

Resolution of the SEP (US) Fifth National Congress

The Resurgence of Class Struggle and the Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

8 August 2018

This resolution was unanimously adopted by the Fifth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party in the US, which was held July 22-27, 2018. The Congress was introduced with a report by David North, national chairperson of the Socialist Equality Party and of the International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site. The Congress also passed the resolution, "Free Julian Assange!"

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Introduction

1. 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. While this broad-based sentiment has not yet developed into a mass political movement directed toward the ending of the capitalist system, interest in and support for socialism is growing rapidly. There are clear indications that the working class is beginning to break out of the political shackles imposed upon it by the traditional institutional-bureaucratic agencies of imperialism, principally the pro-capitalist social democratic and related ex-reformist parties and the trade unions.

2. Not since the 1930s has world capitalism confronted such a fundamental crisis. In fact, the daily news reports recall the economic, political and social conditions of the 1930s. As in that fateful decade, tensions between the major imperialist powers are rising, and threaten to spiral out of control. And as in the 1930s, the "brutality index" of world imperialism is steadily rising. Humanitarian pretenses are being dispensed with. The massacre of defenseless Palestinians in Gaza is not only justified by Israel and its allies, the killings are applauded. The horrific atrocities committed by Saudi Arabia against Yemen, with US-supplied weaponry, are barely reported in the press. Millions of people, made destitute and homeless by imperialist wars and economic policies, are being treated as if their lives were worthless. The president of the United States openly threatens a small country like North Korea with "fire and fury like we've never seen," in other words, a nuclear attack, in which tens of millions would die, without any significant reaction in ruling circles, either in the US or internationally. The drowning of immigrants in the Mediterranean, the incarceration of terrified refugees in concentration

camp, and even the separation of children from their parents, have become the "new normal." These crises are being exacerbated by human-induced climate change and environmental degradation, which have killed thousands, displaced tens of millions and threaten a global catastrophe.

3. The extent of the capitalist crisis is expressed in the political, cultural and moral degeneracy of the ruling class. In country after country, extreme nationalist parties are being elevated to the highest levels of the state. Eighty-five years after the rise of Hitler to power, outright fascists (the Alternative for Germany) are the main opposition party in the German Bundestag, while the fascistic Lega party is in a coalition government in Italy. The traditional social democratic and conservative parties of the ruling class, rotting on their feet, are adapting to the program of the far-right. The ruling classes of Europe and the United States, terrified of social opposition, are turning to authoritarian forms of rule and engaging in a desperate attempt to censor the Internet.

4. The global crisis of class rule finds its most advanced expression in the epicenter of world capitalism, the United States, which concentrates within itself all the contradictions of the world system. The election of Donald Trump signaled a critical turning point in American political history. Though his bourgeois opponents portray him as a monster risen from hell, Trump—whose wealth is derived from decades of fraud in the financial, real estate, casino gambling and entertainment industries—is far better understood as the personification of the parasitism of the American ruling class and the criminality that pervades the operations of the entire system.

5. At the dawn of American imperialism, when the United States was emerging as the leading world power, President Theodore Roosevelt coined the phrase, "Speak softly and carry a big stick." However, with the decline of the US economy relative to its global rivals, American imperialism has increasingly sought to leverage its military power to maintain its global position. Trump's bellicose threats to "make America great again" arise from a frightened sense of national crisis and decline. But the means by which he intends to restore the United States to "greatness" must lead to disaster. Trump's "America First" policy is recklessly dismantling the institutions through which the hegemony of the United States has been exercised since the end of World War II. He is alienating not only critical allies in Western Europe and Asia, but also—with his simultaneous denunciations of Canada and Mexico—isolating the United States within the Americas.

6. Trump calculates that traditional allies of the United States, confronted with the specter of economic sanctions, will have no choice but to bow to American dictates. But more dangerous to the United States than the anger and resentments of the bourgeois presidents and prime ministers he regularly insults, is the anger provoked by Trump's tirades among masses of people throughout the world. The efforts of the United States to cloak its imperialist predations behind the banner of

“democracy” and “human rights,” already eroded by decades of war, have been totally discredited. The global opposition to American imperialism among broad masses throughout the world is emerging as a significant political factor, especially as it intersects and interacts with the growing social radicalization within the United States.

7. The Trump administration presides over a country with unsustainable levels of social inequality. Its actions are the expression of the blind alley of American capitalism. Under the Trump administration, the “war on terror” is metastasizing into the “war on immigrants.” The anti-democratic and police state measures directed against immigrant workers will be used against all social opposition to the ruling class’s policies of war and social counterrevolution.

8. The break with democratic forms of rule is accompanied by ferocious conflicts within the state apparatus. Each day the president spews his verbal tirades, while the Democrats expound their neo-McCarthyite fantasies of Russians “sowing discord” in America. There is nothing remotely progressive, let alone dignified, in the opposition to Trump mounted by the Democratic Party and sections of the media. They represent another reactionary faction of the ruling class. They oppose Trump mainly on the grounds that his foreign policy—particularly in relation to Russia—is undermining longstanding strategic interests of American imperialism.

9. The ruling class is dismantling the old forms of rule, bringing the structures of the state into alignment with the oligarchic character of society. But this process is encountering growing and increasingly conscious resistance within the working class to social inequality and attacks on democratic rights. After decades of suppression by the trade unions, the level of strike activity—the most basic form of class struggle—has risen dramatically. This global process includes protests against austerity in Iran, a series of statewide teachers’ strikes in the US, mass strikes in Germany, the mobilization of workers in France against right-wing labor reforms and strikes by teachers and lecturers throughout Latin America and the Middle East.

