

The fight against war and the political tasks of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain)

28 November 2014

The Second National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain) adopted this resolution unanimously on October 28.

1. The Socialist Equality Party endorses the International Committee of the Fourth International resolution, “Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War.” The resolution of this Congress incorporates and elaborates on the ICFI’s resolution, applying it to the work of the SEP in Britain.

2. The statement’s call for the ICFI to become “the international centre of revolutionary opposition to the resurgence of imperialist violence and militarism” was made on the 100th anniversary of World War I and 75 years after the start of World War II. In 1914 and 1939, the spark for war was ignited in Europe. Today the flame could be lit anywhere in the world.

3. Once again, conflicts over access to markets, raw materials, sources of cheap labour and spheres of influence are preparing an inferno. The recklessness with which the major powers are proceeding points to the deep crisis of imperialism. The basic contradictions of the world capitalist system—between globalised production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states, and between socialized production and private ownership of the means of production—have reached a new peak of intensity. Faced with the danger of economic collapse and social upheavals, the major powers are resorting to militarism. But their actions only further imperil the world economy.

4. This Congress meets as a military offensive unfolds in Iraq and Syria, involving a gang-up of major and lesser powers, that threatens to become the antechamber of a broader conflagration. Just one year after it was forced to retreat from a planned attack on Damascus due to widespread opposition, parliament has authorized an open-ended conflict in the Middle East, in what Prime Minister David Cameron has declared to be a “generational struggle”. A century after Britain conspired to divide up the former Ottoman Empire, it is participating in a new carve up of the Middle East. This time it does so as a much-reduced economic and military power, weakened against its rivals and wracked by internal social and political conflicts that threaten the very survival of the UK state. With few available options, Britain’s ruling elite is forced to try and protect its geopolitical interests through a desperate alliance with US imperialism.

5. In its drive to overcome America’s own declining world position, the Obama administration has accelerated the Bush administration’s policy of securing US global hegemony by military might. In the last year alone, Washington has fomented civil war in Syria; threatened Iran; organized a right-wing coup in Ukraine; sent military forces back into Iraq; bombed targets in Syria; carried out drone attacks on Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan; dispatched military “experts” to Nigeria to combat Boko Haram and troops to West Africa under the pretext of the Ebola crisis; and escalated a “pivot to Asia” aimed at encircling and isolating China. A review of military strategy by the National Defense Panel states that the US must be prepared to fight five or six major wars simultaneously, citing China and Russia as the likely targets. Given that these countries have the second and third-largest nuclear arsenals on the planet, the machinations

of US imperialism threaten the extinction of humanity.

6. At present there appears to be a confluence of interests between the imperialist powers. However, Lord Palmerston’s injunction that “Nations have no permanent friends or allies, they only have permanent interests” retains its full validity. The resort to imperialist gangsterism is the political expression of vast shifts in the world economy that are disrupting the relations established between the major powers since the end of World War II. China has eclipsed the US as the world’s leading manufacturing country, while the share of world manufacturing taken by Western Europe, the US and Japan fell from 80 percent in 1990, to just over half today. In contrast, the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—more than doubled their share to 27 percent.

7. US imperialism is determined to control Eurasia, the vast land mass that stretches from Western Europe to China and includes the Middle East, Central Asia, Russia and the Indian subcontinent. Former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in *The Grand Chessboard*, “America’s global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained.” Brzezinski’s thesis is the contemporary variant of the Eurasian strategy that formed the geo-strategic axis of the First and Second World Wars. This was first elaborated in 1904 by Britain’s Halford Mackinder who warned, “Who rules east Europe commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the world-island; who rules the world-island commands the world.”

8. The destabilization of Ukraine, with the aid of right-wing and fascist forces, was a joint operation by Washington and Berlin, carried out under the auspices of the European Union (EU). For the US, Ukraine is a staging post in the drive to integrate former Soviet republics in Europe and Asia into the military, economic and political structures of NATO, opening the possibility of US or US-linked troops being stationed directly on Russia’s western border and territories. At the same time, Washington aims to bring Europe as a whole more firmly into its orbit. But this brings it objectively into conflict with Germany, which seeks to take advantage of America’s underlying weaknesses to reassert its role in world politics. Berlin has utilized Ukraine as a pretext for ending the restrictions placed upon it following the Second World War. This takes place as the German bourgeoisie proclaims the need to dispense with outmoded “taboos” over Hitler fascism that confined it to “soft power” politics.

