Build the Socialist Equality Party (France)!

15 November 2016

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is founding the Socialist Equality Party as its section in France. The SEP fights to win workers in France to the program of world socialist revolution advanced by the ICFI, based on the unbroken continuity of its defense of Trotskyism and the heritage of classical Marxism. It is confident that, amid the escalating world crisis of capitalism and its impact on the French political establishment, this program will win growing support.

A quarter century ago, as the Stalinist bureaucracy liquidated the USSR, apologists for capitalism claimed that the supposed end of the communist danger ensured peace, prosperity, and democracy. What capitalism has, instead, accomplished over the last 25 years is to remind workers internationally why their class brothers and sisters in Russia were compelled to overthrow the system a century ago in the October 1917 Revolution, led by the Bolshevik Party.

The global economic collapse triggered by the 2008 Wall Street crash and the initial revolutionary response of the world proletariat—the mass uprisings of 2011 in Egypt and Tunisia—vastly accelerated the imperialist powers' drive to re-divide the world. A rising tide of imperialist war that surrounds Europe, from the Middle East and Africa to Eastern Europe and Asia, threatens to explode into a new world war.

At home, European capitalism has repudiated the pacifist and reformist guise it adopted during the Cold War in order to counter the political and ideological challenge posed by the existence of the USSR. The European Union (EU) ruthlessly imposes its austerity diktat across the continent, tearing up social rights while handing out trillion-euro bailouts to the banks and setting up the legal and surveillance infrastructure of a police state. The basic purpose of this police surveillance infrastructure is to violently repress workers' protests against austerity.

The political situation in France is characterized by a vast contradiction. The revolutionary traditions of the French proletariat were a key contributor to the birth and development of Marxian socialism nearly two centuries ago. The October Revolution found powerful support in the French working class, and the main revolutionary struggles of the proletariat in 20th century France were, themselves, key strategic experiences of the international working class. Yet today, as world capitalism staggers under the weight of the escalating war drive and the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression, no political tendency in France outside of the ICFI sets as its aim the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the working class and the building of socialism.

Instead, the forces that have dominated "left" politics since 1968 are bitterly hostile to socialism and the working class. Popular anger is erupting against the reactionary agenda of war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights, pursued by the Socialist Party (PS) and its political satellites over an entire historical epoch. It is ever clearer that the founding of the PS in 1969, the decades-long collapse of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), and the domination of official "far left" politics by figures from the post-1968 student movement, have left workers totally disenfranchised.

As Hollande himself told a meeting of London bankers during his election campaign in 2012, "Today there are no more communists in France. The left liberalized the economy and opened markets to finance and privatization. There is nothing to fear."

For decades, the PS and its allies sought to redefine "left" politics in line with the lifestyle concerns of affluent sections of the middle class. They promoted not opposition to imperialism, but support for its "humanitarian" wars; not class struggle, but "social dialogue" between the trade union bureaucracy and big business; not international workers' solidarity, but Islamophobia and nationalism. To the extent that these forces are allowed to posture as representatives of socialism, they only drive angry and desperate voters behind the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

But the class struggle brooks no interruption. The existing parties are political tools of the ruling class, so the critical task is the building of a revolutionary alternative for the working class. The SEP is fighting to develop as the mass vanguard party of the working class, basing itself on the continuity of the ICFI's struggle for Trotskyism against social democracy, Stalinism and petty-bourgeois anti-Marxism.

The ruling class has been unable to eradicate all memory of Trotsky and Trotskyism in France. These are imperishably associated with opposition to Stalinism's betrayal of the revolutionary opportunities in 20th century France: the 1936 general strike, the liberation from Nazi occupation in 1944, and the 1968 general strike.

The SEP is aware, however, that simply declaring itself to be Trotskyist will not win over the masses of workers and youth, or make clear the content of the SEP's program. For 45 years, Trotskyism has been falsely associated in France with the descendants of petty-bourgeois renegades from Trotskyism, who operate on the periphery or within the PS. The ICFI has not had a French section since 1971, when Pierre Lambert's Internationalist Communist Organization (OCI—today the Independent Democratic Workers Party—POID) split with the Socialist Labour League (SLL) in Britain, then the ICFI's leading section. The OCI joined an international milieu of petty-bourgeois groups—including, in France, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR—today the New Anticapitalist Party—NPA) and Workers Struggle (LO)—against which the ICFI had been founded in 1953. That such parties offer no alternative to the PS was recently underscored by the role of their Greek ally, Syriza. After forming a government in Greece last year, Syriza slavishly implemented the EU's austerity diktat.

The SEP fights to clarify advanced workers on the irreconcilable opposition between the ICFI's Trotskyist struggle for proletarian internationalism and these pseudo-left parties. The SEP's attitude to them is implacably hostile. It does not consider any of these organizations to be Trotskyist or organizations that can be pressured to adopt Trotskyist policies. It rejects with contempt their accusations that the SEP is "sectarian," by which they mean that it struggles for political principles. The SEP bases its opposition to them on the historical and political lessons of the decades of revolutionary struggle conducted by the ICFI and its forebears.

The PCF and the bankruptcy of Stalinism

From the end of World War II to the 1968 general strike, the leading party in the French working class was the Communist Party of France (PCF). It used its close ties to the Kremlin and its emergence to the leadership of the armed resistance movement against the Nazi Occupation

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during World War II, to posture as the inheritor of the October Revolution in France. It exploited this prestige to promote a nationalist outlook and betray the great revolutionary opportunities in 20th century France. Over the last half-century, it has been discredited by its betrayal of the 1968 general strike, its support for and participation in PS governments, and its backing for the Kremlin's restoration of capitalism in the USSR. Its record has vindicated Trotsky's critique of Stalinism as a counterrevolutionary and anti-Marxist reaction to the perspective of world socialist revolution.