10. The intensification of class struggle places immense responsibility on the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Party in the United States. The working class is seeking to resist the relentless assault on its living conditions and democratic rights. However, the crisis of capitalism and the conscious preparations of the ruling elites for war and dictatorship are advancing more rapidly than the class consciousness of the working class. The recognition of this political reality does not justify pessimism, the most shortsighted and useless form of ahistorical subjectivism. Rather, it demands greater determination, rooted in an understanding of the historical experiences of the class struggle over the past century and the present-day objective crisis, to raise the political consciousness of the working class to the level required by the historical tasks with which it is confronted.

11. The relation between the objective crisis of the global capitalist system and the class consciousness of the working class is not static, but dynamic. There will be no shortage of explosive events—above all, those arising out of the actual experience of class conflict—that will undermine traditional beliefs and radicalize social consciousness. Only a Marxist party, conditioned by theoretical insight and historical knowledge, can detect, analyze and prepare for the deep-rooted processes that will “suddenly” assume the form of mass revolutionary struggles. The task of the revolutionary party, therefore, is not to speculate as to whether a revolutionary movement can be built. What can and cannot be achieved will be determined in struggle.

12. Trotsky’s appraisal written in 1940, amidst the initial stages of the Second World War, applies all the more forcefully seventy-eight years later:

Today it is no longer a question, as was the case in the nineteenth century, of simply assuring a more rapid and more healthy development of economic life: today it is a question of saving mankind from suicide. It is precisely the acuteness of the historical problem that completely cuts the ground from under the feet of the opportunist parties. The party of the revolution, on the contrary, finds a wellspring of inexhaustible power in the consciousness of the fact that it carries out inexorable historical necessity.

Eighty years of the Fourth International

13. 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, which 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.

14. This year marks the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International in September 1938. For sixty-five of the eighty years of its existence, the work of the Fourth International has been developed under the leadership of the International Committee. From the vantage point of 2018, 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.

15. All questions about the historical and political legitimacy of the struggle waged by the Trotskyist movement against Stalinism were answered, decisively and irrefutably, by the dissolution of the Stalinist regimes between 1989 and 1991 and the reintroduction of capitalism throughout Eastern Europe, in the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam. The Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, as Trotsky had predicted in *The Revolution Betrayed* (written in 1936), liquidated the nationalized property relations established in the aftermath of the 1917 October Revolution. The events of 1989–91 not only vindicated the struggle of the Fourth International against Stalinism, they also exposed the theoretical bankruptcy of those anti-Trotskyist tendencies that had claimed that state power, in regimes established in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, was exercised by a new ruling class in a new form of exploitative society. But this “new class” of exploiters, discovered with great fanfare by Max Shachtman and his successors, acted in a manner that totally contradicted their theory. Unlike any other ruling class in history, it voluntarily dissolved itself! Far from being the guardians of new forms of property, the bureaucratic regimes proved to be, as Trotsky had anticipated, the political instrument for the restoration of capitalism and the reconstitution of a capitalist class.

16. The International Committee was founded in 1953 in opposition to a new form of anti-Trotskyist revisionism, advanced most prominently by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, which claimed that the Stalinist regimes were the means by which socialism would be realized. The Stalinist bureaucracies would preside over centuries of deformed workers states. This morbid perspective elevated the Stalinist bureaucracies into the main progressive force in history, relegated the working class to nothing more than a secondary social force exerting pressure on the bureaucratic leadership, and totally denied the need for the Fourth International. The Pabloites bestowed their political accolades on a multitude of bourgeois nationalist and petty-bourgeois radical movements. Nasser in Egypt, Ben

Bella in Algeria, Perón in Argentina and, especially, Castro in Cuba (to name only the best known Pabloite heroes) were hailed as exemplars of a new road to socialism, without the independent revolutionary struggle of the working class and without the leadership of a Marxist-Trotskyist party.

17. The split with the Pabloites in 1953 marked only the beginning of a protracted political struggle against anti-Trotskyist opportunism within the Fourth International. The fight between Pabloite revisionism and “orthodox Trotskyism” was not merely a war of words. It arose out of objective political conditions and reflected the interests of real class forces. Pabloism was the political expression of the efforts of the petty-bourgeoisie to subordinate, to its own interests, the working class. To the extent that the conditions of the post-war boom, and the still substantial influence of the Stalinist, Social Democratic and trade union bureaucracies and bourgeois nationalist organizations, suppressed class consciousness and revolutionary class struggle, the relation of forces within the Fourth International favored the Pabloites. The retreat of the Workers Revolutionary Party in Britain in the 1970s from the principles that its leaders had previously defended—in the fight against Pablo and Mandel in 1953 and in opposition to the reunification of the American Socialist Workers Party with the Pabloites in 1963—threatened to destroy the International Committee.

18. The opposition to the Pabloite course of the WRP that emerged within the Workers League (predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States) between 1982 and 1985 proved decisive in rallying the entire International Committee in defense of the historically developed program of the Trotskyist movement. With the suspension of the Workers Revolutionary Party in December 1985, followed by the formal split of February 1986, the orthodox Trotskyists regained control over the International Committee. It is not a coincidence that this decisive victory took place against the backdrop of the final terminal crisis of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the universal capitulation of the existing mass labor parties and trade unions in response to the world capitalist offensive, and the obvious impotence of the bourgeois national movements in the face of worldwide imperialist neocolonialism. The weakening of these agencies of imperialism undermined the Pabloite forces.