9. There is nothing more grotesque than the posturing of Cameron and Labour leader Ed Miliband as defenders of civilization from the “barbarism” of Islamic State, the authoritarianism of China and “Russian expansionism”. Britain, with its long and bloody history as a colonial oppressor, is an international aggressor, seeking to overcome its eclipse by its major rivals abroad and profound social domestic tensions at home through the return to militarism. This has been made all the more urgent by the UK’s precipitous economic decline. In 1952, manufacturing comprised a third of its national output, employing 40 percent of the workforce and accounting for one-quarter of world manufacturing exports. Today, it is just 11 percent of GDP, employs 8 percent of the workforce

and accounts for a miserable 2 percent of world manufacturing exports. What the UK retains, and seeks to utilize, is a significant military apparatus, with a presence in more than 80 countries. This, combined with the 53 member states of the Commonwealth, 14 British Overseas Territories and nine of the world's top 16 military bases, gives it a global reach second only to that of the US. In addition to possessing nuclear weapons, it has privileged access to a vast intelligence network courtesy of Washington and is part of the Five Powers Defence Agreement—making it an integral part of US-led provocations against China and Russia. Britain is playing a lead role in the reorganisation of NATO, including heading one of the newly created rapid reaction forces that is directed against Russia.

10. Two new aircraft carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, currently being built have been described as the “biggest and most powerful warships ever constructed for the Royal Navy.” From 2020, they will be used to station helicopters as well as some of the 40 F35 Lightning II stealth fighter-bombers presently on order. The extent of British imperialism's ambitions and its future imperatives was made clear in a 2010 Ministry of Defence policy document, *Future Character of Conflict*. This pointed out that “the changing dynamic between the major powers will influence how the UK prepares to fight.” In addition to maintaining a delicate balance of international relations, it includes as major global challenges: climate change, demographic imbalances, the battle for scarce resources and the rise of “ideological movements.” It warns, “The fundamental nature of conflict is enduring. It will remain a violent contest; a mix of chance, risk and policy whose underlying nature is both human and, at times, apparently irrational, making its character inherently volatile... The initiative is not a given and we must expect casualties, possibly in large numbers.”

11. The same contradictions that give rise to war create the basis for revolution. The widespread opposition to militarism among broad layers of workers and youth presently finds no political expression. The responsibility of the Socialist Equality Party is to provide the programme, perspective and leadership to mobilise the working class against the profit system—the root cause of war. The imperialist powers seek to resolve the contradictions embedded in the capitalist system through an internecine battle for world hegemony. The working class must provide its own answer by ending the irrational division of the planet and establishing world socialism based on production for need not profit.

The historical decline of British capitalism

12. Cameron has declared that the centenary anniversary of World War I should be a “celebration” of Britain's “national spirit”. £50 million has been allotted to encouraging events designed to recast war as a heroic venture. The Great War poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon are derided as left-wing propagandists, while artistic works such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Oh! What a Lovely War* and even *Blackadder* are denounced for undermining patriotic values and the tradition of military excellence embodied in Britain's armed forces.

13. The aim is to obliterate from collective consciousness the traumatic events of the first half of the 20th century. The Great War bequeathed to posterity the names of the Somme, Ypres, Verdun, Gallipoli and Kut—battlefields in which 800,000 British soldiers' lives were lost, out of a one million national death toll, and 16 million worldwide. The term Thankful Villages was coined for those parishes that lost no men in the conflict, of which there were just 53 in England and Wales, and none in Scotland or Ireland. The tragedy of the First World War was made all the more poignant by the fact that it was not, as was claimed, the “war to end all wars.” Instead, it was followed by a yet bloodier world conflagration that left 70 million dead and brought mankind face to face with the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb.

14. Not only did these wars explode the claim that the working class had a stake in imperialism, they sealed the fate of the British Empire. By 1945,

Britain's efforts to beat back the challenge from German imperialism to its global domination had ended in its total eclipse by the United States, its wartime ally. Such were the tensions between London and Washington in the inter-war years that a plan was drawn up in the US for war, beginning with an attack on Canada and designed to open up all of the British Empire to American business and trade.

15. In his 1925 introduction to the US edition of *Where is Britain Going?* Trotsky wrote, “Britain is moving towards revolution because the epoch of capitalist decline has set in. And if culprits are to be sought, then in answer to the question who and what are propelling Britain along the road of revolution, we must say: not Moscow, but New York... The powerful and ever-growing world pressure of the United States makes the predicament of British industry, British trade, British finance and British diplomacy increasingly insoluble and desperate... The United States can only expand at the expense of Britain.”