In 1935, the Stalinized Third International adopted the strategy of supporting bourgeois parties in Popular Front alliances, consciously abandoning the struggle for socialist revolution outside the USSR. This strategy, which flowed from the Soviet bureaucracy's repudiation of international revolution and its adoption of the theory of "socialism in one country" in the USSR, directly violated a cardinal principle of Marxism: the need to establish the political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie. It produced terrible defeats internationally. In Spain, a Popular Front government suppressed workers' uprisings and led the Spanish Republic to defeat in the struggle against the fascist rebellion of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. The French Popular Front government rode out the 1936 general strike, which the Stalinists sold out for concessions agreed with French business federations, and crushed the strike wave that continued until 1938.

Shortly after the 1936 French general strike, Stalin launched the Moscow Trials, which framed the surviving Old Bolshevik leaders of the October Revolution as terrorists and fascists. The trials paved the way for the Great Purges and the political genocide of Marxists inside the Communist International, which culminated in the assassination of Trotsky. As the Communist Party in France isolated the strikes that followed the 1936 general strike and allowed the state to crush them, it savagely denounced Trotsky and attacked his supporters. Its top leadership published slanders against Trotsky and the Old Bolsheviks in the PCF daily *L'Humanité*, and helped organize the GPU's assassination of Trotskyists internationally.

Stalinism blocked the European proletariat's last chance to avert the devastation and mass slaughter of World War II through social revolution. It paved the way in France for the coming to power of the fascist Vichy regime, as the bourgeoisie went over to defeatism after the Nazi invasion in 1940. The National Assembly voted full powers to Marshal Philippe Pétain, who oversaw collaboration with the Nazis. The PCF was forced underground after it approved the Stalin-Hitler non-aggression pact in 1939.

In line with the Kremlin's counterrevolutionary policy of splitting the world, with US and British imperialism, into spheres of influence during World War II, the PCF betrayed the revolutionary opportunity provided by the liberation of France from Nazi occupation. It used its dominant role in the French Resistance to help General Charles de Gaulle, together with US and British authorities, set up a capitalist Fourth Republic and cover up the crimes of European fascism. Adopting de Gaulle's misleading claim that France "resisted," and blocking the legal pursuit of the collaborationists, the PCF disbanded factory committees into co-management bodies controlled by the bosses, dissolved Resistance militias into de Gaulle's army, and contributed ministers to de Gaulle's government. It allowed colonial wars to proceed, notably in Indochina and then Algeria and proved to be a pillar of stability in every crisis of the Fourth Republic, selling out the mass insurrectionary strikes of 1947 and the general strike of 1953. On this basis, it enjoyed broad support among intellectuals, who sought to give their theorizing a "left" or even Marxist coloration, but who opposed a socialist revolution.

The false identification of the October Revolution with the PCF ultimately had fatal consequences for the French workers' movement as it emerged from the Liberation. Millions of workers flocked to the unions and the PCF, under conditions where capitalism had been deeply discredited by the crimes of fascism. However, they were joining organizations poisoned by a nationalist outlook, whose false claims to represent revolution were based on historical lies: the cover-up of the crimes of fascism in France, the PCF's unbending defense of the Moscow Trials, and the denial of the role of Trotskyism as the continuation of the October Revolution.

The Algerian war of 1954–1962 soon exposed the reactionary role of the political establishment of the Fourth Republic, of which the PCF was an integral part. When Premier Guy Mollet, of the social democratic French Section of the Workers International (SFIO), asked for war credits and special powers, the PCF voted for them. It then failed to oppose an aborted coup against Mollet, which returned de Gaulle to power in 1958 and led to the founding of the Fifth Republic. France's resort to mass torture and the murder of hundreds of thousands of Algerians exposed the post-war regime. The methods of the French paratroopers and security forces in Algeria recalled those used, just over a decade before, by the fascist authorities in France. Moreover, as anti-war protests met with deadly repression, Paris prefect and former Vichy official Maurice Papon oversaw a bloody massacre of the October 17, 1961 protest of Algerians, called by the National Liberation Front (FLN).

The eruption of the May–June 1968 general strike in France was a high point in a wave of working class struggles internationally that shattered the post-war capitalist equilibrium and, in France, undermined the PCF and the de Gaulle regime. A bloody police assault on student protesters at the Sorbonne triggered a mass response in the proletariat. Over ten million workers went on strike, as red flags were raised over factories across the country, and the French economy ground to a halt. When de Gaulle made an urgent trip to visit his generals in Baden-Baden, he found that troops under their command could not be relied upon to march on Paris to crush the protests.

The international working class demonstrated its immense revolutionary potential. From 1968 to 1975, mass workers' struggles, anti-colonial uprisings and youth protests spread throughout the world. The collapse of dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece, the resignation of US President Richard Nixon, and Washington's defeat in the Vietnam War, amid mass strikes and protests in the United States, shook global capitalism to its foundations.

The main obstacle to socialist revolution was the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. In 1968 in France, the PCF and CGT again blocked a struggle for power by the working class, propping up the de Gaulle government, negotiating wage concessions in the Grenelle Accords, and, over the course of several weeks, organizing a return to work. While the PCF managed to halt a revolution, it undermined illusions that it was a revolutionary party.

The rise of the Socialist Party

What emerged from the discrediting of the PCF by the events of 1968 was not, however, a mass revolutionary party in the working class, but the PS. Founded at congresses held in 1969 and 1971 at Alfortville and Epinay, from the very beginning it was not a socialist party, but a party of finance capital. Nor was it a new version of the SFIO. Launching such a party would, in itself, have been a reactionary initiative, as the SFIO was a staunch servant of the bourgeoisie: it supported World War I and opposed the October Revolution; most of its deputies voted for Pétain in 1940; and it waged war in Algeria. However, the PS was a far broader coalition.

The PS was designed as an electoral vehicle for François Mitterrand, a former Vichy official and justice minister in the Mollet government, who had maintained close ties to leaders of the Vichy police, such as René Bousquet, who collaborated in the Holocaust. It included a rump of the SFIO; Mitterrand's Convention of Republican Institutions, which incorporated forces from the old Radical Party tied to Vichy; social-Catholic forces, such as the supporters of *Esprit* magazine; and "left"

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intellectuals, ex-Stalinists and ex-Trotskyists from the United Socialist Party (PSU). The PS was a bourgeois party recruited mainly from the state machine, the media and academia. It was compelled to present itself as "socialist," however, under conditions of an upsurge of protest among workers and youth, in which the PCF and the Trotskyist movement retained influence.