19. In the aftermath of the split of 1985–86, the International Committee initiated, on the basis of Marxist theory and the entire heritage of the Trotskyist movement, a process of political clarification and organizational development. The transformation of the previously existing leagues of the International Committee into new Socialist Equality Parties was undertaken in the anticipation of the independent and decisive role that the Trotskyist movement would play in a new period of revolutionary upsurge by the working class. The establishment of the *World Socialist Web Site* in February 1998, an unprecedented initiative that recognized and made creative use of the revolutionary potential of the Internet, made possible a vast expansion of the audience for revolutionary Marxism and the political influence of the Trotskyist movement.

20. Its principles and program substantiated by history, the International Committee of the Fourth International is now the critical force in the unification of the international working class and the building of the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

The social crisis and the radicalization of the working class

21. The basic contradictions of capitalism—between international economy and the nation-state system, and between socialized production and private appropriation of profit—are expressed in the intensification of geopolitical conflict and the danger of a third world war, the growth of

social inequality, the breakdown of democratic forms of rule internationally, and, above all, the political radicalization of the working class.

22. It is now ten years since the financial collapse of 2008, which represented not a conjunctural downturn, but a systemic crisis of the capitalist system. In January 2009, the SEP warned that there could be no “socially neutral” response to the crisis, and that “all of the measures taken were aimed at securing the interests of the most powerful sections of the financial elite.” The response of the ruling class to the crisis, we predicted, would be an intensification of the assault on the working class and an expansion of militarist violence internationally, exacerbating tensions between the major imperialist and capitalist powers.

23. This analysis has proven correct. Over the past ten years, the ruling classes of the world, led by the Obama administration in the US, have funneled trillions of dollars into the markets to reflate asset bubbles, to be paid for through the imposition of austerity measures, wage cuts and a relentless assault on social programs. The consequences are evident in the state of social relations and the levels of social inequality that prevail throughout the world.

24. The concentration of wealth in the hands of the financial elite is greater than at any point in modern history. According to the June 2018 “World Wealth Report” by consulting firm Capgemini, the wealth of the world’s millionaires (18.1 million people) surpassed \$70 trillion for the first time ever in 2017, increasing by more than 10 percent from the year before. Another report, the “Billionaire Census” put out in May by Wealth-X, found that the global billionaire population grew by 15 percent, to 2,754 people, between 2016 and 2017, and that the wealth of these billionaires surged by 24 percent to a record level of \$9.2 trillion, equivalent to 12 percent of the gross domestic product of the entire planet. The central factor in this wealth increase has been the rise of the stock market, with global market capitalization growing 21.8 percent in 2017, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average has risen fourfold over the past decade.

25. The accumulation of extreme wealth has been, to an extraordinary extent, fueled by financial speculation, which has been supported by the government, exemplified by its long-running program of “quantitative easing.” But there are growing indications that market speculation has reached unsustainable levels. Total margin debt (that is, borrowed money used to buy stock) now stands at approximately \$670 billion. This accounts for 3 percent of the gross domestic product, which is higher than at any time since the crash of 1929. Just five stocks—Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Google and Netflix—account for 10.6 percent of all stock market wealth.

26. While government-sanctioned market gambling has enriched the financial oligarchy, conditions for the broad mass of the population are deteriorating at a shocking pace. According to a report published by Credit Suisse at the end of last year, “The world’s 3.5 billion poorest adults each have assets of less than \$10,000 (£7,600). Collectively, these people, who account for 70 percent of the world’s working age population, account for just 2.7 percent of global wealth.” In the United States, three people—Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett—have more money than the bottom half of the population. The income share of the top 1 percent of US income earners rose from 10 percent in 1980 to 20 percent in 2016, while the income share of the bottom 50 percent fell from 20 percent to 13 percent over the same period.

27. The extreme growth of social inequality is expressed in innumerable forms. An opioid crisis is ravaging large parts of the country. A sharp rise in mortality from the drug epidemic, alcohol abuse and suicides produced a fall in life expectancy for the second year in a row in 2016. Nearly half the population has less than \$10,000 in savings and will be unable to retire. Health care costs are rising under the impact of Obamacare, and college graduates have an aggregate debt of more than \$1 trillion. The

Obama administration's restructuring of the auto industry was the spearhead for the proliferation of part-time and low-wage work. The criminal consequences of the looting of public infrastructure has been exposed in the Flint water crisis and the devastation of Puerto Rico from Hurricane Maria, which killed 5,000 people or more.

28. The "land of unlimited opportunity," which always had a mythical character, has given way to the land of low wages, debt, permanent economic insecurity and social inequality. During the past half-century, the chance that a child will earn more than his or her parents has fallen from 90 percent to 50 percent. The United States now has the highest infant mortality and the lowest life expectancy of any major capitalist country.

29. These facts have the most far-reaching political implications. As the SEP stated in its program, adopted in 2010, "In the final analysis, the vast wealth and power of American capitalism was the most significant objective cause of the subordination of the working class to the corporate-controlled two-party system. ... The change in objective conditions, however, will lead American workers to change their minds. The reality of capitalism will provide workers with many reasons to fight for a fundamental and revolutionary change in the economic organization of society."

