

Socialist Equality Party summer school prepares membership for growth of class struggle

Barry Grey
11 August 2021

The Socialist Equality Party in the United States held its biennial summer school from August 1 through August 6, 2021. The school, which was held online, was devoted to an analysis of the major social and political events in the US and internationally since the previous SEP school, held in July of 2019.

Despite the impact of the pandemic on public activity and the intense efforts of Google, Facebook and other corporate media conglomerates to suppress access to the *World Socialist Web Site*, the SEP membership has grown substantially. Attendance at the school was far larger than in 2019. There was also a significant international presence, with delegations from Latin America, Europe, Asia and the Asia-Pacific.

SEP schools are carefully prepared and conducted at a high political and intellectual level. The building of a socialist movement is not just a matter of numbers. Those who join a revolutionary party that is serious about gaining the confidence of the working class require political education. As Trotsky wrote, “a revolutionary organization selects and educates people not for intrigues among cliques but for great struggles.”

This year’s school was particularly challenging. The coronavirus pandemic has spread throughout the world, triggering the most extreme crisis since the Second World War. More than four million people have died, according to official figures, while the real death toll is well over 10 million. The response of the ruling class to the pandemic has exposed the bankruptcy of the entire capitalist system and the criminality of the ruling elites, and is producing growing anger and opposition in the working class.

Marxist politics requires a continuous and critical reworking of past events and experiences as the basis for a political orientation in the present. While the school was centered on a review of the past two years, it began with a discussion of an important episode in the history of the Trotskyist movement.

On the eve of the school, members received the first part of a political biography of Cliff Slaughter, written by WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman and SEP National Chairman David North. Slaughter was a leader of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and

its British section between 1957 and 1986.

Although Slaughter later broke with the International Committee, North emphasized the necessity of an objective appraisal of the history of the movement, including recognition of the significant role that Slaughter had played in an earlier period.

The discussion of the major theoretical and political issues that confronted the Trotskyist movement between 1956 and 1963 provided a historical and political framework for the ensuing work of the school. North called attention to Slaughter’s emphasis on the centrality of class struggle in the Marxist identification of the working class as the essential revolutionary force in society. Of particular importance was Slaughter’s statement in an essay written in 1959: “There is not a scrap of Marxism in any approach to class which does not have class conflict at its core.”

The SEP’s last school, in July 2019, analyzed the stages in the development of the Trotskyist movement since 1923. Based on a review of this history and of the capitalist crisis, the SEP anticipated that the ICFI had entered an entirely new stage, which would be characterized by the growing intersection between the practice of the party and the growth of the class struggle. “The world crisis that we are analyzing,” North stated in his introductory report in 2019, “is one in which the International Committee is an increasingly active and direct participant.”

In reviewing the past two years, a central task was to determine whether this prognosis had been confirmed. SEP National Secretary Joseph Kishore opened this section of the school with an overview of the major social, political and cultural developments of this period, and the response of the party to them. The remaining sessions reviewed these developments in greater detail.

The first of these sessions examined the insurrection of January 6, incited and directed by Donald Trump. Eric London gave a report on the period preceding January 6, including the protracted crisis of American democracy going back to the theft of the 2000 election. London was able to verify, based on new material in books that have been published over the past month,

the party's analysis of the insurrection as an attempted fascistic coup, carried out with support from significant factions of the state apparatus and ruling class.

Patrick Martin provided a detailed account of the coup itself, which showed how the operational plan to stop the transfer of power on January 6 was implemented. Jacob Crosse reviewed the cover-up of the coup, which has been carried out with the critical assistance of the Democratic Party, along with sections of the pseudo-left that have claimed the attempt to overturn the election and stop the transfer of power was of no real significance.

The next session was devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic. Benjamin Mateus, who has published scores of articles on the pandemic on the WSWs, compared the present pandemic to the Spanish Flu of 1918, and documented the staggering loss of life caused by the homicidal policies of the ruling class.

WSWS writer Andre Damon's report reviewed how at every stage of the pandemic, the response of the ruling class was to subordinate human life to profit, first under Trump and now under Biden. Damon's report also thoroughly exposed the "Wuhan Lab theory" of the origins of the pandemic. He explained how this "theory" is being used to divert attention from the ruling class' responsibility for mass death, while fueling the increasingly aggressive campaign of American imperialism against China.

Leading members of the Trotskyist movement from Europe, Canada, Turkey and Brazil gave additional reports on the impact of the pandemic throughout the world, showing that political developments within the US are a particular expression of an international process.

The session concluded in the evening with a panel discussion involving two scientists who have played a central role in fighting for policies to contain the pandemic.

The next session reviewed the *New York Times*' "1619 Project," which was launched in 2019 and is aimed at discrediting the American Revolution and Civil War and reinterpreting all of American history in racial terms. Tom Mackaman introduced the session with a report demonstrating that without the intervention of the Trotskyist movement, there would have been no conscious, organized opposition to the falsification of the most critical events in American history.

Niles Niemuth and Tom Carter gave two additional reports that reviewed the theoretical and political origins of the identity politics of the Democratic Party. Carter's report included a detailed examination and refutation of "Critical Race Theory," an anti-Marxist conception rooted in postmodernism and subjective idealist philosophical trends.

The final day of the school examined the upsurge of labor struggles in the US and internationally, and in particular the strike by Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia, in June and July of this year.

There was intense interest in the report by Marcus Day, which reviewed in detail the timeline of the struggle, the

formation of a rank-and-file committee of Volvo workers with the assistance of the SEP, and the efforts of workers to oppose the UAW-company conspiracy to impose a pro-company contract. He also reviewed the enormous impact on the Volvo workers of the support that came from workers throughout the world, including from Volvo Cars workers in Belgium, who launched their own wildcat action in the midst of the Virginia Volvo workers strike.

WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White delivered a report that placed the party's initiative to build rank-and-file committees in the context of a long historical experience with the trade unions. The report demonstrated the central role that the Trotskyist movement played in the major class battles of the 1970s and 1980s, including the strike by PATCO air traffic controllers in 1981, which the Reagan administration smashed with the crucial assistance of the trade unions.

In concluding the school, North stressed that the developments of the past two years could not be understood outside of the practice of the Trotskyist movement. How the situation develops, whether toward fascism, authoritarianism, war and ever-growing inequality and exploitation, or toward socialism, depends critically on what the party does, North explained:

We can see very clearly that objective conditions are changing that provide for us unparalleled opportunities. Everything depends on how we utilize these opportunities. There have been many cases, even in the past two years, where success depended on a rapid political response. That we recognized these opportunities was of course grounded in a deeper historical understanding. But realizing the potential in the objective situation requires that the party act, and that it act decisively.

The school as a whole was animated by this conception. In reviewing the past two years, in the context of the entire history of the Trotskyist movement, the party is preparing the leadership for enormous revolutionary struggles that are already emerging.

All the major reports to the school will be published on the *World Socialist Web Site* in the coming days and weeks. We urge our readers to study these documents and carefully review the experiences of the past two years.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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