Its goal, as Mitterrand later explained to approving US officials, was to destroy the PCF's electoral base, become the main "left" party, and take power. It posed as socialist by criticizing the PCF and the historical crimes of Stalinism revealed in the 1960s and 1970s. These criticisms were not made from the standpoint of the working class, based on Trotsky's defense of Soviet democracy against the Stalinist bureaucracy, or a Trotskyist critique of the PCF's counterrevolutionary role. Rather, the PS promoted anti-communism and illusions in bourgeois democracy.

The PS exploited the rightward shift of the PCF, which had been staggered by the 1968 general strike. The PCF reacted to the revolutionary struggles of 1968–1975 by signing a Common Program with the PS and the bourgeois Radical Left Movement in 1972, and renouncing the dictatorship of the proletariat in 1976, amid the "Euro-communist" turn. The Common Program, while it wrapped itself in the aura of the social concessions temporarily granted by the Popular Front in 1936, set the stage not for social gains, but for an entire epoch of social war on the working class.

Above all, the PS relied on the war on Marxism waged by broad sections of the French intelligentsia. The "left" intelligentsia, which had largely moved from the PCF to Maoism after the Algerian war and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech admitting Stalin's crimes, went even further to the right after the 1968 general strike. Terrified by their brush with social revolution, they abandoned their flirtation with Marxism under the aegis of the PCF, mounting, instead, a media and political campaign in support of the PS.

Various forces, from the "new philosophers" led by Bernard Henri-Lévy, to the post-structuralist Michel Foucault and the historian of the 1789 Revolution, François Furet, attacked "totalitarianism" and presented it as the inevitable result of social revolution. While the concept of "totalitarianism" made a reactionary amalgam between communism, Stalinism and fascism, the target of this campaign was neither fascism nor the crimes of Stalin. It did not attack ex-Vichy officials in France, such as Bousquet and Mitterrand, or the Kremlin's political genocide against Marxism. Rather, these forces attacked communism and Marxism, based on a right-wing critique of the anti-democratic policies of the Kremlin. They promoted pro-free market dissidents targeted for repression by the Kremlin, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Silent on the crimes of imperialism and hostile to a struggle of the Soviet working class to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy, they built the theoretical framework for "left" support for anticommunism, capitalist restoration in the USSR, and, later, for "humanitarian" wars waged by imperialism against ex-colonial countries, whose leaders were also presented as "totalitarian."

They also attacked the struggle for workers' power, advocating "self-management" instead. Initially linked to a failed attempt by workers to take over and operate the bankrupt Lip watch-making plant, calls for "self-management" took on a broad, anti-Marxist content. PSU leader Michel Rocard noted that the concept was "ambiguous," but had the advantage that it "is accompanied by a rejection of the type of regime that the USSR imposes." More bluntly, *Esprit* warned that social struggle based on "the principles… of socialism produces a totalitarian state," and instead hailed self-management as the "castration of the desire for power."

This set the stage for Mitterrand to come to power in 1981, with PCF support. Exploiting mass discontent with the impact of the 1970s economic crisis and the austerity policies of conservative President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Mitterrand promised to nationalize key firms and boost purchasing power. Once in power, however, he soon repudiated his program. Faced with a predictable flight of capital from France, he refused to impose capital controls, instead proclaiming an "austerity turn," slashing social spending and jobs.

Mitterrand's betrayals of the PS's election promises produced shock, anger and disillusionment among workers. Ultimately, however, since no party in France fought for a politically independent, revolutionary policy against the PS, this opposition found no organized expression. In this surreal situation, as the class gulf between workers and the privileged forces in the student movement and the state bureaucracy became ever more enormous, the labor movement began to disintegrate. The trade unions collapsed, with strike activity and union membership plummeting, and the unions emerging as a corporate police force, financed overwhelmingly by business. The radicalized petty-bourgeoisie set up a variety of organizations controlled by the PS and its political allies, such as SOS-Racism and the student unions. These have served to monitor the population and, when required, stage limited protests as a safety valve for discontent.

The crisis of the Trotskyist movement in France and the OCI's split with the ICFI

If the party that came to dominate in France after 1968 was the PS, a party that attacked the PCF from the right, this was, above all, due to the crisis of the Trotskyist movement and the betrayal of the OCI, which blocked the emergence of an alternative on the left. The OCI broke with the ICFI and adopted the perspective of the Union of the Left, seeking a political and electoral alliance with the PS and the PCF. While it claimed this perspective would produce a united front of workers' organizations, it in fact produced an anti-working class regroupment, dominated by the PS, a bourgeois party.

This was a flagrant repudiation of the struggle for the political independence of the working class and the struggle against bourgeois influences within the Trotskyist movement itself, which was at the heart of the work of Trotsky and the ICFI. By adopting the Union of the Left perspective, the OCI helped create the political framework of "left" bourgeois governments in France over the last half-century, joining a broad petty-bourgeois milieu oriented to the PS.

This has included the Workers Struggle (LO) group, founded in 1956 as the syndicalist organization Voix Ouvrière, and renamed LO in 1968. It included members of a group active in the 1930s and 1940s led by David Barta. The Barta group claimed loyalty to Trotskyism, but refused to join the FI on the anti-Marxist grounds that the working class would struggle only on a national basis, and that the FI was therefore a petty-bourgeois organization. While the Barta group mounted joint actions with the FI, fighting for the Renault strike that triggered the 1947 mass strikes, it maintained close ties to anarcho-syndicalist circles. The LO has been presented as Trotskyist by the media and the political elite in the presidential campaigns of its candidate Arlette Laguiller, but it is a reliable satellite of the PS. LO's nationalist and anarcho-syndicalist orientation underlies its role in covering up union betrayals of workers' struggles, inciting anti-Muslim hatreds by backing bans on the veil and the burqa, and tacitly supporting French imperialism's foreign policy.