16. Trotsky identified the key significance of the UK's decline in its revolutionary implications for the development of the class struggle. He was writing at a time of a tremendous radicalisation of the working class, generated by the war and its aftermath, which was to culminate in the eruption of the 1926 General Strike just one year later. British capitalism came close to revolution, but was rescued by the betrayal of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. Still, it staggered from one crisis to another. Hammered by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, forced into a government of National Emergency in 1931, it was beset by a depression that lasted until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

17. America post-1945 was able to dominate Britain and Europe, which had been ruined and bankrupted by war. Combined with the role of Stalinism and social democracy in politically suppressing the working class, US economic might provided the basis for rescuing capitalism. Britain was reluctantly forced to accept a junior position to Washington, due to both mass anti-colonial struggles in India, Africa and Asia, and the US sabotage of Britain's intervention into Suez in 1956. Even so, London considered its role as that of the experienced elder statesman, dispensing sage advice to an upstart, and it was able to maintain a global standing thanks to its favoured place within the framework of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, in NATO and the United Nations Security Council.

18. At home, the ruling class undertook far-reaching welfare measures in a bid to ameliorate class tensions, along with a programme of nationalisations aimed at consolidating British industry. The global financial crisis that began in March 1968 and led to the demise of dollar-gold convertibility in August 1971, made clear, however, that these measures had failed to halt Britain's decline against the US and its resurgent Japanese and European competitors. Attempts by the Conservative government of Edward Heath to impose the burden of this crisis on the working class provoked the biggest eruption of the class struggle since 1926, ending in his downfall in 1974. The struggles of the British working class were a component part of the revolutionary convulsions that gripped world capitalism between 1968 and 1975,

19. The Labour government that replaced Heath gave the ruling class the time it needed to prepare a counter-offensive. Beginning with the International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity measures initiated under James Callaghan, and undertaken with greater determination by the Conservative government that came to power in 1979, the ruling elite set out to deal with what Margaret Thatcher declared to be “the enemy within”—the working class. The attempt to preserve industrial “national champions” was abandoned in favour of letting “lame ducks” fail, privatising basic industries and encouraging the growth of speculative finance capital by deregulating the London stock market. Thatcher's aim in launching the 1982 Malvinas/Falkland Islands war was to cultivate a right-wing social constituency for this agenda. Throughout, she was able to rely on the role played by the Labour Party and the trade unions in demobilizing and betraying every struggle waged by the working class, up

to and including the miners' strike of 1984-85.

The dissolution of the USSR

20. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was a turning point in world politics. Notwithstanding the crimes of Stalinism, and its policy of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism, the Soviet Union had acted as a major restraint on the global ambitions of the US and helped impart a degree of stability to international relations. With the Stalinist bureaucracy's liquidation of the nationalised property relations established by the 1917 October revolution, all of this changed. President George H. W. Bush's declaration of a "new world order" was based on the calculation that there now existed a unipolar world, in which no power or combination of powers could rival the military dominance of the US. Beginning with the Gulf War in 1991, America's ruling elite set out to use its military superiority to offset its historic economic decline, and to inaugurate what the neo-conservative ideologues dubbed "the American Century."

21. While the British bourgeoisie joined in the outbreak of capitalist triumphalism heralding the "end of socialism", the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern European states presented it with an immediate crisis. Despite her reputation as the "Iron Lady", no one was more anxious about the implications of these events than Thatcher. What exercised Britain's ruling class above all was the prospect of a unified Germany. Diplomatic records and Thatcher's own memoirs confirm that she went so far as to lobby France's President François Mitterrand and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to oppose the reunification of East and West Germany. One key adviser even noted private discussions of the possibility of war. Thatcher told Gorbachev in September 1989, "We do not want a united Germany. This would lead to a change to post-war borders, and we cannot allow that because such a development would undermine the whole international situation and could endanger our security." To Mitterrand she complained, "We beat the Germans twice, and now they are back," while in a conversation with President Bush, on February 24, 1990, Thatcher declared, "looking well into the future only the Soviet Union or its successor" could provide a balance against Germany's domination of Europe. "By its very nature," she wrote in her memoirs, "Germany is a destabilising rather than a stabilising, force in Europe."

22. Events were to confirm Thatcher's fears. In its determination to finally liquidate the gains of the October 1917 revolution, the Stalinist bureaucracy accepted reunification on terms amounting to abject surrender. French imperialism focused on establishing mechanisms to tie Germany into a pan-European political and economic project. Just six weeks after German reunification, on November 22, 1990, Thatcher was dumped from office and replaced by John Major, who declared his intention to "place Britain at the heart of Europe". But this was not to be. Unable to compete economically with Berlin, on "Black Wednesday", September 16, 1992 the pound was forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism by a wave of international speculation.

