

A reply to the ISO's Sherry Wolf on racial politics and the killing of Trayvon Martin

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The recent World Socialist Web Site article, "The killing of Trayvon Martin and racial politics in America," by Joseph Kishore, elicited the following response from Sherry Wolf, a member of the International Socialist Organization and associate editor of International Socialist Review. Below we publish a reply by Kishore.

"Thank you for providing socialists with an especially crude example of vulgar Marxism in the hands of rank sectarians. I've circulated it to members as a useful example of lunk-headed indifference to racism in the name of socialism — a gem of pseudo-Marxist inanity!

"P.S. Please help resolve a debate. Is your inability to grasp the ISO's 35 years of unbending opposition to the Dems a result of colossal idiocy or just garden variety mendacity?"

Sherry Wolf

Dear Ms. Wolf,

Thank you for sharing with us your opinion of my recent commentary on the racial politics practiced by the ISO and other pseudo-left organizations. We are pleased to learn that you are carefully reading the *World Socialist Web Site*, which places you among the approximately 40,000 readers who access our publication each day.

You denounce us as "rank sectarians" who practice "vulgar Marxism." Coming from you, this double-barreled denunciation is a compliment. In the political world that you inhabit, "sectarianism" denotes the fight for the political independence of the working class from big business parties on the basis of a socialist program. And what makes our Marxism "vulgar" in your eyes is

the Socialist Equality Party's insistence that class, not race, gender or sexuality, is the essential analytical category and decisive social basis of revolutionary politics.

You go on to decry our "lunk-headed indifference to racism in the name of socialism." This is simply a slander. Socialists have never denied or ignored the existence of racism. However, the historic position of the socialist movement has been that the struggle against racism and all forms of oppression must be based on the fight to unite all workers, on the basis of their common class interests, against the capitalist system. The identity politics of the ISO—which bases itself on varied disaffected but, nonetheless, relatively privileged sections of the middle class—serves to divide workers. It is a form of politics that facilitates an orientation to and outright collaboration with the Democratic Party.

This brings me to your letter's postscript. You ask whether our "inability to grasp the ISO's 35 years of unbending opposition to the Dems" is "a result of colossal idiocy or just garden variety mendacity?" The answer, Ms. Wolf, is neither. In describing your organization as a left appendage of the Democratic Party, we're basing ourselves on well documented political facts.

You can rant and rave as much as you like, but there are hundreds of articles on the ISO's web site that document its role as an apologist for the Democratic Party and the Obama administration. The ISO mediates its relations with the Democratic Party through its connections with the trade union bureaucracy, the reactionary and well-heeled civil rights establishment, the innumerable "left" think tanks and NGOs, and countless left-liberal journals such as the *Nation*, for which you yourself write.

In the case of Trayvon Martin, the ISO is attempting to present his murder as a racial issue—an approach opposed by Trayvon’s parents—for the most crassly opportunist reasons. As the 2012 presidential election approaches, the ISO sees an opportunity to connect opposition to racism with support for Obama’s reelection.

This operation is already well underway. At an April 11 meeting sponsored jointly by the ISO and Jackson’s Rainbow-PUSH coalition—under the banner “Trayvon Martin & The Fight Against The New Jim Crow”—Rainbow-PUSH representative Jeanette Wilson called on everyone “to go vote in the polls in November” for “progressive”—i.e., Democratic Party—politicians. Your own speaker, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, adapted herself to Jackson’s reactionary politics. Her presentation did not contain a single reference to “class,” the “Democratic Party” or “Obama,” and concluded by denouncing the “rich white men” who run the country.

The ISO is merely continuing the pro-Obama line that it pursued in the last presidential election. In 2008, the ISO campaigned for Obama and cheered his election, as documented in detail by David Walsh in an essay published on the WSWS. The ISO hailed Obama’s election as a “transformative event” that would mark an end to “the right-wing agenda that dominated US politics for the last three decades.” Of course, the exact opposite has occurred, as the WSWS predicted at the time. Obama is overseeing a historic attack on the democratic rights and social conditions of the working class—black and white, immigrant and native-born.

As with all middle-class opportunist organizations, the politics of the ISO is mendacious. Socialist rhetoric serves only to mask a politics that is entirely in the orbit of the Democratic Party. Ill-tempered denunciations of the *World Socialist Web Site* cannot hide this basic fact.

Sincerely,

Joseph Kishore

Socialist Equality Party National Secretary



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