The ICFI was founded in 1953 in direct struggle against the Pabloite revisionist tendency in the Fourth International (FI) from which the LCR/NPA descends. This tendency emerged within the FI's International Secretariat in Paris, led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, who initially expelled the majority of the French section for opposing their political line. The ICFI intervened to defend Trotskyism against Pablo and Mandel, who insisted that the FI liquidate itself into the Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist parties that had emerged in the leadership of the mass labor movements and anti-colonial uprisings after World War II. The Pabloites predicted that "war-revolution," fought between the Stalinist and imperialist regimes, would replace revolution through the independent mobilization of the working class, as in Russia in October 1917;

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victorious “war-revolutions” would produce dictatorships, like the Stalinist regimes in China and Eastern Europe, lasting for centuries, from which socialism would develop in the distant future.

History soon invalidated the predictions of Pablo and Mandel. Less than four decades later, the Stalinist regimes in the USSR, China and Eastern Europe had restored capitalism, and nationalist regimes in the ex-colonial countries had thrown themselves open to imperialist finance capital.

Well before then, events demonstrated the counterrevolutionary role of Pabloism. The ICFI’s split with the Pabloites occurred only months after the PCF’s sell-out of the 1953 general strike, to which the Pabloites had adapted themselves. The bankruptcy of the Algerian bourgeois regime, which had emerged from the war in 1962, also exposed the Pabloite perspective of orienting to the bourgeoisie in the colonial countries. Unlike the OCI, which unsuccessfully tried to develop an Algerian Trotskyist movement via discussions with elements in the Algerian National Movement of Messali Hadj, the Pabloites did not even attempt to develop a movement in Algeria. Rather, they printed counterfeit money and helped arm the National Liberation Front (FLN), for whom Pablo briefly served as an advisor, before leaving the country after the Boumédiène coup.

The ICFI opposed Pabloism, which adapted to the prevailing Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist forces, explaining that it constituted a petty-bourgeois attack on Marxism. By reducing politics to the conflict between imperialist and Stalinist governments, Pabloism consigned the international working class, the central force in classical Marxism, to irrelevance. Moreover, it adopted many views with large currency in the French bourgeoisie. Pabloism’s virulent opposition to the continued independent existence of the Trotskyist movement conformed to widely disseminated petty-bourgeois prejudices against the central political instrument of Marxism: the revolutionary proletarian party.

While the majority of the French section opposed Pabloism, it gradually adopted a skeptical attitude to the history of the ICFI and the Trotskyist movement. At the 1966 Third Congress of the ICFI, it brought with it a delegation from Voix Ouvrière and began advocating “reconstructing” the Fourth International. The formulation “reconstructing” meant a centrist reorientation away from the intransigence that characterized the ICFI’s struggle against Pabloism, and a move toward the broader layer of petty-bourgeois satellites of the social democracy and PCF.

In 1968, the OCI sought to orient student protests to the workers and called a key strike at the Sud Aviation plant in Nantes that helped trigger the general strike. However, it adopted a syndicalist line, calling only for the formation of a central strike committee, regrouping all trade unions and workers’ parties. The British SLL correctly criticized the OCI for not calling for the PCF and the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor (CGT) to take power, in order to raise the issue of state power with the workers, expose the PCF’s counterrevolutionary policy, and place itself in a position to fight for political leadership of the working class. The OCI’s increasingly centrist and skeptical orientation had fatal consequences when the upsurge of radicalism after 1968 produced a sudden influx of new members to the party, primarily drawn from student youth.

In 1971, the SLL and the majority of the sections of the ICFI announced a split with the OCI. The SLL’s criticisms of the OCI’s opportunism were amply justified. This was exemplified in the career of Lionel Jospin, who went from covertly being a member of the OCI and the PS simultaneously, to becoming a top Mitterrand aide and, later, the prime minister of France. Nevertheless, the SLL failed to carry out the split with the necessary clarification of political issues. Nor did it seek to win forces from within the OCI or build a party in France. The premature split, which preempted a discussion of essential political issues, effectively liquidated Trotskyism in France as an organized political tendency over an entire historic epoch, and proved to have serious political consequences for the SLL, itself, in Britain.

During the 1971 split, the OCI defended its syndicalist line in 1968 and its orientation to the PS. It claimed that the SLL’s call for a PCF-CGT government would have meant splitting the working class, isolating the social democratic trade unions where the OCI had support, and cutting across a United Front of workers’ organizations. Its positions not only disregarded the fact that in 1968 the vast majority of militant workers looked to the PCF, not social democratic unions, for a revolutionary policy, it also falsified the class character of the PS, which is a bourgeois party.

The OCI’s entry into a lasting political alliance with the PS was a fundamental repudiation of the perspective of the ICFI. Abandoning the struggle for Trotskyism and the political independence of the working class, the OCI converted itself into a bourgeois party. It adopted the Union of the Left perspective, which proved to be the political framework within which the PS exerted its dominant role, starting with the Mitterrand presidency in 1981. The OCI sent its members into the PS, functioning as a faction of the PS and the union bureaucracies. It played this role not only in France, but also used its influence to set up anti-working class parties internationally, most egregiously in Latin America, where it helped establish the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil. In dissolving themselves politically into such bourgeois parties, the Lambertistes were not trying to win forces to Trotskyism, but to make themselves available to provide political cover for the policies of the French, Brazilian and international bourgeoisie.

The ICFI’s split with the WRP

After its unclarified split with the OCI in 1971, the SLL began to adopt similar policies in Britain. Renaming itself the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), it grew on the basis of popular opposition to the Conservative government of Edward Heath, but began to downplay the ICFI’s struggle against Pabloism. When the Labour Party returned to power in 1974 and the WRP struggled to continue its growth among workers, it sought support elsewhere behind the backs of the rest of the ICFI—in ties with Third World nationalists and factions of the union bureaucracy and political establishment.