23. The problem vexing the British bourgeoisie was how to adjust to the break-up of the post-World War Two order. It was under these conditions that Britain's "special relationship" with the US took on new dimensions. To retain any global standing, the ruling elite was forced to acknowledge that, far from being an equal partner, it was wholly reliant on Washington. Under conditions where the US was pursuing an aggressive military turn, this meant signing up to whatever wars it dictated. These base economic imperatives were translated into policy by the 1997 Labour government, and found their personification in Prime Minister Tony Blair.

24. In a speech on the 50th anniversary of NATO's founding in April 1999, even as US war planes were bombing Belgrade, Blair espoused his "doctrine of the international community." The maintenance of global economic stability meant accepting unconditionally the political and military hegemony of Washington. "There is no more dangerous theory in

international politics than that we need to balance the power of America with other competitive powers," he insisted, dressing this up as a new version of liberal imperialism, whereby a "responsibility to protect" was used to sanction illegal wars of aggression. In its first six years in office, Labour sent troops into battle on five separate occasions, including Kosovo (1999), Sierra Leone (2000), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (1998, 2003). Blair set out the motives behind this outbreak of militarist violence when he declared the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York to be "a moment to seize. The Kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us."

25. This strategy was characterized by hubris and acute myopia. The belief that US imperialism could, through force of arms, not only arrest its own historic decline but bring about a new Pax Americana, was a reactionary utopia. The US, with Britain trailing in its wake, suffered a series of setbacks as the Afghanistan and Iraq wars proved to be a disaster, with the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and the beginning of an occupation and civil war, whose reverberations have destabilised central Asia, Pakistan and the Middle East. Iraq ultimately proved to be Blair's undoing and left a lasting legacy of mistrust and hostility towards the entire establishment. Rather than the major powers simply acquiescing to an American-led new world order, they are now demanding a share in the redistribution of global resources and markets.

The crash of 2008

26. The financial crash of 2008 signalled the onset of the greatest systemic crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Trillions of dollars in public funds were handed over to the world's banks to prevent a global meltdown. Since then, trillions more have been pumped into the global economy through quantitative easing, simply printing money that bears no relationship to actual production. In every country, welfare provisions have been destroyed amid proclamations of a new "age of austerity". Even so, the world economy is teetering on the brink of a new great depression.

27. Nowhere has the fundamental weakness of capitalism been so exposed as in Britain. Such is its dependency on the City of London that the total assets of the three largest British banks rose from 7 percent of GDP at the turn of the 20th century, to 200 percent in 2007. Between September and October 2008, 30 percent was wiped off the FTSE 100 share index, while output that year fell by 7.2 percent. In addition to the collapse of the Northern Rock building society, the Labour government had to initiate a bailout for the banks that has now cost over £1 trillion and involved the partial nationalisation of the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and HBOS. This, along with corporate and household debt, has left the UK as the world's fourth most proportionately indebted country, at 276 percent of GDP, with a public sector debt of £1.4 trillion.

28. The financial crash debunked all the claims that the right-wing policies pursued by successive governments since 1979 would lay the basis for an economic rebirth. In the years since, the UK's manufacturing sector has shrunk by more than two-thirds, the greatest deindustrialization of any major nation. In contrast, the service sector, which consists overwhelmingly of low paid employment, has risen from 46 percent of GDP to 79 percent. Britain's export of financial services accounts for 29 percent of the world total, twice that of its nearest rivals, the US, Switzerland and Luxembourg. The total assets of the UK financial sector are five times GDP.

29. In 35 years, vast areas of the country have been reduced to industrial wastelands, while central London has come to resemble a separate country, as cuts in housing and welfare benefits are used to "socially cleanse" its inner-city boroughs. A playground for Gulf sheiks and Russian plutocrats, the capital makes up almost one-quarter of the entire UK economy and is the ninth largest economy in Europe. In contrast, Berlin accounts for 4 percent of Germany's economy and Paris for 9.6

percent of France's. Hot money, property speculation and financial services are responsible for much of London's economy. In the aftermath of 2008, the parasitism of the UK economy has only worsened, as austerity for the mass of the population is used to funnel even more money into the coffers of the rich. According to government figures, since 2008, the banks have paid out twice as much in bonuses, £67 billion, as they paid in taxes.