30. These changes in consciousness are already well underway. In no other country has there been such a relentless campaign to block even the most elemental expression of socialist consciousness. However, numerous polls show that among young people more than 50 percent have a favorable view of socialism, and more would prefer to live in a socialist society than a capitalist one. This is a remarkable change that verifies the conceptions of Marxism and refutes all petty-bourgeois theories about the end of the class struggle and the end of the working class.

The eruption of American imperialism and the danger of world war

31. Social counterrevolution is the domestic response of the American ruling class to the long-term decline of American capitalism. Its international response is the explosion of imperialist violence. Analyzing US imperialist policy in 1928, the year before the eruption of the Great Depression, Leon Trotsky warned: "In the period of crisis, the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom. The United States will seek to overcome and extricate herself from her difficulties and maladies primarily at the expense of Europe, regardless of whether this occurs in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia or Europe itself, whether this takes place peacefully or through war."

32. War has become a permanent feature of American policy. Following the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the strategists of American imperialism proclaimed a "unipolar moment." The disappearance of its main competitor during the Cold War period was interpreted by the American ruling class as an opportunity to utilize its military force without restraint as the central mechanism for counteracting the decline of American capitalism and the erosion of the foundations for its global hegemony.

33. A quarter-century later, this policy has manifestly failed. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 provided the "war on terror" pretext for a vast escalation of militarist violence, spelled out in the doctrine of "preemptive war" adopted by the administration of George W. Bush in its 2002 National Security Strategy. A series of wars and invasions, led or backed by the United States, has devastated Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen and many other countries. While leading to the deaths of more than one million people,

destroying entire societies and creating the greatest refugee crisis since World War II, these wars have failed to resolve the crisis of American imperialism. They are now developing into a conflict with major powers, including China, Russia and Washington's traditional imperialist allies in Europe.

34. The United States is actively planning for world war. The Trump administration's National Security Strategy, unveiled in December 2017, for the first time makes explicit that the center of US military planning is preparation for a major war involving large powers. Such a war, the first conflict in world history in which both sides would be armed with nuclear weapons, would threaten the physical survival of humanity. "Great power competition, not terrorism, is now the primary focus of US national security," Defense Secretary James Mattis declared, singling out Russia and China as "revisionist powers." The strategy document laments the "strategic complacency" of the US over the past period, the failure to build "military capacity" and acquire "new weapons systems," and, most significantly, the idea that war can be "won quickly, from stand-off distances with minimal casualties."

35. There is an inherent connection between the quarter-century of US-instigated wars and the emergence of great power conflict and the threat of world war. As David North, chairman of the SEP, wrote in July 2016:

The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China. But this latest stage in the ongoing struggle for world hegemony, which lies at the heart of the conflict with Russia and China, is bringing to the forefront latent and potentially explosive tensions between the United States and its present-day imperialist allies, including—to name the most significant potential adversary—Germany. The two world wars of the twentieth century were not the product of misunderstandings. The past is prologue. As the International Committee foresaw in 1990–91, the American bid for global hegemony has rekindled inter-imperialist rivalries simmering beneath the surface of world politics. [A *Quarter Century of War*, Preface]

36. The historic breakdown of the G7 summit in June, amidst mutual denunciations from the Trump administration and the governments of Europe and Canada, is the latest and most extreme expression of the growing transatlantic divide. The immediate cause of the conflict is the "America First" economic nationalism of the Trump administration and threats to impose tariff barriers on billions of dollars of imports from the European Union, Canada and Mexico. US-EU divisions are growing not only over trade, but also over EU opposition to the US policy of threatening Iran with war by ending the Iranian nuclear deal. The growing conflicts between the major imperialist powers, however, cannot be attributed to the particular personality of Donald Trump. They are the expression of the growing struggle between these powers over access to markets, resources and labor.

37. The response of the imperialist powers in Europe is to rearm and assert their interests independently of the United States. "We, as Europeans, have to take our fate more into our hands," German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared in June. Europe can "no longer hope as we did somewhat carelessly for decades that the US is already taking care of it." Germany and Europe "must promote our principles and values in Europe, potentially in alliance with Canada or Japan." Under Merkel, Germany has thrown its support behind an independent European military interventionist force under German-French leadership.

Palace coup or class struggle

38. The impact of unsustainable levels of social inequality and permanent and expanding war finds political expression in the breakdown of democratic forms of rule within the United States.

39. The inauguration of Trump has brought far-right, fascist and extreme nationalist politics into the highest levels of the state apparatus. During the 2016 elections, Trump pitched his rhetoric to social discontent and frustration, employing lying and empty demagoguery about the “forgotten man.” The true social constituency of the administration, however, is expressed in its massive tax cuts for the rich, a sharp expansion in the military budget and an intensification of the assault on public education, government regulations, social programs and the working class as a whole.

40. At the center of the Trump administration’s policy is the vilification of immigrants, who have been terrorized by Gestapo-style raids, imprisonment and deportation. The scenes of children being ripped from their parents at the border, imprisoned in cages and then physically and sexually abused, have produced shock and revulsion throughout the United States and around the world. Trump’s response to the conflicts within the ruling class is to redouble his fascist appeal, seeking to mobilize far-right forces on the basis of extreme nationalism and populist demagoguery. The aim is to scapegoat the already hyper-exploited layer of immigrant workers for the grotesque levels of social inequality that characterize American society.

41. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Customs and Border Protection agencies are the training ground for the future wars against the working class. The immigration police have been given far-reaching authority to violate the democratic rights of everyone, carrying out unlawful searches and seizures, demanding proof of citizenship and detaining people at schools and workplaces en masse. Prison centers erected under the Obama administration are being expanded into modern-day concentration camps. This apparatus of repression will be utilized by the ruling class against all social and political opposition.

42. With the Trump administration, the American ruling class has passed a line from which there is no going back. It is now 18 years since the theft of the 2000 election and the handing of the presidency to George W. Bush through a 5-4 decision of the US Supreme Court. As the WSWS stressed at the time, the outcome of the election and its acceptance by the entire political establishment demonstrated that there no longer existed a constituency for basic democratic rights within the ruling class. The election was followed by the “war on terror,” forever associated with the Patriot Act, domestic spying, “extraordinary rendition,” state-sponsored torture and Guantanamo Bay. The Obama administration escalated the attack on democratic rights with the assertion of the right of the US president to assassinate anyone, including US citizens, without due process.

43. The Trump administration’s greatest asset is the spineless and reactionary character of his critics within the political establishment. In the United States, as in Europe, the far-right is benefiting from the absence of any progressive outlet for social anger and discontent.

44. In its statement, “Palace Coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy of the working class,” the Political Committee of the SEP explained:

Trump’s opponents within the political establishment, including both Democrats and Republicans, speak for a faction of the

corporate and financial elite. The methods they are using in their campaign against Trump are fundamentally antidemocratic, involving behind-the-scenes plotting with elements within the military/intelligence establishment and corporate-financial elite. These are the methods of a palace coup.

45. Trump’s election in 2016 was possible only due to the character of the Democratic Party. Hillary Clinton ran as the candidate of Wall Street, the military-intelligence apparatus and privileged sections of the upper-middle class through the promotion of identity politics. The decision of Bernie Sanders to back Clinton—the culmination of a campaign aimed at channeling social opposition behind the Democratic Party—opened the way for Trump to make an appeal to social discontent.

46. In the aftermath of the election, the Democrats have worked to direct all opposition to Trump behind the conspiracies and intrigues of powerful factions of the intelligence apparatus, centered on the anti-Russia campaign and the investigation headed by former FBI chief Robert Mueller. While the Democrats have denounced the Trump administration for seeking an accommodation with the government of Vladimir Putin in Russia, they have ignored, covered up and facilitated its attack on the working class and immigrants, its tax cuts for the wealthy and its systematic preparations for world war.

47. The purpose of the anti-Russia campaign of the Democrats is threefold: (1) to enforce a more aggressive foreign policy against Russia, which is seen by dominant factions within the military and intelligence agencies as a principal obstacle to US hegemony in the Middle East, which must be confronted as a prerequisite to taking on China; (2) to create the framework for an attack on democratic rights and the imposition of a regime of Internet censorship, under the guise of combating “fake news” and “Russian meddling”; and (3) to divert the anger of millions of workers and youth away from any challenge to the capitalist system.

48. In addition to the anti-Russia campaign, the other major preoccupation of the Democrats has been the promotion of the #MeToo movement, which has, under the cover of opposing sexual assault and violence, served to create a witch-hunt atmosphere to undermine and eradicate basic democratic rights, including the right to due process. The #MeToo campaign has entirely ignored the issues facing the working class, including working class women. While the relentless preoccupation with sex has played well with the Democratic Party’s affluent upper-middle class constituency, it has fallen flat with the great mass of working people, whose main concerns relate to problems arising from their class position in capitalist society, rather than their gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

49. A year-and-a-half after his inauguration, the Democrats’ strategy for opposing Trump is in shambles. The administration feels emboldened and is pressing forward with its efforts to establish far-right control over all the institutions of the state, including the Supreme Court. The Democrats, on the other hand, are redoubling their efforts to divert and suppress social and political discontent. Nothing frightens them more than the emergence of a mass popular movement against the billionaire thug in the White House. They do not want to do anything to weaken the institutions of the capitalist state in advance of a growth of the class struggle.

The CIA Democrats and the pseudo-left

50. The response of the Democratic Party to the election of Trump is determined by its class character and political physiognomy. It is a party of finance capital and the military-intelligence apparatus, supported by a

broad layer of the affluent upper-middle class, whose total annual income places it within the wealthiest 10 percent of American society. While the income of this wealthy social stratum is far greater than that of the vast majority of Americans, those who fall within this privileged 90-99 percentile are, nevertheless, keenly aware of the vast difference in the scale of their wealth compared to that of the richest 1, 0.1 or 0.01 percentile of the population. They are far more dissatisfied with what they view as an unfavorable distribution of wealth among the richest 10 percent than they are with the existence of mass poverty. And even if they cannot effect a reduction in the vast sums allocated to the very richest Americans, the members of the upper-middle class wage a ferocious struggle among themselves for more of the money sloshing around at the apex of American capitalism.

51. The politics of racial, gender and sexual identity promoted by the Democratic Party is bound up with sordid conflicts within the upper-middle class over access to positions within corporations, universities, the trade unions and the state apparatus. The now routine denunciations of one or another individual for alleged “microaggressions,” racism and, most dangerous of all, sexual harassment, represent nothing other than the weaponization of identity politics.

52. Sections of the pseudo-left have taken to calling for a new “party of the 99 percent.” This slogan implies that there is a commonality of interests between those who are paid \$25,000 a year (the annual income for a \$12 per hour job) and those who receive annual compensation (aside from earnings on investments) of \$250,000 to \$1,000,000. This slogan, sociologically absurd and politically reactionary, is aimed at subordinating the working class to the upper-middle class and the Democratic Party.