In 1982, opposition inside the ICFI to the degeneration of the WRP culminated in the formulation of political and theoretical criticisms of the WRP’s political line by David North, the national secretary of the Workers League, the American party in solidarity with the ICFI. In 1985, after a factional crisis exploded inside the WRP, the ICFI suspended the WRP as its British section and re-admitted those members of the British section who accepted the ICFI’s international authority and perspective. The ICFI published a comprehensive exposure of the WRP, *How the WRP Betrayed Trotskyism*, and David North’s *The Heritage We Defend*, defending the ICFI’s history of struggle for Trotskyism against a vitriolic attack from WRP General Secretary Michael Banda. These documents established how the ICFI defended Trotskyism against the WRP’s adaptation to the Labour and trade union bureaucracies and its embrace of bourgeois nationalism.

The ICFI mounted a powerful political offensive against petty-bourgeois revisionism as the objective conflict between the working class and the old, nationally-oriented bureaucracies of the labor movement, and the petty-bourgeois parties that oriented to them, grew to unprecedented levels. There were union sell-outs of major strikes internationally, including the 1981 PATCO strike in the United States and the 1984–85 British miners’ strike in Europe and, above all, the announcement of the perestroïka free-market reforms by the Soviet regime of Premier Mikhaïl Gorbachev.

The lead-up to the restoration of capitalism in the USSR made clear the class gulf separating the ICFI from rightward-moving petty-bourgeois groups like the LCR and OCI. In line with the major imperialist governments, they hailed perestroïka as a democratic reform by the bureaucracy. The ICFI, alone, based itself on Trotsky’s warning that the

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Stalinist bureaucracy would ultimately move to restore capitalism in the USSR, and warned that Gorbachev's reforms would lead to the restoration of capitalism if the Soviet workers did not overthrow the bureaucracy.

The restoration of capitalism in China and Eastern Europe, and finally the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, marked a historical and political watershed. Trotsky's warnings about the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism, made over a half-century before, were totally vindicated. The European Stalinist parties, which had steadily lost support after 1968, collapsed. Ignoring the industrial and economic disintegration that occurred in the capitalist post-Soviet republics and the rise of a gangster oligarchy, reactionaries declared that this collapse marked the end of history and the final triumph of capitalism.

In opposition to these forces, the ICFI insisted that the restoration of capitalism, while undoubtedly a blow to the international working class, did not spell the end of the epoch of imperialist war and world socialist revolution, which had opened nearly a century before. The dissolution of the USSR had not resolved the fundamental contradictions of capitalism identified by Marxism. Indeed, the same economic processes and geo-strategic conflicts that had undermined the USSR, and pushed the Stalinist regime to restore capitalism, were also undermining the world imperialist system.

The ICFI pointed to the development of economic globalization and transnational corporations that organize international supply chains in a ruthless struggle for maximum profit. These processes made it impossible to pursue economic policy or bargain for wages and conditions on a national level. The ex-colonial bourgeoisies' "national development" strategies, the union bureaucracies' nationally-based bargaining, and Stalinism's autarkic orientation, had all been rendered obsolete. Instead, they all functioned ever-more nakedly as labor contractors, competing to slash workers' pay and conditions in order to offer the greatest profit to international finance capital.

The intensified social crisis went hand in hand with a rising crisis of the global imperialist order. The processes of globalization, and the resulting redistribution of economic power, undermined not only workers' living standards, but also the objective basis of US world hegemony. Despite US imperialism's insane dreams that the disappearance of its superpower rival would allow it to compensate for its relative economic decline by resorting to military force, its attempts to conquer or militarily dominate the Middle East and Central Asia led only to disaster. It was impossible to return to the old, nationally-based forms of economic life. Yet the globalization of capitalism brought all the contradictions, which in previous decades had exploded into world wars and revolutions, to a fever pitch. This was and remains the objective basis for world socialist revolution.

The key issue facing the international working class, however, was the crisis of revolutionary leadership and of political and historical perspective. The ICFI fought to articulate the basis for the development of socialist consciousness in the new epoch, and to bring socialist consciousness into the working class. It worked tirelessly to refute the academic representatives of the post-Soviet school of historical falsification, who denounced Trotsky and insisted that there was no socialist alternative to Stalinism and the dissolution of the USSR.

In 1995, the ICFI's national sections, previously organized as leagues, reorganized themselves as Socialist Equality parties. Underlying this initiative was a change in the conception of the ICFI's relationship to the working class. The ICFI insisted that the turn to openly anti-worker policies by the old, nationally-based organizations, and the disintegration of their base in the working class, made it impossible to fight to reorient the working class by placing demands on these organizations and winning the workers inside them. The SEP (US) explained: "All over the world, the working class is confronted with the fact that the trade unions, parties and even states which it created in an earlier period have been transformed into the direct instruments of imperialism. The days are over when the labor bureaucracies 'mediated' the class struggle and played the role of buffer between the classes… We cannot resolve the crisis of working class leadership by 'demanding' that others provide that leadership. If there is to be a new party, then we must build it."

In 1998, the ICFI launched the *World Socialist Web Site* as an online socialist daily. Through the WSWS, the ICFI's sections collectively articulate a common political line and offer analysis, perspective and leadership to the struggles of the world working class. In the course of more than 18 years of continuous daily publication, the WSWS has established itself as the world's most widely read socialist web site.

The ICFI's struggle against the pseudo-left in France

The ICFI's intense political and theoretical work has formed the basis for its intervention in France. The 1990s and 2000s saw significant class struggles and social protests in France: strikes against pension cuts, including the mass 1995 rail strike, and youth protests against the First Job Contract (CPE) reform. During this period, in response to the collapse of the PCF, layers of workers sought to orient to a Trotskyist alternative. They were blocked, however, by the reactionary role of the LCR, LO and OCI. Having supported capitalist restoration in the USSR, these parties developed closer ties with the desiccated Stalinist and social democratic parties in Europe, and integrated themselves more deeply into the media, academia, and trade union bureaucracies. While posing as "left," they supported imperialist war, social austerity and attacks on democratic rights.

The period since the 2002 presidential election crisis demonstrates their bankruptcy. That year, PS candidate Lionel Jospin was eliminated in the first round and protests erupted against a runoff between the conservative Jacques Chirac and FN candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. The LCR, LO and Workers Party (PT—the ex-OCI) had collectively won three million votes. That same year, international anti-war protests erupted against the illegal US invasion of Iraq, which was ultimately launched in 2003. The LCR, LO and PT proved capable however, only of squandering this opportunity.

The ICFI issued an open letter to the three parties, proposing a campaign for an active boycott of the runoff. Without hiding its political differences with them, the ICFI explained that an active boycott, mobilizing workers in struggle, would best prepare the working class to oppose the policies Chirac would pursue. These parties did not bother to respond, however, simply aligning themselves with the campaign of the PS for a vote for Chirac, supposedly to block neo-fascism from coming to power.

Over the next fourteen years, they followed Chirac and the PS as the ruling elite turned toward neo-fascism and waged a series of neo-colonial wars. Even as the French state dropped its initial opposition to the Iraq war, these supposedly "far left" organizations backed racist anti-Muslim laws against the veil and the burqa. They turned even further to the right after the 2008 financial crash and the initial response of the international proletariat—the 2011 revolutionary uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. When their Greek co-thinkers in Syriza came to power last year, the "far left" supported Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras as he continued imposing EU austerity measures against the people. They supported as "democratic revolutions" not only NATO's wars in Libya and Syria, but a fascist-led putsch in Kiev that installed a far-right, pro-NATO regime in Ukraine that threatens to provoke all-out war with Russia. Such policies have placed the world on the brink of nuclear war and economic collapse.

The ICFI has classified these forces as the "pseudo-left," a tendency based in upper layers of the middle classes and rooted in the degeneration of the post-1968 student movement. They are anti-Marxist, hostile to the working class and to class struggle, and supportive of imperialist war, austerity and police state measures. They will produce only disaster for the working class. At the same time, the explosive discontent building up in the working class with the PS and its pseudo-left allies lays the

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objective political foundation for the development of the SEP as the mass Trotskyist party.

Seventy-eight years ago, the Fourth International issued its founding *Transitional Program* and warned, two years before World War II, of the death agony of capitalism. Once again, capitalism faces an insoluble historical crisis, as all the imperialist powers—staggered by the economic crisis and the implications of the terminal crisis of US hegemony—turn to war and dictatorship. The war danger, grotesque levels of social inequality, and attacks on democratic rights predominate worldwide. As the EU's austerity policies lay bare its reactionary character and neo-fascism rises across Europe, world war threatens to break out from the wars in the Middle East, NATO conflicts with Russia in Eastern Europe, and the US "pivot to Asia" aimed at isolating China. The turn, now as in 1938, is to the international working class and the struggle for socialism.

In its 2014 resolution titled "Socialism and the Struggle against Imperialist War," the ICFI wrote: "Another imperialist bloodbath is not only possible; it is inevitable unless the international working class intervenes on the basis of a revolutionary Marxist program… However, the same contradictions driving imperialism to the brink provide the objective impulse for social revolution." It added, "The building of the Fourth International, under the leadership of the International Committee, is the central strategic question. It is the only conceivable means through which the working class can be unified internationally… The task of the ICFI now is to work for the development of sections in new countries and areas of the world."

On the basis of this perspective and history, the SEP (France) lays out the following principles that will guide its political work.

Principles of the Socialist Equality Party (France)

Internationalism and the struggle for World Socialist Revolution

Accepting the political authority of the ICFI, the SEP seeks to win workers in France to the program of world socialist revolution, led by the ICFI. This revolution signifies the entry of masses of people into conscious political struggle and portends the end of mankind's social organization into classes and, thus, of the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. Its task within France is to mobilize the working class to take political power and establish a workers state, pursuing socialist policies, as part of the United Socialist States of Europe.

Workers' power cannot be established by electing socialists to the structures of the bourgeois state. New organs of participatory democracy, created in the course of mass revolutionary struggles, in order to genuinely represent the working-class majority of the population, must be developed as the foundations of the workers state. Such a state, as it introduces measures essential for the socialist transformation of economic life, would actively promote a vast expansion of democratic, working-class control over decision-making processes. Such changes are possible only in the context of a mass mobilization of the working class, imbued with socialist consciousness. This creates the objective preconditions for the development of a truly democratic, egalitarian and socialist society.

This final objective can be realized only through an international struggle to unify the workers of all countries and create a world federation of workers states, democratically overseeing the use and expansion of the productive forces, created under globally-integrated capitalism, to meet humanity's social needs. As Trotsky wrote, explaining his theory of permanent revolution, "The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word: it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet."

The SEP fights to raise workers' political horizons beyond the borders of France, and to explain that workers' struggles in France are inextricably linked to an emerging process of world socialist revolution, requiring an internationalist strategy and perspective. The SEP fights all attempts to divide the working class through discrimination along lines of race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender or sexual orientation. The SEP defends the right of all refugees and immigrants to live, work, and study in their country of choice, with full citizenship rights. It bases its policies on the unification of the international working class in revolutionary struggle.

The abolition of class society is the task of an entire epoch. The SEP's principles are therefore based on the history of this entire epoch: on Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism's betrayal of the October Revolution, rooted in the substitution of nationalism for internationalism by the Soviet bureaucracy, and on the unbroken international continuity of the ICFI's struggle for Trotskyism.

The crisis of capitalism

Capitalism, and the imperialist world system that develops on its economic foundations, are the main causes of poverty, exploitation, violence and human suffering. The bloody history of the 20th century—including two world wars, innumerable local wars, and fascist dictatorships across Europe—constitutes an unanswerable indictment of capitalism.

The vast productive forces and technological advances of modern society are sufficient to guarantee a high standard of living to the entire population of the world. Yet capitalist society cannot resolve any of its economic, social, ecological or cultural problems. Instead, living conditions are falling for broad masses of people, amid the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Social inequality is attaining grotesque proportions; a few dozen multi-billionaires own more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of the world's population, and the richest 1 percent own as much as the rest of the world.

Human culture, deprived of perspective and hope for the future, is again threatened with the barbarism of fascism and war. The solution to this crisis lies not in the reform of capitalism, for it is beyond reform, but in its overthrow. As feudalism gave way to capitalism, so capitalism must give way to socialism.

The struggle against imperialist war

The crisis of capitalism finds its most violent expression in the spread of imperialist wars of plunder and inter-imperialist rivalries, which again threaten humanity with world war. These conflicts arise from the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, analyzed by Lenin and Trotsky a century ago: between global economy and the nation-state system, and between the social character of productive processes and the private ownership of the means of production. While the means of production operate globally, controlled by transnational corporations, capitalism remains rooted in a system of nation-states that serves as a base of operations from which each country's capitalist class pursues its global interests. The uncontrollable drive of the imperialist powers to seize markets, vital resources, access to cheap labor, spheres of influence and strategic advantage leads inevitably to war.

France is an imperialist power, pursuing its predatory economic and military interests through war and interventions internationally. In the 19th century, it established an empire of tens of millions of colonial slaves across Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Today, as it seeks to reconquer spheres of influence, it is joining in a surge of wars waged by the imperialist powers from the Middle East and Africa to Russia and China, which threatens to unleash a new world war.

The SEP condemns the wars waged by France and all the other imperialist powers, and rejects the fraudulent pretexts, advanced by the imperialists and their pseudo-left apologists, that these interventions are struggles for human rights or against terrorism. It recognizes the basic right of people to defend themselves and their countries against neo-colonial invaders. This principled position does not lessen the SEP's opposition to violent acts against innocent civilians in occupied countries or around the world. Such reactionary acts, which can legitimately be defined as terrorist, enrage and disorient the public, deepen ethnic and

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sectarian tensions, and undermine the struggle for the international unity of the proletariat in revolutionary struggle—the only basis upon which countries can be liberated from imperialist domination. Terrorist attacks play into the hands of the imperialist ruling elites, which use them to legitimize the resort to war.

The SEP encourages and supports the widest protests against imperialist war. It stresses, however, that since the causes of war are embedded in the structure of capitalist society and its political division into nation-states, the struggle against imperialist war can be successful only to the extent that it mobilizes the working class on the basis of an international revolutionary strategy. As the ICFI has written in its statement, "Socialism and the Fight against War:"

* The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

* The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

* The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

* The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism. The permanent war of the bourgeoisie must be answered with the perspective of permanent revolution by the working class, the strategic goal of which is the abolition of the nation-state system and the establishment of a world socialist federation. This will make possible the rational, planned development of global resources and, on this basis, the eradication of poverty and the raising of human culture to new heights.

Defense of democratic rights

The SEP advances and defends all of the democratic rights won over more than two centuries of revolutionary struggle against France's feudal and then capitalist aristocracies. These rights have, however, been drastically eroded, particularly since the dissolution of the USSR, the 2008 economic crisis and France's decision to fully join the so-called "war on terror."

The rehabilitation of far-right forces in Europe, the preparation for the use of the French army against domestic opposition, and mass electronic spying on the people by French and international intelligence agencies, testify to the advanced state of decay of bourgeois democracy. The PS and the pseudo-left, which denounce Marxism and revolution as threats to democracy, have proven to be supporters of police state measures. The danger to democracy comes from the policies of the bourgeoisie and the crisis of capitalism, a historically doomed social system.

The defense of democratic rights is inseparably linked to the struggle for socialism: as there can be no socialism without democracy, there will be no democracy without socialism. The decay of democracy, in France and all the countries with bourgeois democratic traditions, can be fought only in opposition to the entire political establishment through an independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.

The struggle for the political independence of the working class

The struggle for power requires the unconditional political independence of the working class from the parties, political representatives, theoreticians and agents of the capitalist class. The repeated betrayals of revolutionary opportunities in France by Stalinism and the pseudo-left provide classic illustrations of the tragic consequences of a situation where the proletariat is straitjacketed by debilitating alliances with parties representing other class forces. In France, this signifies first and foremost unwavering opposition to the Socialist Party and its various Stalinist and pseudo-left satellites, and a rejection of the lie that these forces represent a lesser evil compared to other bourgeois parties.

The SEP's opposition to this bankrupt political establishment does not imply, however, any obligation to provide support to whatever parties and organizations emerge in opposition to it. The SEP evaluates such tendencies not based on their episodic positions on individual issues, but on their history, program, perspective, social basis and class orientation.

The SEP upholds the fundamental interests of the working class based on a scientific, Marxist understanding of the law-governed nature of capitalism and the political dynamics of class society. This places the SEP in irreconcilable opposition to opportunist politics, which sacrifices the long-term interests of the working class in the pursuit of short-term tactical gains. Opportunism is not, however, simply the product of intellectual and theoretical errors. It is rooted in material forces in capitalist society, and develops within the workers' movement as an expression of class forces hostile to the proletariat. Manifestations of opportunism, such as that of Stalin, which developed in the Bolshevik party in the 1920s, that of Pablo and Mandel, which developed inside the Fourth International in the 1950s, and the OCI's adaptation to the PS in the 1970s, can be traced to the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces on the working class. The struggle against such influences is not a distraction from building the party, but rather the highest point at which the fight for Marxism in the working class is engaged.

The SEP defends the classical Marxist conception, developed by Lenin in the building of the Bolshevik Party and carried forth by Trotsky's struggle to build the Fourth International, that revolutionary socialist consciousness does not develop spontaneously in the working class. This consciousness requires scientific insight into the laws of historical development and of capitalism. This understanding must be introduced into the working class, and that is the principal task of the Marxist movement. Denigration of the struggle for revolutionary consciousness is the stock-in-trade of reactionary academics and political opportunists.

The betrayal of the trade unions

The SEP calls for workers to break with the trade unions. It insists that workers' struggles can be victorious only if they are organized independently of the unions and based on a revolutionary socialist perspective for a broad mobilization of the working class in political struggle against capitalism. It encourages at every point the formation of new, independent organizations, such as factory and workplace committees, that truly represent the interests of rank-and-file workers and are subject to their democratic control.

The SEP fights for a scientific understanding of the role of the trade unions. Already in the early days of the union movement in Britain, Marx criticized the unions, which negotiate the conditions of the exploitation of the working class under capitalism within a given country, rather than seeking the overthrow of capitalism internationally. "Instead of the conservative motto 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work,' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: 'Abolition of the wages system!'" Marx wrote.

The experiences of the 20th century confirmed the generally counterrevolutionary role of the union bureaucracy, including in France, where the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) union played a key role, with the PCF, in suppressing revolutionary opportunities in 1936, 1945, 1953 and 1968. Nonetheless, to the extent that broad masses of militant workers sought to struggle through the unions, the Trotskyist movement correctly sought to intervene inside them. This distinguished the ICFI from innumerable petty-bourgeois "left" groups that denounced the politics of the unions as an excuse to abstain from the struggle to reach the workers.

The advent of globalization in the period since 1968, and the collapse of the unions' working-class membership, transformed these organizations. From organizations that defended workers' short-term interests through

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nationally-based bargaining on wages and conditions, they turned into privileged bureaucracies that defend the corporations' global competitiveness by planning cuts to wages and jobs. In France, while they supervised symbolic protest strikes tailored to the political needs of the ruling elite, they oversaw a drastic reduction in strike activity. Nonetheless, despite the collapse of their dues base, social cuts, mass layoffs and plant closures, the revenues of the unions have continued to rise, thanks to billions of euros in legal or semi-legal funding from corporations and the state. They are no longer workers' organizations, but empty shells funded by the ruling class, in which workers are trapped and controlled by petty-bourgeois functionaries tied to the police and intelligence agencies. They function today as an industrial police force directed against the working class.

For a Leninist vanguard party in the working class

The entire history of the 20th century shows that revolution cannot triumph unless the working class is led by a revolutionary party. This underlies the ferocious hostility, within the reactionary petty-bourgeois milieu of the pseudo-left, to the building of a Marxist vanguard party in the working class. The SEP encourages broad struggle by the working class and welcomes every true victory. It fundamentally opposes, however, syndicalist conceptions that the organization of militant struggles can replace a worked-out revolutionary strategy for the working class, led by a Marxist party.

The SEP upholds the essential revolutionary socialist principle: tell the workers the truth. It bases its program and its political work on a scientific and objective assessment of political reality and fights to develop socialist consciousness in the masses by bringing its Marxist perspective to the most advanced layers of workers and youth. It rejects the insidious claim that Marxists must take the prevailing level of mass consciousness—or rather, what petty-bourgeois philistines imagine it to be—as their point of departure. The first responsibility of the party, Trotsky explained, is to give "a clear, honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which flow from this situation, irrespective of whether or not the workers are today ripe for this. Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the workers. That is what the program should formulate and present before the advanced workers."

The revolutionary struggle of the working class requires organization, and organization is impossible without discipline. The discipline required for revolutionary struggle cannot be imposed from above, however; it must develop on the basis of an agreement, freely arrived at, on principles and program. This conception finds expression in the organizational structure of the SEP, which is based on the principles of democratic centralism. In the formulation of policy and tactics, the fullest democracy must prevail within the party. No restraints, other than those indicated in the party's constitution, are placed on internal discussion of the SEP's policies and activities. Leaders are democratically elected by the membership, and are subject to criticism and control. But if the formulation of policy requires the broadest discussion and open and honest criticism, its implementation requires the strictest discipline. Decisions arrived at democratically within the party are binding on all members. Those who object to this essential element of centralism, or who see in the demand for discipline a violation of their personal freedom, are not revolutionary socialists but anarchistic individuals who do not understand the implications or the demands of the class struggle.

The defense of Marxism

A central task of the SEP is the defense of the historical and theoretical tradition of Marxism. Nearly a century ago, on the 50th anniversary of the Paris Commune, Trotsky wrote, "More than any other proletariat has the French made sacrifices for the revolution. But also more than any other has it been duped. Many times has the bourgeoisie dazzled it with all the colors of republicanism, of radicalism, of socialism, so as always to fasten upon it the fetters of capitalism. By means of its agents, its lawyers and its journalists, the bourgeoisie has put forward a whole mass of democratic, parliamentary, autonomist formulae which are nothing but impediments on the feet of the proletariat, hampering its forward movement." It must be added that over the last century, this work of political and theoretical mystification has continued on an even more massive scale.

The SEP bases its activity on an analysis of the objective laws of history and society. Rooted in materialism, Marxism insists on the primacy of matter over consciousness. "The ideal is nothing else than the material world," Marx wrote, "reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." The materialism of Marxism is dialectical, in that it regards the material world and its reflections in thought not as a collection of fixed, internally undifferentiated objects and concepts, but as a complex of processes in constant motion and interaction, with antagonistic and divergent tendencies. This conception provided the theoretical basis for the development by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels of scientific socialism, based on an objective understanding of class conflict and exploitation in capitalist society and of the revolutionary role of the working class.

Despite the socialistic sentiments that animated masses of workers in France during the 20th century, these conceptions did not prevail in sections of the middle class intelligentsia that professed loyalty to Marxism. The collapse of the pseudo-left parties in the current epoch of capitalist crisis, imperialist war, and revolutionary struggles of the working class has proven the bankruptcy of all these anti-Marxist theories and the parties that drew inspiration from them. The SEP fights for a renaissance of classical Marxism to provide the theoretical basis for the development of a Trotskyist movement in the working class.

The SEP defends the historical legacy of Leon Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement against the attacks and falsifications from its bourgeois and petty-bourgeois opponents. These attacks—whether by descendants of Cold War anti-communist or Stalinist ideologists, or pseudo-left forces that seek to cover their anti-Trotskyist policies with fraudulent claims that there are "many Trotskyisms"—all aim to block the development of socialist consciousness in the working class. They deny that the struggle of Trotsky, carried forward by the ICFI, is the continuation of the struggle of the Marxist movement as the revolutionary alternative to capitalism.

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