30. The UK's reliance on speculative capital is directly connected to its turn to imperialist violence. "Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital," Lenin wrote, "is the highest stage of capitalism in which this separation [of money capital from productive capital] reaches vast proportions. The supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier and of the financial oligarchy; it means that a small number of financially 'powerful' states stand out among all the rest."

31. Today, Britain is the rentier state par excellence, one in which "parasitic, decaying capitalism" has reached malignant proportions. Even in the 1920s, Trotsky could still write that "The British bourgeoisie is, broadly speaking, the most perceptive: it has been said long ago that it thinks in centuries and continents. The British bourgeoisie has forged its might over centuries and grown used to looking a long way ahead, and is led by politicians who concentrate the whole past experience of their class in their consciousness." Today, no trace of this perspicacity remains. Led by political nonentities, the ruling elite relies on desperate short-term manoeuvres and improvisations in both foreign and domestic policy, which, far from securing its imperial ambitions, only deepen its crisis, above all by exacerbating class antagonisms.

The social polarisation in Britain

32. In addition to the pursuit of its geostrategic interests, British imperialism is driven to war as a means of channelling raging social tensions outwards. The transformation of the UK into an on-shore tax haven has witnessed the emergence of a modern-day financial aristocracy. UK stock prices have risen by 50 percent since 2009. With the most billionaires per head of population in the world, the top 1 percent, or 600,000 people, possess more wealth than the poorest 55 percent of the population, or 33 million people. Just the five richest families in the UK are wealthier than the bottom 20 percent, the 12.6 million people living below the poverty line. Wealth inequality has risen four times faster in the seven years after 2008, compared with the seven years before, as the gargantuan fortunes of the rich are fed by the systematic impoverishment of the broad mass of the population.

33. Almost one million public sector jobs have been destroyed since 2010, while health, education and social service budgets have been handed over to the private sector. More than 13 million people are living in poverty, including almost one-third of all children. In 2012 the international charity Save the Children, which traditionally directs aid to humanitarian disasters in developing countries, raised a financial appeal for families in poverty in the UK for the first time in its near 100-year history. The "working poor" make up the largest number of those in poverty. An estimated 5.5 million people are eking out an existence on low paid, zero-hour contracts, while workers have suffered the most protracted squeeze on their incomes since the 1870s. Real wages have fallen for more than four years, and by a total of more than 15 percent since 2008, if inflation is taken into account, with the poorest tenth of the population suffering a staggering 38 percent decrease in their net income. The 10 years leading up to 2020 will be the first decade since records began that will see a rise in absolute poverty, affecting three and a half million households. Household debt in 2013 was 150 percent of national income, and by 2014 had risen to 170 percent. Combined with cuts in welfare benefits, this desperate situation has led to an explosion in the numbers resorting to charitable food banks.

34. Young people have been especially hard hit. Three-quarters of a

million 16-24 year olds, one in six, are without work, and one in three of these have been jobless for more than 12 months. The figure would be far higher were it not for the fact that young people are being driven off the welfare rolls and mandatory education or training up to age 18 is being introduced. Training most often means bogus apprenticeships lasting two years, with youth paid as little as £2.73 an hour. In the case of graduates, it can mean up to a year of unpaid internships in the vain hope of getting a job. Militarisation is particularly directed against the youth. The government's "Military Ethos in Schools" scheme includes programmes to introduce "disengaged pupils" to the armed forces; the setting up of over 100 new cadet troops in schools; plans for military-based Free Schools, and a "Troops-to-Teachers" project to bring army veterans into classrooms to enforce discipline.

35. This social polarisation has led to the discrediting of virtually every national institution, from parliament and its parties to the media, judiciary, the police and the trade unions. This has been compounded by years during which all manner of criminality among the rich has gone unpunished—including the Libor and Forex scandals and the *News of the World* phone hacking, from which the Murdochs emerged unscathed. All the parliamentary parties are regarded as the bought and paid for representatives of the financial oligarchy, with Labour indistinguishable from the Tories. Less than one percent of the electorate belongs to any of the three main parties, while more than four in 10 say they would never vote for any of them. Trade union membership has collapsed to just 6.5 million, as time and again the unions have acted as policemen for the government and corporations.

36. Faced with this gulf between the classes, the bourgeoisie is strengthening the state and clamping down on internal dissent. It regards this as critical under conditions where funding for its military endeavours demands a further onslaught on living standards and social provision. The declaration of a "war on terror" has spearheaded a raft of legislation that has collectively dismantled centuries-old civil liberties. So eviscerated is bourgeois democracy that parliament's answer to Edward Snowden's exposure of the vast spy network deployed by the US and Britain against their own citizens was to fast track the Data Retention and Investigative Powers Act, providing new powers of state surveillance. Anyone who tries to alert the public to these dangers is hounded and criminalized, as Snowden, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, and David Miranda can attest.