53. As the WWS has documented, in the 2018 midterm elections, the Democrats have fielded an unprecedented number of former intelligence agents and military veterans. The politics of the “CIA Democrats” is not in conflict with, but rather corresponds to, the pseudo-left politics of the upper-middle class, as expressed in organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO). In “Palace coup or class struggle,” the WWS stated:

The characteristic feature of middle class politics is its lack of independence from the ruling class. It seeks to influence the Democratic Party and win its support for marginal reforms of the capitalist system. While the more left-liberal elements within this political milieu refer to issues of social inequality, they combine, in the most unprincipled manner, semi-reformist appeals with support for the Democratic Party and the aims of American imperialism. This is bound up with the fact that their own privileged economic position is based on the record rise in corporate profits and stock prices. Their primary political function is to maintain the domination of the ruling class over the working class.

54. The DSA is playing an increasingly central role in attempting to buttress the political authority of the Democratic Party. Since the 2016 election, the membership of the DSA has increased from 7,000 to 37,000. It is winning the support of a layer of young people looking for a socialist opposition to capitalism and is seeking to direct this sentiment back behind the Democrats. The campaign of DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who defeated the incumbent Congressman Joseph Crowley in a New York congressional primary election in June, demonstrates its role. While tapping into social discontent to defeat Crowley, the fourth highest Democrat in the House of Representatives, Ocasio-Cortez has moved quickly to burnish her establishment credentials, while being lauded by the corporate media. The DSA and Ocasio-Cortez’s call to “abolish

ICE”—in reality, rebrand it with a new name while retaining all its vicious capabilities—is being taken up by a faction of the Democratic Party leadership.

55. Both the fear of the growing interest in socialism and the function of groups like the DSA were given expression in an article in the *New York Times* following Ocasio-Cortez’s primary victory (“The Millennial Socialists Are Coming,” by Michelle Goldberg). Goldberg writes, “Talk of popular control of the means of production is anathema to many older Democrats, even very liberal ones. It plays a lot better with the young; one recent survey shows that 61 percent of Democrats between 18 and 34 view socialism positively. The combination of the Great Recession, the rising cost of education, the unreliability of health insurance and the growing precariousness of the workplace has left young people with gnawing material insecurity. They have no memory of the widespread failure of Communism, but the failures of capitalism are all around them.”

56. Goldberg’s conclusion is that the Democratic Party should open its doors to the DSA and its candidates as a means of rebranding the party:

There are more candidates like Ocasio-Cortez out there, and the Democrats should welcome them. It needs their youth and zeal and willingness to do the work of rebuilding the party as a neighborhood institution. And they’re coming, whether the party’s leadership likes it or not.

57. In fact, there are no traces of genuine socialism in the program of the DSA and similar pseudo-left parties. Their proposals for limited social reforms are connected to support for the Democratic Party and the defense of the organizational domination of the corporatist trade unions over the working class. That is, they provide a pseudo-left cover for institutions that are waging a war on the working class.

58. The pseudo-left groups either abstain from the fight against imperialist militarism or offer dishonest rationalizations for endorsing US military operations. The particular role of the ISO in the US is to most clearly articulate the policy of the US State Department and the CIA within the milieu of pseudo-left politics. It is the most fervent supporter of the US-backed campaign for regime-change in Syria and has developed close ties with factions of the state openly calling for a more aggressive military intervention in Syria and against Russia.

59. The most damning expression of the pseudo-left’s support for imperialism is its silence on the escalating threats against WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange, who remains trapped in the Ecuadorian embassy in London and faces the danger of being pushed out, arrested and extradited to the US, where he would face criminal charges of espionage.

60. The treacherous role of the pseudo-left organizations of the upper-middle class is an international phenomenon. In Greece, the “Coalition of the Radical Left,” Syriza, has led a coalition government for three-and-a-half years, during which time it has dutifully implemented the demands of the European banks and acted as a front-line perpetrator of the European Union’s anti-refugee policy. In Germany, the Left Party is supporting and implementing austerity measures and attacks on immigrants, largely adopting the program of the fascistic AfD.

61. The promotion of the DSA, the ISO and other pseudo-left groups by factions of the political establishment is paralleled by the systematic efforts to suppress the *World Socialist Web Site*. While the DSA-affiliated *Jacobin* magazine is regularly cited in the *New York Times* and featured prominently in Google searches, the WWS has been the principal target of censorship mechanisms implemented by Google, Facebook and other Internet companies, in close alliance with the intelligence agencies and the state. As masses of workers and youth are

seeking a way to oppose capitalism and fight for socialism, they are being directed to organizations that serve as auxiliary arms of the state and the bourgeois political apparatus.

The significance of the resurgence of strike activity

62. A genuine movement against the Trump administration will not come from the ruling class or from the upper-middle class, but from the broad mass of the population, the working class, which is completely excluded from political life. The reality of the capitalist crisis has already led this year to significant initial expressions of working class struggle. Over the past 30 years the trade unions suppressed virtually all organized expression of the class struggle. But since the beginning of 2018, teachers have engaged in a series of strikes and walkouts—in West Virginia, Oklahoma, New Jersey, Arizona, North Carolina, Colorado and Kentucky. There have also been strikes by telecommunications workers in West Virginia and University of California service workers.

63. The growth of the class struggle confirms the fundamental theoretical principles of Marxism and the political perspective elaborated and developed by the International Committee of the Fourth International. It has demonstrated:

That class is the fundamental social division in American and world society, not race, gender or sexual identity. It has exposed the fraud of the division of the US into “red” and “blue” states, with many of the class battles this year erupting in “Republican” states, where the working class has been slandered by the Democrats and their political adjuncts as racist and backward.

That the working class is the basic revolutionary social force upon which a movement against war, authoritarianism, censorship and inequality must be based.

That the class struggle is an international struggle. As the ICFI wrote in 1988, “Given the new features of capitalist development, even the *form* of the class struggle must assume an international character. Even the most elemental struggles of the working class pose the necessity of coordinating its actions on an international scale.”

That the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade unions are not workers’ organizations, but corporatist arms of management and the state that serve to block and suppress opposition to inequality and the capitalist system.

64. Each of the major teachers’ strikes this year was initiated by rank-and-file teachers, not the trade unions. In the first of these strikes, in West Virginia, an expanding wave of local wildcat strikes forced the unions to call a limited, statewide walkout to let off steam and contain teacher discontent. When the unions issued a back-to-work order, based on an agreement with the state’s billionaire governor, teachers rebelled, forcing a continuation of the strike. The unions then intensified their efforts, supported by pseudo-left organizations around the Democratic Party, to shut down the struggle without meeting any of the teachers’ main demands. The unions played a similar role in every strike, working to suppress and shut down opposition from workers.

65. The true function of the unions was spelled out by union lawyers in oral arguments in the Supreme Court case of *Janus v. AFSCME* on the constitutionality of “agency fees,” which require workers in public-sector unions in some states to pay the equivalent of union dues, even if they do

not belong to a union. David Frederick, representing AFSCME Council 31 in Illinois, stated: “The key thing that has been bargained for in this contract for agency fees is a limitation on striking. And that is true in many collective bargaining agreements.” Fredrick continued: “The fees are the tradeoff. Union security is the tradeoff for no strikes.” If the court makes the decision to overturn prior precedent allowing states to mandate agency fees, he warned, “you can raise an untold specter of labor unrest throughout the country.”

66. The nature of the trade unions is manifest in the corruption scandal that has engulfed the United Auto Workers, concerning the payment by Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) executives of more than \$1.5 million to UAW officials involved in contract negotiations. In exchange for these payouts, the UAW pushed through, by means of intimidation and fraud, contracts that abolished the eight-hour day, halved the wages for a new class of “second-tier” workers, and expanded the number of temporary part-time workers who pay union dues but have no rights.

67. The character of the unions is rooted, fundamentally, not only in the corruption of individual leaders, but in the nature of the organizations themselves and changes in the structure of world economy. The nationalist and pro-capitalist unions reacted to the rise of globalized production and the crisis and decline of US capitalism by abandoning the struggle for even limited gains. The union apparatus integrated itself ever more directly into the framework of corporate management, with the proliferation of union-management partnerships that ensured a continued increase in the income of the union executives, even as membership in the organizations declined and the wages and benefits of workers collapsed.

68. The growth of the class struggle is an objective process. As the WWS stated in “Palace coup or class struggle”:

The interaction of objective conditions of crisis, both within the United States and internationally, and the radicalization of mass social consciousness will find expression in the eruption of class struggle. The decades-long suppression of the class struggle by the trade union bureaucracy, the Democratic Party and the affluent sponsors of various forms of identity politics is coming to an end. The social counterrevolution of the ruling elites is about to encounter an upsurge of the American working class. The many different forms of social protest—in work places, communities and entire cities—will acquire an ever more distinct working class identity, anti-capitalist orientation and socialistic character. Struggles in individual workplaces and communities will draw into unified struggle broader sections of the working class.

The logic of the class struggle and the general strike

69. The United States is a social powder keg. The eruption of social struggles on a scale never before seen in the United States is all but inevitable. There are many factors—the commonality of social interests among broad sections of the working class, the erosion of sectional differences, the racial and ethnic integration of the working class, the impact of Internet-based social media—that are working toward the coalescence of mass protests. Thus, it is to be expected that the outbreak of serious social protests—whatever the immediate issue or wherever the location—will rapidly expand and draw millions of workers into active participation in the struggle. 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.

70. Therefore, preparation for mass working class struggles requires the

development of an interconnected network of popular workplace and neighborhood committees. The necessity for such committees arises out of the experiences of the workers themselves. The organizations that claim to represent them, the trade unions, are not only deeply hostile to the organization of working class struggles, they have abandoned even the most limited forms of representation, including the resolving of grievances and the enforcement of contract provisions. Workplace and factory committees will raise demands such as workers' control over line speed, an end to multi-tier labor, the enforcement of an eight-hour day, with full and livable wages for all workers, and an end to unsafe working conditions.

71. The Socialist Equality Party's call for the formation of rank-and-file factory committees, totally independent of the corporate-controlled trade unions, has enraged not only the reactionary bureaucrats but all tendencies among the pseudo-left. "How dare the SEP challenge the political and organizational sovereignty of the trade unions over the working class!" Some of the pseudo-left spokespeople, feigning adherence to Trotskyism, accuse the SEP of abandoning the *Transitional Program*. These petty-bourgeois attorneys for the corporatist union executives have either never read or have long forgotten what Trotsky actually wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International. He called upon the members of the Fourth International

to create in all possible instances independent militant organizations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society; and, if necessary, not flinching even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions. If it be criminal to turn one's back on mass organizations for the sake of fostering sectarian factions, it is no less so passively to tolerate subordination of the revolutionary mass movement to the control of openly reactionary or disguised conservative ("progressive") bureaucratic cliques. Trade unions are not ends in themselves; they are but means along the road to proletarian revolution.

