SEP from all other tendencies that claim to have some relation to socialism is its insistence, based on Marxism and the strategic lessons of the history of the American and international socialist movement, on the revolutionary role of the American working class. The program of the SEP has nothing in common with those of various pseudo-left organizations that promote every form of identity politics and are oriented to sections of the privileged middle class, while they seek to channel workers behind the trade unions and the Democratic Party.

“The working class is revolutionary,” the document states, “because 1) it is the principal productive force in society; 2) the historical and political logic of its resistance to capitalist exploitation and oppression leads to the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, the replacement of the profit motive with the satisfaction of social needs as the driving principle of economic life, and the realization of genuine social equality among all people; and 3) it is an international class whose victory will break down the barriers of national states and unite humanity in a truly global community devoted to the protection and development of its common home, the Earth.”

The working class comprises the vast majority of society—“whether they work in factories and on construction sites, or in offices, medical centers, shopping malls, primary and secondary schools, university complexes or scientific laboratories; whether they drive trucks, buses and trains or fly commercial aircraft.” The great task of the present period is uniting this immensely powerful social force on the basis of its common class interests.

In one of its most important sections, “American Workers and Socialism,” the program notes the “vast disparity between the historic character of the political and social tasks that confront American workers and their existing level of consciousness.” The history of the American working class has been one of relentless struggle to secure its interests and rights. However, “the Achilles heel of the working class lay in the absence of an independent mass socialist movement, guided by Marxist theory.”

The program explains the difficulty in developing a politically independent mass socialist movement against capitalism, and at the same time points to the means of by which this difficulty will be overcome. Stressing the vast significance of the decline in the global position of American capitalism, the document states: “In the final analysis, the vast wealth and power of American capitalism was the most significant objective cause of the subordination of the working class to the corporate-controlled two party system.... The change in objective conditions, however, will lead American workers to change their minds.”

When American workers change their minds about the viability of the capitalist system, it will have earth-shaking consequences. This change will take the form of a renewal of class struggle. While it is impossible to predict the exact tempo of events, it can be stated with certainty that the working class will fight back. This perspective was confirmed on the last day of the congress, when auto workers in Indianapolis, opposed to company demands that they accept a 50 percent wage cut, threw out representatives of the

UAW who were insisting on concessions.

As the events in Indianapolis demonstrate, the struggles of the working class will bring it into immediate and direct conflict with the trade union apparatus, which works consciously to impose concessions and defend the capitalist system. The document has an important section calling for the formation of independent workplace action committees.

The new objective situation will facilitate a new political orientation in the working class. This will not happen automatically. It requires the active intervention of socialists and a relentless struggle against all those tendencies and organizations that work to subordinate the working class to the Democratic Party and the two-party system. It requires the resolution of the great historical problem of the working class, in the US and internationally—the problem of revolutionary leadership.

The Socialist Equality Party intends to play the leading role in the coming struggles. In terms of numbers, the SEP is still relatively small. However, it is growing rapidly, and will grow more rapidly still.

Most importantly, the SEP enters this new period with the greatest strength of all: a clear program and perspective that is based on a vast historical experience. It is the union of this history and the principles of Marxism with the growing upsurge of millions of workers all over the world that will provide the force to overturn the capitalist system—an irrational, outmoded form of social organization—and lay the foundations for socialism and the progressive development of humankind.

We encourage all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to carefully study the program of the SEP and help bring it to the working class. Make the decision to join the SEP and take up the fight for socialism.

Joe Kishore



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**