The threatened break-up of the UK

37. The September 18, 2014 referendum on Scottish independence underscored that the UK is now as much a "failed state" as any of the oppressed nations it targets for regime change. In the space of a few weeks, support for separatism rose to an unprecedented 45 percent and, at one point, was even predicted to hold a majority—provoking international concern, a plunge in the value of the pound and fears of breakaway movements being boosted elsewhere.

38. The near break-up of the state that provided the birthplace of the industrial revolution is an indictment not just of British, but of world capitalism. Contrary to the nationalist mythmaking of Scotland's "historic" oppression, the Act of Union in 1707 was the end product of the English bourgeois revolution. It laid the basis for a massive expansion of the productive forces and Britain's rise as *the* global power, in which the Scottish bourgeoisie played a full part. British capitalism has now come full circle, with competing sections of the bourgeoisie fighting over the division of national assets.

39. Having eroded any basis for economic life outside of manic speculation in London, and having gutted the welfare provisions that once provided for social cohesion, none of the major parties was able to make a positive case for preserving the UK. This enabled the Scottish National Party (SNP) to mount a thoroughly dishonest campaign, presenting independence as a means of escaping the savage cuts and illegal military

actions of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and its Labour predecessor. In reality, the policy of the SNP is to maintain membership in the war-mongering institutions of NATO and the European Union, while offering up its proposed Scottish state to the major corporations as a low wage, low tax investment platform.

40. The majority No vote has in no way resolved the crisis of the British nation state. Rather, continued demands for greater powers for Scotland are being used to cultivate English chauvinism and to accelerate plans for devolution across the country. The underlying objective is to finally divest central government of any responsibility to fund social welfare measures and maintain national wage rates and working conditions. But, as Abraham Lincoln warned, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

41. Everywhere, the bourgeoisie is cultivating nationalist forces, whether the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain, the National Front in France, the Sweden Democrats, True Finns or Jobbik in Hungary. All these parties promote anti-immigrant measures, blaming the social problems created by capitalism on the most oppressed and vulnerable sections of the working class. A particular effort is made to whip up hostility towards Muslims, in line with the war propaganda of the imperialist powers. The emergence of separatist tendencies in Catalonia, Belgium, Italy and elsewhere is part of this same reactionary development. Exploiting the betrayals of the social democratic parties and the trade unions, their promotion of national divisions is directed against a unified movement of the working class against the social counter-revolution now underway.

The crisis of the European Union

42. In Europe, efforts to create a united, harmonious continent under bourgeois rule have failed. The EU has been exposed as a mechanism through which dominant states, mainly Germany, police the continent on behalf of the banks and major corporations. Weaker countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland have been devastated and class tensions everywhere have been brought to a breaking point. According to the European Union Institute for Security Studies, the main threat to “security” is a violent “conflict between unequal socioeconomic classes in global society.” The priority must be to protect the rich, it states, since “the percentage of the population who were poor and frustrated would continue to be very high, the tensions between this world and the world of the rich would continue to increase, with corresponding consequences.”

43. Resolving the “German question” has been fundamental to British foreign policy for over a century. It was Winston Churchill who, in 1946, advocated the creation of a United States of Europe as a means of stabilising the continent by containing Germany in a federal European structure, balanced by France and the smaller states. The aim was to prevent the re-emergence of Germany or any other European country as a major competitor, while Britain—which would remain outside—could maintain its global position through its Commonwealth relations and military alliance with the US. Churchill’s wartime advisor, Hastings Ismay, outlined the fundamental imperative when summarising NATO’s goal as “To keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down.”

44. However, Britain could not stay outside the then European Economic Community indefinitely, finally joining in 1973. Its efforts were directed at preventing the emergence of Europe as a political entity. German reunification in 1990 proved to be the end game of this strategy. For the past quarter-century, British imperialism has fought a rearguard action, seeking to maintain the European Union as a free-trade zone while opposing all moves towards political union. However, the very measures advanced as a means of economically unifying the continent while disciplining Germany have had the opposite effect. Especially following the 2008 crash, the euro currency and other pan-European mechanisms have only served to strengthen German domination of the continent.

