

Resolution of SEP (UK) Congress: “Build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality”

10 January 2013

1. The global crisis of capitalism that broke out in 2008 is creating intolerable conditions of life for ever wider sections of the population. For young people, the deepest economic breakdown since the 1930s is resulting in mass poverty and unemployment, leading to talk of a “lost generation”.

2. The austerity measures of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government, supported by Labour, have left more than one million young people aged 16 to 25 out of work—40 percent of overall unemployment. Half of all youth out of work have had no job for at least six months. For those in work, conditions are deteriorating rapidly. The minimum wage of £4.98 [\$US 7.98] for 18- to 20-year-olds was frozen on the recommendation of the Low Pay Commission, on which the Trades Union Congress sits. Many employed youth do not receive even this pittance. Wages for 16- to 29-year-olds fell by an estimated 10 percent between 2003 and 2011.

3. The proliferation of low-wage, insecure jobs for young people is a means of attacking the living standards of the entire working class. Fraudulent training schemes—paying just £2.65 an hour—have been set up, while many youth have been forced to work for free to obtain the miserly jobless benefit. Housing Benefit is being scrapped for those under 25 years of age. Young people are therefore more and more denied jobs, homes and any means of sustenance.

4. Increasingly, obtaining a decent education is a luxury only to be enjoyed by the elite. Funding from pre-school to Further Education (FE) has been slashed, accompanied by a sustained attack on the public provision of education. The creation of Academy schools by Labour and of Free Schools by the present government means there is virtually no educational institution today that is not heavily penetrated by private corporations. Through outsourcing, private companies now control more than 30 percent of UK educational spending—a higher proportion than in the United States. All this has gone hand in hand with a dramatic deterioration in the quality of education, attacks on the pay and working conditions of teachers and a vast expansion in class sizes.

5. Obtaining a college or university level qualification is being placed out of the reach of many. The abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has prevented

thousands of working class youth from going on to further education, with half of all colleges reporting a drop in student numbers. FE funding is being cut by a quarter over the next three years, under conditions in which the school-leaving age is to be raised to 18. Already hundreds of jobs have been cut in colleges, with staff facing pay cuts of up to £9,000 per annum.

6. University tuition fees rose in 2012 from £3,000 annually to £9,000 and there are moves to end the exemption afforded to Scottish students in Scottish universities and the subsidising of Welsh students in Wales for costs above £3,465. Levels of student indebtedness have risen sharply, with estimates that graduates beginning their studies in 2012 will face an average £53,000 debt on completing their education. Academic standards are being destroyed as universities become increasingly corporatized. Small group tuition and staff/student contact time have been cut, “uneconomic” courses closed and a turn made to overseas students who pay far higher fees in order to balance the books. While higher education is now one of Britain’s biggest export earners, foreign students are subjected to arbitrary and racist immigration crackdowns as was the case at London Metropolitan University.

7. These conditions are not unique to Britain. Globally, 81 million young people are officially without a job, but an additional 152 million live in households that earn less than one euro [\$US 1.31] a day. In North Africa and the Middle East, the real rate of youth unemployment is over 40 percent, while in Europe more than one in five young people is out of work and ten million have been unemployed for more than a year. In the countries that are worst affected by the austerity policies dictated by the European Union, such as Greece and Spain, more than half of young people aged 16 to 25 are jobless.

8. The fate threatening this generation has revolutionary implications. Youth are being placed at the forefront of every oppositional movement. As the business news service *Bloomberg* noted, “In Tunisia the young people who helped bring down a dictator are called *hittistes* — French-Arabic slang for those who lean against the wall. Their counterparts in Egypt... are the *shabab atileen*, unemployed youths.” It continued, “The *hittistes* and *shabab* have brothers and sisters across the globe”, citing NEETs (not in education,

employment, or training) in the UK, “boomerang kids” forced to return home in the US, Freeters (freelance workers) in Japan and *mileuristas* (those earning 1,000 euros a month or less) in Spain. In China, the collective term for college graduates who live together seeking work is the “ant tribe”.

9. The global character of the problems facing young people demands the adoption of an internationalist and socialist perspective. It means inculcating irreconcilable hostility to all forms of nationalism and chauvinism, used by the bourgeoisie to divide working people. This is made all the more vital at a time when British imperialism’s attempt to assert its global interests, in alliance with the US, is turning young people into cannon fodder. This is the significance of the proliferation of military recruitment in schools, colleges and universities, at a time when threats mount of war against Syria and Iran.

10. There has been no shortage of determined efforts by young people to take up a struggle against these miserable conditions. In Chile, Mexico and Canada opposition movements and major student strikes have erupted against government policies attacking education. In 2010 mass student protests in the UK against the abolition of EMA and the hike in tuition fees were brutally attacked by the police. One year later, thousands of youth who saw no hope for the future expressed their outrage on the streets of major cities such as London, Manchester and Birmingham. Once again the response was state repression.

11. The work of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality is based on the understanding that the working class is the principal revolutionary force in society. It seeks to forge an alliance between the working class, including working class youth, and the best elements among the students. Central to this task is a consistent struggle against all of the various pseudo-left tendencies who seek to confine students to the bankrupt politics of petty bourgeois protest. The IYSSE will promote a study of Marxist theory. It will champion the dialectical materialist view of history in opposition to the idealist, irrationalist and subjectivist forms of thought associated with postmodernism, the Frankfurt School and neo-anarchism, which presently flourish on campuses, thanks to their official promulgation by academia.

12. It is critical that the younger generation, which has grown up under and lived through a period of the suppression of the class struggle by the ruling elite and its supporters in the union bureaucracies and the pseudo-left, educate itself in the history and experiences of the international working class. This means, above all, an engagement with and an assimilation of the lessons of the Russian Revolution, the rise of Stalinism and the struggle waged by Leon Trotsky to found the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

13. The IYSSE will pay particular attention to the exposure of the post-Soviet school of historical falsification. The tendentious works of a number of British historians, Ian Thatcher, Geoffrey Swain and Robert Service, herald a new

phenomenon: the “pre-emptive biography” in an era of pre-emptive warfare. Their efforts necessarily focus on denigrating and distorting both Trotsky’s personality and the significance of his opposition to Stalinism, its theory of socialism in one country and crimes against the international working class. The aim of this school of historians is to counter the growth in Trotsky’s political authority and the perspective of international socialism under conditions of intensifying class struggle.

14. David North’s detailed refutation of the falsifications and distortions in the Trotsky biographies of Thatcher, Swain and especially Service, presented in his book *In Defence of Leon Trotsky*, has met with growing international interest and support, including the endorsement of significant historians. US historian Bertrand Patenaude, writing in the authoritative *American Historical Review*, commended North’s book and criticised Robert Service. Fourteen leading European historians wrote a letter opposing the decision by Suhrkamp Publishers to put out Service’s work in German. In Britain, a concerted effort is being made through laudatory reviews and a conspiracy of silence on its manifold failings, to portray Service’s book as a major effort in historiography that should be used as the definitive work on Trotsky in universities and colleges. This testifies to the extraordinary sensitivity of the British bourgeoisie—and the intellectual milieu that serves its interests—toward the danger represented by Trotsky. The IYSSE will appeal to students and lecturers to oppose and repudiate efforts such as Service’s and to insist that critical historical issues are approached with due academic rigour.

15. The revolutionary potential of the younger generation can be realised only through a turn to the working class and the building of a new socialist leadership. This congress of the Socialist Equality Party affirms that the building of the IYSSE, as the youth movement of the International Committee of the Fourth International, is central to the fight for this perspective among students and working class youth.



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