72. In advocating the formation of factory and workplace committees, Trotsky explained that they raise the question: "Who shall be the boss of the factory: the capitalist or the workers?"

From the moment that the committee makes its appearance, a factual dual power is established in the factory. By its very essence it represents the transitional state, because it includes in itself two irreconcilable regimes: the capitalist and the proletarian. The fundamental significance of factory committees is precisely contained in the fact that they open the doors, if not to a direct revolutionary, then to a pre-revolutionary period—between the bourgeois and the proletarian regimes.

The tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

73. The urgent political task is to build the political influence of the Socialist Equality Party in every section of the working class. The SEP is spearheading the fight to arm the developing objective working class movement with an uncompromising revolutionary strategy and perspective. It is fighting to connect struggles against declining wages, attacks on health care and the destruction of public education to

opposition to the assault on immigrant workers, police brutality, the destruction of democratic rights and the danger of world war.

74. The basic task of the SEP is to build a revolutionary vanguard and impart an ever-greater level of understanding to the working class of its aims, and clarify the nature of the movement that is developing. The SEP must fight to connect the growth of struggle in the working class to a socialist, internationalist and anti-imperialist political movement to take state power and reorganize economic life on the basis of social need instead of private profit. To the ruling class policy of war and social counterrevolution, the working class must advance a program of socialist revolution.

75. The political activity of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International is increasingly connected to the course of political events. Over the past year, the ICFI and the SEP have been in the forefront of the fight against Internet censorship and the defense of Julian Assange. The party's campaign for factory committees, independent of the pro-corporate trade unions, is winning growing support among teachers, autoworkers and other sections of the working class.

76. A study of social revolutions in the twentieth century reveals that political defeats were frequently the consequence of incorrect policies by the socialist party in the course of revolutionary struggles. The policies of the POUM during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) rank among the most tragic examples of a defeat resulting from incorrect policies. But another cause of defeats is the failure of the Marxist party to recognize and respond, in a timely and sufficiently determined manner, to the approach of a revolutionary crisis. The defeat of the German Revolution in 1923 is the most significant example of such a failure of political initiative. In the present situation of deepening crisis, it is the latter mistake that the revolutionary movement must be determined to avoid.

77. The specific tasks that flow from this perspective are:

A. The development of the party's base in key sections of the working class, including auto and other manufacturing workers; workers in the extraction, mining and steel industries; teachers and other public-sector workers; health care workers; Amazon, UPS and other shipping workers; and service workers. The SEP must connect an aggressive campaign to organize factory, workplace and neighborhood committees independently of the trade unions with the political mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system. Every effort must be made to coordinate the actions of workers within the United States to those in other countries, making conscious the objective unification of the working class on an international scale. All party branches should work systematically to recruit into the party the most advanced workers.

B. The development of a campaign against the victimization of immigrant workers and the fascistic policies of the Trump administration. The fight against the persecution of immigrants must be brought into the working class, based on an understanding that the attack on immigrants is an attack on all workers, and that the police state methods being used against immigrants will be used against every form of social and political opposition. This campaign must be developed in opposition to the Democratic Party and all its peripheral organizations.

C. The development of a new antiwar movement of the working class. The SEP reaffirms its support for the ICFI statement "Socialism and the Fight Against War" and the principles it outlines as the essential political foundations of an antiwar movement:

i. 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.

ii. The new antiwar 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.

iii. The new antiwar movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

iv. The new antiwar 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.

D. The intensification of the campaign against Internet censorship, the persecution of Julian Assange and all attacks on democratic rights, through the broadest mobilization of the working class. It is not just that the working class is necessary to defend democratic rights, but democratic rights are critical for the working class. As the initial eruption of class struggle has demonstrated, a free and open Internet is an essential tool for workers to organize and communicate independently of the capitalist media, the instruments of the state and the trade unions. The censorship of the WWS must be countered through an aggressive campaign to expand its readership and develop its content, including through the more systematic use of social media.

E. A broad and active campaign to build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality on campuses and schools and among working class youth. The first half of 2018 has seen significant expressions of a politicization of young people, including the mass protests against school violence. This radicalization must be turned to the working class and consciously directed to the source of inequality, war and violence: the capitalist system.

F. Support for the campaign of Niles Niemuth, the SEP's candidate for Congress in Michigan's 12th Congressional District in the 2018 midterm elections. This campaign is advancing a socialist program for a workers' government to secure the rights of the working class, expropriate the wealth of the financial oligarchy, transform the giant banks and corporations into publicly controlled utilities, and establish workers' control over the workplace and the process of production.

78. To carry out its immense political responsibilities, the party and its cadre must be firmly rooted and educated in the historical experiences of the Marxist movement, above all the eighty-year history of the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. There is no other political movement that represents the continuity of the fight for Marxism in the working class. The immense history embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International must be brought into the developing movement of the working class. The intersection of the objective radicalization of the working class and the practice of the party will create the conditions for the victory of the working class, the abolition of capitalism, and the socialist transformation of world economy.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)