45. This has created deep divisions in the British ruling class, expressed

in the rise and promotion of UKIP and its de facto political alliance with the anti-European wing of the Tories. Under conditions of widespread opposition to the anti-democratic EU and its austerity programme, the prospect of a referendum on Britain’s membership has caused consternation in business circles. The EU is Britain’s largest trading partner and exiting it would leave the UK unable to oppose measures that could severely impact on the City of London. Exiting would also severely affect Britain’s relationship with the US, which has made plain its opposition to such a course of action. Alienated from both Europe and the US, any attempt to maintain British capitalism’s global standing would be gravely undermined.

46. The attempt of nationalist, right-wing parties to hijack popular opposition to the EU must be answered by the mobilisation of the British and European working class on the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe. This, Trotsky insisted, was the essential political form “of the struggle of the European proletariat for power”. The task facing the working class, he explained, was to give expression to the “deeply progressive tendency of modern economic life towards a planned organisation throughout our continent, and further, all over the globe. Imperialism is the capitalist-thievish expression of this tendency of modern economy to tear itself completely away from the idiocy of national narrowness, as it did previously with regard to local and provincial confinement... From the standpoint of historical development as well as from the point of view of the tasks of social democracy, the tendency of modern economy is fundamental, and it must be guaranteed the fullest opportunity of executing its truly liberating historical mission: to construct the united world economy, independent of national frames, states and tariff barriers, subject only to the peculiarities of the soil and natural resources, to climate and the requirements of division of labour.”

The pseudo-left champions of militarism and nationalism

47. Opposition to militarism and war requires a consistent political struggle against the pseudo-left tendencies such as the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party and Left Unity that act as apologists for imperialism. The social layers that once dominated the anti-war movement now constitute a privileged petty-bourgeois stratum. For decades, they have not merely been insulated from the decline in the social position of the working class, but have benefited from the speculative orgy on the stock markets, the property boom and the privatisation of public service provision. This gives them a vested interest in the intensified exploitation of the working class at home and in securing the ability of the major banks and corporations to do so on a global scale. Their desire to preserve the social order from which they derive personal benefit translates into the open repudiation of socialism and tacit support for the police role played by the UN, NATO and the major powers.

48. In 2003, the Euston Manifesto in support of “humanitarian” intervention into Iraq involved just a handful of prominent “left” figures. Today they have been joined almost to a man by their former critics in the Stop the War Coalition. In Libya, Syria and Ukraine, the pseudo-left groups have functioned as ardent champions of imperialist-inspired “opposition” movements and their “right” to seek direct military assistance from the Western powers. Their class standpoint was summed up by Socialist Workers Party leader Alex Callinicos, who condemned “knee-jerk anti-imperialism.” His injunction confirmed the shift by the fake-left directly into the camp of imperialist reaction. In Denmark, the Red-Green Alliance voted in parliament to back Danish military involvement in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria. This included the support of MPs affiliated to the Pabloite Socialistisk Arbejderparti (Socialist Workers Party), on the grounds that “there is a temporary coincidence of interests between imperialism and socialists on the simple issue of fighting IS.” Since then, the pseudo-left in every country have taken up the demand for their respective governments to “arm the Kurds”. This is a transparent cover for the strategy being pursued by US and

British imperialism, of creating yet another proxy force on the ground. It opens the door for imperialist intervention, not only in Iraq and Syria, but in Iran and throughout the region.

49. A key means through which the pseudo-left seek to legitimise US and European aggression is through the false characterisation of Russia and China as imperialist countries. This tears their development out of all historical context, in order to condition public opinion to accept the provocations of the imperialist powers in Europe, Asia and internationally. The reintroduction of capitalism in both countries was the outcome of the nationalist policies pursued by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Their subsequent development will be shaped by the efforts of finance capital to reduce them to colonial status, not by their rise as new centres of imperialist power. Representing the interests of a tiny layer of capitalists and oligarchs, neither Moscow nor Beijing has any genuine independence from imperialism. They are both incapable of principled opposition to the machinations of the US and Europe. The Socialist Equality Party is implacably opposed to the bourgeois regimes in China and Russia. But our opposition is rooted in the fight to mobilise the working class as an independent political force on the basis of a socialist programme.

50. There is, in fact, a permanent coincidence of interests between the pseudo-left and the bourgeoisie. In the Scottish referendum they acted as foot soldiers for the SNP, dressing up separatism in progressive colours and rewriting history to portray Scotland as a nation oppressed by England. Their integration into official politics was epitomised by Scottish Socialist Party leader Colin Fox's position on the advisory board of the Yes Scotland campaign, which would have made him part of the team sent to London to negotiate a division of national assets post separation. Railing against the creation of the UK, the pseudo-left never address its most significant result—the forging of the British working class in the course of centuries of unified struggle against a common enemy. Instead, Fox dismissed “the classic left argument that Scottish independence would undermine the unity of the British working class” as “for us, an out of date formulation.”

