

Resolution of the SEP (US) Fifth National Congress

The Resurgence of Class Struggle and the Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party: Part Three

10 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, the 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!”

The resolution was initially published in parts. The entire document is available here.

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 WSWS 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 WSWS 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.

Concluded



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact