

Socialist Equality Party (US) holds Fifth National Congress

3 August 2018

The Socialist Equality Party in the United States held its Fifth National Congress July 22-27 in Southeast Michigan. The main Congress resolution, “The Upsurge of the Class Struggle and the Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party,” was the subject of an extensive discussion. After four days of debate, which included proposals for amending or clarifying different sections of the draft document, the resolution was adopted unanimously.

The Congress also adopted a resolution condemning the persecution of Julian Assange and calling for an international campaign to secure his freedom.

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

The SEP Congress registered a substantial influx of new members, from all parts of the United States, into the party since the Fourth Congress, held in 2016. The newly elected National Committee includes many members who have joined the party in the past five years.

Also attending the Congress were delegations from the sister parties of the SEP in the International Committee of the Fourth International. Supporters of the ICFI from Central and South America were also in attendance.

The Congress delegates participated in a broad-ranging and extensive discussion that reviewed the political situation in the US and internationally, examined the experiences of the working class and the party over the past two years and outlined the tasks of the SEP. There were separate reports and discussions on the teachers’ strikes and the growth of the class struggle in the US, the fight by the SEP against Internet censorship, the campaign of the SEP and the ICFI against the persecution of Julian Assange, the attack on immigrant workers by the Trump administration, and the right-wing character of the #MeToo campaign and the politics of the pseudo-left.

The main resolution adopted by the Congress stresses the immense crisis of the world capitalist system. It begins:

The world capitalist system has entered a period of acute social and political crisis, characterized by broad-

based discontent provoked by deteriorating living standards and the extreme concentration of wealth, intensifying class conflict, and the discrediting of long-established political institutions. There is a growing sense among substantial sections of the working class and youth that capitalism is inherently unjust and that fundamental changes in the economic system are needed.

Elaborating on this theme, David North, in his report introducing the Congress, reviewed the extraordinary conditions in which the Congress was being held: the breakdown of international alliances; the eruption of American imperialism and the military buildup of all the major capitalist powers; the ferocious conflicts within the highest levels of the state; the turn to authoritarianism by the ruling class, including the censorship of the Internet; and the extreme growth of social inequality.

North stressed the reactionary and anti-democratic character of all factions of the ruling class in the United States. He said:

It would be the height of naïveté to believe that there exists a profound political divide between Trump and his Democratic opponents. Attempting to determine who is “worse” is like being asked whether you prefer to be bitten by a cobra or strangled by a boa constrictor. At one moment one may think that no one could be worse than Trump. But then, one watches Democratic Party Senator Mark Warner threaten war against Russia and House Democrats bellowing “USA, USA!” and, in comparison, Trump appears almost civilized. The only appropriate answer, therefore, is that suggested by Shakespeare: “A plague on both your parties!”

A central theme of North’s report, the main congress resolution and the discussion at the Congress was the 80th anniversary of the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky, which held its first Congress in September 1938. Many contributions to the Congress discussed the relationship

between the heritage defended by the Fourth International throughout its history and the developing consciousness of broad masses of workers and youth.

“From the vantage point of 2018,” the main resolution states, “there is no question but that the historical analysis, principles and program upon which the Fourth International was founded in 1938, and which were upheld in the issuing of the Open Letter that established the International Committee in 1953, have been vindicated by the entire course of historical development.”

North explained in his report the relationship between historical consciousness and socialist consciousness. “The working through of past experiences has always been, for Marxists, an essential preparation for future struggles,” he said.

The International Committee and its sections introduce into the struggles of the working class not only slogans and a set of demands. These are of considerable importance, but they are insufficient for the education of the working class and the raising of its political consciousness to the level necessary for the carrying out of the socialist revolution. To comprehend the crisis and the tasks with which it is confronted, the working class must understand the nature of the historical epoch in which it lives and fights. Moreover, for the development of a revolutionary strategy and the appropriate tactics, the working class must acquire a sufficient level of knowledge of the major political events and revolutionary struggles of the past century. Finally, for the working class to evaluate the organizations and tendencies that claim to represent its interests, it must know their history, their political lineage and the role they have played in past struggles.

The main resolution stresses that the development of a mass socialist movement of the international working class depends on the activity of the SEP and the ICFI. During the discussion, many participants cited the section of the resolution that states:

Within this historical situation, the revolutionary party is itself an immense factor in determining the outcome of the objective crisis. An evaluation of the objective situation and realistic appraisal of political possibilities that excludes the impact of the intervention of the revolutionary party is utterly alien to Marxism. The Marxist revolutionary party does not merely comment on events, it participates in the events that it analyzes, and, through its leadership in the struggle for workers’ power and socialism, strives to change the world.

The central task of the SEP is to build an independent, revolutionary and socialist movement in the working class. This requires a fight against the politics of the pseudo-left, including groups like the Democratic Socialists of America and the International Socialist Organization, which represent the social

interests of privileged sections of the upper-middle class. It also requires a fight against the trade unions, which function as agents of corporate management and the state and work to suppress the class struggle.

A critical section of the main resolution, which was the topic of extensive discussion at the Congress, is titled “The logic of the class struggle and the general strike.” It states that the eruption of social struggles on a scale never before seen is all but inevitable in the US, and that these struggles, “whatever the immediate issue or wherever the location,” will “rapidly draw millions of workers into active participation in the struggle.” It continues: “Given the historical experience of the working class, the logical outcome of this coalescence of social struggles will be a general strike, which will raise the question of political power.”

To prepare for such a struggle, the resolution states, the working class must develop “an interconnected network of popular workplace and neighborhood committees,” the necessity of which arises out of the experiences of the workers themselves with the anti-working class trade unions. In one of the main reports to the Congress, Jerry White, the labor editor for the WSWs, reviewed in detail the experiences of the past year, including the wave of teachers’ strikes in the US that developed in opposition to the unions.

Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the SEP, said that the Congress was animated by a consciousness of the immense tasks that face the party. “The ruling class is moving rapidly to implement far-reaching attacks on democratic rights,” he said, “including efforts to shut down and censor the Internet, which are targeted above all at the *World Socialist Web Site*. The oligarchy is bringing its political forms into alignment with the character of capitalist society—including unsustainable levels of social inequality and advanced preparations for world war.”

However, he added, the Congress was also characterized by a spirit of revolutionary optimism rooted in an understanding that the principles and history of the SEP and the ICFI correspond to and express the interests of masses of workers all over the world. “I have no doubt,” he said, “that the SEP will emerge in the leadership of working class struggles, and that it will win to the banner of Trotskyism great masses of workers and youth seeking a way to fight against the capitalist system.”



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