

Socialist Equality Party (US) holds National Congress

30 August 2012

The Socialist Equality Party (US) held its Second National Congress in Detroit, Michigan on July 8-12, 2012. The Congress unanimously adopted four resolutions: “Perspectives of the Socialist Equality Party,” “On the 2012 Election and the SEP Campaign,” “The Organization of the Working Class and the Fight for Socialism,” and “Build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.”

Delegates attended from throughout the United States. There were also significant international delegations from Canada, Australia, Germany, Sri Lanka, England and France.

The Congress elected a new National Committee, the leading body of the party. David North was reelected as national chairman. The incoming National Committee reelected Joseph Kishore as national secretary, Lawrence Porter as assistant national secretary, and Barry Grey as *World Socialist Web Site* national editor.

In opening the Congress, David North placed the proceedings within the context of the world economic and political situation. He stated:

“This congress is being held against the backdrop of the greatest economic, political and social crisis of American and world capitalism since the 1930s... The continuing stagnation in job growth and the sharp deterioration in manufacturing output within the United States make a mockery of the repeated claims of the Obama administration that a ‘recovery’ is in progress.

“The potential for a revival of the US economy is all but negated by the intensifying crisis within Europe and Asia. The simultaneous cuts in interest rates by China’s central bank and the European Central Bank, combined with the decision of the Bank of England to accelerate its stimulus program, testify to the widespread belief within the ruling elites that the condition of the world economy is rapidly deteriorating.

“The crisis is, as we have repeatedly stressed, of a systemic, rather than merely conjunctural, character. We are witnessing the breakdown of institutions that were central to the growth and stability of world capitalism in the aftermath of World War II. The failure of the euro signifies the breakdown of the entire project of European ‘unity’ that developed after 1945.

“But what is taking place is not only the collapse of institutions, but the decomposition of the bourgeoisie itself. The phenomenon of financialization—which, to borrow the definition of a contemporary economist, represents a ‘pattern of accumulation in which profit making occurs increasingly through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production’—represents the triumph of economic parasitism, and,

with it, the unstoppable descent of bourgeois society into the lower depths of criminality.”

North said the economic crisis will have far-reaching political consequences:

“We are now witnessing the end of one long phase of historical development. In fact, it might be more correct to say that we have already entered into a new phase of historical development, one which will be characterized by the greatest social convulsions in world history. Indeed, this is the meaning of the main resolution’s assertion that the crisis of 2008 represented, no less than 1914, 1929, and 1939, a turn in world history.

“The task before this Congress is to understand the political implications of this ‘turn’ from the standpoint of the historical development of the Fourth International. Seventy-four years ago, Trotsky began the founding document of the Fourth International with the sentence: ‘The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.’ In determining its response to the very advanced crisis of the world capitalist system, this Congress must consider the question: Within the context of an examination of the interaction of the objective contradictions of world capitalism and the class struggle *and* the development of the Fourth International, how do we presently assess the crisis of working class leadership?”

North contrasted the approach of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International, whose political programs are grounded in an assimilation of the lessons of the revolutions and counterrevolutions of the twentieth century, to that of the pseudo-left organizations that reflect the interests of affluent sections of the middle class. Citing, as an example, the recent declaration by the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France that it takes no position on the political issues that arose in the aftermath of the 1917 October Revolution, North stated:

“In other words, the NPA... practices historical abstentionism. Its answer to all great historical questions is, as Trotsky once said in relation to Burnham [one-time Socialist Workers Party leading member James], ‘Excuse me, I don’t smoke.’ It has nothing to say about the past. And how, one must ask oneself, can it develop concrete policy on any issue without working through the lessons of the most tumultuous period of world history. It wants to just pass over the Russian Revolution, the character of the Soviet Union, Stalinism, the imperialist world wars. How can all that be forgotten? It responds to political events on an entirely impressionistic, ad hoc basis. Such a method, which is rooted in its social position, can produce nothing but the most opportunist,

shortsighted and reactionary politics.”

Joseph Kishore introduced the first resolution, which places emphasis on the major episodes in the development of the international class struggle since the beginning of 2011, including the Egyptian Revolution, the working class protests in Wisconsin, the Greek elections and social upheavals in Europe, and the Occupy Wall Street movement.

“The intensification of global economic crisis is leading inexorably to the resurgence of class struggle within the United States and throughout the world,” the resolution states. “It is not enough to predict the inevitability of revolutionary struggles and then await their unfolding... The Socialist Equality Party must do everything it can to develop, prior to the outbreak of mass struggles, a significant political presence within the working class—above all, among its most advanced elements.”

The resolution notes that the ruling class, in seeking to maintain its political and ideological domination, relies on the services of innumerable “left” organizations. Referring to the sections of the resolution dealing with the role of these organizations, Kishore said, “The past year and a half have provided the working class with many crucial lessons on the importance of leadership, and, related to this, the role of the middle class pseudo-left. In Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists and other pseudo-left tendencies channeled the mass uprising behind bourgeois forces, thereby helping to maintain the military dictatorship. They continue to praise the Muslim Brotherhood, presenting the MB’s alliance with the military to enforce the counterrevolution as a victory for the revolution.

“In Greece, Syriza—a coalition of state capitalist, ex-Stalinist, environmentalist and other tendencies—was the beneficiary of mass opposition to austerity measures. It has positioned itself entirely within the framework of bourgeois politics, declaring its fealty to the euro and the EU and pledging to carry out austerity measures. And here in the United States we have the experience of Wisconsin, the channeling of the largest working class demonstrations in many years back behind the Democratic Party, with the crucial assistance of the ISO and the trade unions.”

Drawing together these experiences with the SEP’s analysis of the Occupy Wall Street movement, the resolution emphasizes that “the pseudo-left organizations represent, in their aggregate, a *tendency within bourgeois politics.*” (Emphasis in the original)

The resolution states: “Only the mass movement of the working class, based on an international socialist program, can settle accounts with the American ruling class. The Socialist Equality Party must provide the political perspective without which serious and sustained struggle, let alone victory, is impossible. It must seek to recruit into its ranks the most far-sighted and self-sacrificing workers and youth.”

The resolution on the 2012 US elections, introduced by WSWs writer Patrick Martin, endorses the campaign of White and SEP vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer. The election race between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, the resolution notes, is a contest between two candidates equally committed to the defense of the corporate and financial aristocracy. The SEP campaign is aimed at building a revolutionary leadership in the working class.

The resolution on the organization of the working class, introduced by SEP presidential candidate Jerry White, explains the anti-working class character of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win Coalition, stressing that the organization of the working class requires a political and organizational break with the official trade unions and the formation of independent rank-and-file committees. It reviews the critical US working class struggles of 2011 and 2012, including the protests against budget cuts in Wisconsin and the struggles of workers at General Motors in Indianapolis and Cooper Tire in Findlay, Ohio.

The final resolution adopted by the Congress, introduced by youth leader Andre Damon, elaborates a program for building the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party. “The fight to build a socialist movement of the working class requires a struggle to educate a new generation of students and working class youth in the history and principles of Marxism and the Fourth International,” it states.

The Congress voted to change the name of the organization from the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) to the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). With this change, delegates stressed the need to broaden the appeal of the IYSSE to all sections of youth.

Delegates concluded the Congress with a commitment to aggressively build the Socialist Equality Party in the working class, based on the political and theoretical conceptions developed at the Congress itself.

In concluding the meeting, Kishore stressed that the party’s program corresponds to objective forces driving the working class into political struggle. The party will recruit broadly among workers, youth and students. “Our task is nothing less than building a mass socialist movement of the working class that will take power in the United States, as part of an international movement for socialist revolution.”



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