

Resolutions of the SEP (US) National Congress

The Organization of the Working Class and the Fight for Socialism

1 September 2012

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1. From its very inception in 1966, the Workers League, the predecessor of the SEP, parted company with all other political tendencies by insisting on the revolutionary role of the American working class—the only force capable of settling accounts with the US ruling class. As Gerry Healy, the leader of the Socialist Labour League, told the American Trotskyists at the time: "It is not Black Power or the dozens of peace and civil rights movements which extend throughout the country which will resolve the basic questions of our time, but the working class led by a revolutionary party."

2. The struggle to build the SEP in the working class involves the most determined fight for socialist consciousness against all forms of political backwardness and illusions promoted by the capitalist system and its servants in the trade unions, big business parties and liberal and pseudo-left groups. Socialist consciousness does not arise spontaneously out of the class struggle, but must be brought into the working class by the cadres of the SEP. As Lenin explained, "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."

3. The revolution that will lay the political basis for socialism arises out of the struggles of the working class for its independent class interests and its basic social, economic and political rights. The SEP must work to develop, prior to the outbreak of struggles, a political presence in the working class and its most advanced elements. It must build systematically a political vanguard that will fight to unite these struggles and direct them in a political offensive against the capitalist system. The experiences of the new wave of working class struggles—from Egypt to Greece to the United States—have confirmed that without the existence of a revolutionary political leadership, the working class is left exposed to the political machinations of the ruling class and its representatives.

4. The SEP fights to break the political and organizational stranglehold of the existing trade unions through the building of independent rank-and-file committees. The working class cannot fight without organization. However, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win Coalition are not working class organizations, but auxiliary arms of corporate management. Even the word "union" in reference to these organizations conceals social reality. They no longer function as elementary defensive organizations of the working class. They do not protect workers from layoffs, plant closings, wage and benefit cuts,

speedup or any other management demands. They do not unite workers to defend their common interests. On the contrary, they sabotage every struggle by workers to defend themselves and enforce the disunity of the working class. They have long ago rejected the doctrine of the class struggle in favor of corporatism, labor-management partnership and economic nationalism. The workers who are compelled to pay dues have no control over these organizations, which regularly use intimidation, ballot-rigging and violence to impose management dictates.

5. These organizations serve as a critical prop of the Democratic Party. When struggles do emerge, they work consciously and deliberately to prevent these struggles from breaking free of the two-party capitalist system. In the mass protests that erupted against budget cuts in Wisconsin last year, the AFL-CIO worked closely with the Democratic Party and its auxiliary organizations to divert the struggle behind a recall campaign against Republican Governor Scott Walker and for his Democratic Party challenger. The unions have worked closely with the Obama administration in its attacks on the working class, including the UAW's collaboration with the restructuring of the auto industry on the basis of poverty-level wages for new-hires. They are now fully behind Obama's reelection campaign.

6. The SEP has intervened in the struggles of the working class not merely to expose and condemn the betrayals of the old organizations, but to fight for a program and practice that can lead these struggles forward. In Wisconsin, at the height of the mass movement, the SEP called for the launching of a general strike by the workers. The correctness of this call was vindicated, but tragically in the negative. The union leaders opposed a general strike and instead advanced the recall campaign as a deliberate diversion. This had the effect of demobilizing the working class, directing workers and youth into the blind alley of Democratic Party politics, and politically strengthening the right-wing administration of Republican Governor Walker.

7. In a series of working class struggles, the SEP has fought to organize workers independently of the bureaucratic shells such as the UAW. When workers at the Indianapolis GM plant voted down a wage-cutting deal and denounced UAW officials for accepting it, the SEP organized a rank-and-file committee to carry forward the rebellion. At Cooper Tire in Findlay, Ohio, the SEP urged locked-out workers to break through the straitjacket of isolation imposed by the United Steelworkers and take their struggle to workers throughout the Midwest. Whether they are factory workers in basic industry, public service workers like teachers, or workers with no experience of unions

at all, the SEP tells workers the truth: the old organizations cannot be reformed or revived. The class struggle must go forward through the building of new organizations.

8. The layer of executives who operate the “union” apparatus long ago separated its material interests from those of the workers it supposedly represents, finding new means to secure its income and privileges through the betrayal of the working class. The assets of the UAW, for example, rose to well above \$1 billion even as it suffered an 80 percent decline in membership. Today, the UAW holds billions of dollars in shares of the Detroit automakers. These organizations speak on behalf of a privileged upper-middle-class layer whose interests are fundamentally hostile to the interests of the working class.

9. The more the trade unions have been transformed into organizations opposed to the working class, the more the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups, such as the International Socialist Organization, have insisted that it is impermissible to challenge the authority of these organizations over the working class. A major aspect of the right-wing evolution of groups like the ISO has been the rise of their members to high-paying positions in the trade union apparatus, where they have invariably worked to betray the working class and subordinate it to the Democratic Party and the dictates of big business. When struggles have arisen that have threatened to break free of the grip of the unions—such as the establishment of the Indianapolis Rank-and-File Committee initiated by the SEP—the ex-radicals have used red-baiting to intimidate militant workers and finger them for victimization by the union bureaucracy.

10. In insisting on the organizational control of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win based on the claim that they are the only viable “working class” organizations, the pseudo-left groups falsify history. The eruption of class struggle has generally taken the form of a rebellion against old organizations that adapted themselves to the corporate-controlled status quo. In the United States, the formation of industrial unions in the 1930s was possible only through a bitter struggle against the American Federation of Labor, the organization of craft unions. A debate erupted within the Marxist movement at the time as to whether the party should advocate the formation of new organizations in opposition to the AFL. In the end, the explosive strike wave of the mid-1930s and the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) proved the advocates of an offensive against the AFL correct. And yet the AFL of the 1930s could still be called a workers’ organization, albeit one bitterly hostile to industrial workers.

11. The current state of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win organizations is the culmination of the decades-long subordination of the unions to the Democratic Party, the anti-communist purges following World War II, and the unions’ defense of capitalism and American imperialism. It was precisely this essentially nationalist orientation that, in the period of globalization, led to their collapse. The growth and expanding mobility of finance capital along with the formation of transnational corporations undercut the national reformist program of the unions. In response, the union bureaucracy ever more directly turned itself into an arm of corporate management in order to maintain their privileges at the expense of the workers they claimed to represent.

12. The Socialist Equality Party fights for the building of factory, workplace and neighborhood committees, animated by the spirit of revolutionary intransigence and opposition to the two parties of big business. These organizations must begin with the needs of the working class and must be democratically controlled by the working

class. They must take ever greater responsibility for unifying the working class—employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled, native-born and immigrant, across different industries and workplaces—and organizing their common struggles against the capitalist class.

13. The transformation of the official unions into corporate-labor syndicates renders all the more important the work of the party among workers who currently find themselves trapped in these organizations. The SEP intervenes in every struggle, including those that emerge within the existing apparatus, from the standpoint of mobilizing the working class independently, fighting to break free of the isolation imposed by the pro-corporate syndicates, and drawing out the more general social and political implications of every particular fight.

14. The SEP aims to create not just new workplace organizations, but also community organizations and neighborhood action committees to fight against deteriorating social conditions and budget cuts. An important example of such a struggle is the experience of the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs (CAUS), formed at the initiative of the SEP after a series of house fires in Detroit caused by the shutoff of utilities by the local energy monopoly DTE. CAUS rallied residents of Detroit against the shutoffs, campaigned among DTE workers, organized a demonstration on the city’s West Side, and intervened at municipal forums and other meetings as an advocate for the working class.

15. These organizations must fight to unify the working class around definite demands, including the abolition of the two-tier wage system, the right to a job, the right to a livable income and to a secure retirement and decent health care. They must reject all efforts to pit young workers against old, black against white, city against suburbs, American-born against immigrant. They must insist on the political independence of the working class from the Democratic Party and the two-party system, and refuse to subordinate the demands of the workers to the profit interests of the companies.

16. The axis of the SEP’s intervention in every struggle is its revolutionary socialist program. The agitation for new organizations of struggle is part of, and never a substitute for, the basic strategic task: the building of the Socialist Equality Party in the working class. Indeed, independent committees can be sustained only to the extent that they are led and guided by workers who have begun to develop a socialist consciousness, and have come to a political understanding of the role of the trade unions and the Democratic Party.

17. Every branch of the SEP must fight to build a leadership in the most important sections of the working class—including in manufacturing, service industries, health care, education, government and transit. Systematic propaganda must be carried out to expose the conditions of life of the working class. The particular interests of different sections of the working class must be connected to the general interests of the working class as a whole through a united political struggle against the capitalist system.



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