51. This apologia for nationalism has nothing to do with Marxism, socialism or the working class. It puts the pseudo-left in the same political trench as numerous far-right groups. In the aftermath of the referendum, they are demanding that the 2015 general election be transformed into a plebiscite on separation. Meanwhile, Left Unity has stressed the need to “advocate a new constitutional settlement for England; we should campaign for an English republic”. This echoes pro-Labour figures such as Billy Bragg and Owen Jones, who argue that “Englishness” should no longer be the exclusive preserve of the right wing. The outlook of them all was summed up by Solidarity Scotland's Tommy Sheridan, who declared that “internationalism is ‘inter’ and ‘nationalism’...a collective of nationalisms.”

The tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

52. Only one social force can prevent a new world war—the working class. The very process of global economic integration that has undermined capitalism has, at the same time, vastly strengthened its gravedigger—the more than three-billion-strong international proletariat. It is this class, which owes no allegiance to any nation, which alone is capable of putting an end to the profit system and building a socialist world.

53. A new pre-revolutionary period has opened up, analogous to the years leading up to 1914. The objective maturing of this crisis poses the question of socialism or barbarism. The answer will be determined in the realm of politics. Everything depends upon the working class being armed with the necessary programme and perspective to take on and defeat the ruling class and its political agencies. As Trotsky wrote on the eve of World War Two, “The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.” The resolution of this crisis depends on the actions and decisions of the revolutionary party.

54. The entire history of the socialist movement has been bound up with the struggle against militarism and war. The great betrayal of the parties of the Second International in supporting their own ruling classes in the First World War sounded its death knell. The struggle against that betrayal, led by Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg and Liebknecht, gave birth to a new and revolutionary socialist movement, and laid the basis for the Russian Revolution in 1917. The task posed before the working class today is to complete the work begun by the Bolsheviks of abolishing national divisions and capitalist property relations through the reorganisation of the world by means of social revolution.

55. The Socialist Equality Party, British section of the ICFI, bases its struggle on the political principles laid down by Lenin and the Bolsheviks and defended and continued by Trotsky and the Fourth International. The struggle against war requires a struggle against the entire bourgeois order—to be waged by the methods of class struggle.

56. The Socialist Equality Party will seek by all appropriate means to mobilise political opposition to war, above all through the work of the *World Socialist Web Site* in educating the most advanced workers and youth, and recruiting and developing new cadres based upon the historic legacy of the Marxist movement. All the basic issues involved in the fight against war—the abolition of the standing army, the dismantling of the military-intelligence apparatus and the withdrawal of all British forces from overseas—must be placed at the centre of a resolute turn by the party to the working class, and especially its younger generation, in defence of its social and democratic rights.

57. Writing in 1916, Lenin stressed, “The fight against imperialism is a sham and humbug unless it is inseparably bound up with the fight against opportunism.” On this basis, he waged an unrelenting struggle to expose and break with the majority leadership of the parties of the Second International that had lined up in support of the first imperialist slaughter. Today, it requires the struggle against all those who seek to tie the working class to the bourgeoisie and a rotting capitalist system—from the trade unions and the Labour “left” to the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left tendencies that act as specialist opponents of socialism.

58. The Socialist Equality Party stands for a workers' state and a socialist Britain. Under conditions of the profound degree of global economic and political integration, this can be won and defended only as part of a collective offensive by the European working class. The Socialist Equality Party is resolutely opposed to all forms of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, including that directed against immigrants and asylum seekers who are the immediate victims of imperialism's twin policies of austerity and military violence.

59. The most powerful answer to the warmongering of the major powers is the unified political struggle waged by the Socialist Equality Party and its co-thinkers in Europe and internationally. This congress of the SEP endorses the September 2014 resolution of our German comrades at their special conference against war. The stand taken by the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit against the revival of German militarism will find a powerful resonance in Britain and throughout the continent.

60. The Socialist Equality Party pledges to devote itself to the building of sections of the ICFI throughout Europe. This assumes a life and death character. The working class must not only break decisively with the rotten labour bureaucracy, but also begin the task of constructing the necessary alternative. The ICFI, by virtue of its history and programme, alone offers such an alternative. As the IC resolution concludes; “The building of the Fourth International, under the leadership of the International Committee, is *the* central strategic question.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact