

Third National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka): Greetings from David North on behalf of the ICFI and the SEP in the US

David North
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The following greetings were delivered by David North on behalf of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the SEP in the US to the Third National Congress of the SEP in Sri Lanka held from May 14 to May 16.

Dear comrades,

Please allow me to extend to your Third Congress the warmest revolutionary greetings from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the Socialist Equality Party in the US. It is hardly necessary for me to state that your Congress is being held under the most extraordinary circumstances. In our view, not only do you confront within Sri Lanka a political crisis with unprecedented dimensions. That crisis itself is unfolding within the greatest global crisis of world capitalism since the end of the World War II.

In the present circumstances, the Congress is not an occasion merely for commenting on the events happening outside of it. The party leadership, every delegate, must clearly understand, as I am sure you do, that all the discussions are invested with an immense and immediate political and historical content. Therefore, the fundamental challenge that this Congress confronts is to clearly define the attitude of the Sri Lankan section of the IC to the immense and decisive global events, and, of course, to the developing revolutionary crisis within Sri Lanka. In this sense, the Congress that you are holding has many similarities to the Congress of the Bolshevik Party in April 1917, the first Congress held following the return of Lenin to Russia amid a revolutionary crisis.

In the midst of a global war, the party had to define its political orientation, program and perspective. Lenin reoriented the Bolshevik Party based on the Theory of Permanent Revolution, previously developed by Trotsky, which set the course of the Bolshevik Party on the path of revolution and state power.

In determining the policy of the party in Sri Lanka, we understand that it is necessary to place this crisis within its international context. Even under the conditions of immense crisis within Sri Lanka, our starting point is never the national, but rather the international framework. This is because it is only within the framework of the international context of the crisis in Sri Lanka that it is possible to arrive at and sustain the necessary revolutionary orientation for the working class.

The US/NATO war is acquiring ever more nakedly an imperialist character. It is a war of imperialist gangsters led by the US, whose aim is essentially the destruction of Russia and its incorporation as a semi-colony into the global structure of US-led imperialism. This is a war which was anticipated, predicted, and foreseen by the IC.

At previous party congresses we have frequently spoken about the “drive to war.” Now the war has begun. The imperialists are not “driving

to world war.” They have fired the first shots of that war. This is not a minor episode that will soon pass. It is an initiation of a fundamental reorienting of global politics. What the great Marxists of the past referred to as the redivision of the world is presently underway.

The outcome of this war, however, will not be decided merely on the plane of military action between the combatants, which are the US, the major European powers and their client states organized within NATO, on one side, and the reactionary capitalist regime in Russia that emerged from the breakup of the USSR in 1991, on the other. The aim of the US and European imperialists is to use this war to accelerate the disintegration of Russia in its present form and facilitate the takeover of the fragments that emerge from the breakup.

But beyond this conflict is the more fundamental confrontation between the imperialists and the international working class. And on this basis of this analysis, we can now understand the significance of the crisis within Sri Lanka itself.

As in every war waged by imperialism, the conflict over Ukraine was initiated with a barrage of lies that formed the foundation of false propaganda. If we are to believe the narrative that is being broadcast in all imperialist media, the war is simply the product of the decision taken in February by the Putin government in Russia to attack peaceful, innocent Ukraine. This narrative is whipped up with lies and cannot withstand any objective analysis.

At the May Day rally recently held by the IC, we reviewed in detail statements made by the IC and the WSWWS at previous rallies, which clearly anticipated the events that are now taking place. I would like to reference another article written by my comrade Bill Van Auken on April 24, 2014. The title of this article was “Does Washington want war with Russia?” It was written in response to the tensions that were intensified by the coup d’état organized by the US and Germany in February 2014:

Does Washington want a war with Russia? A review of recent US actions surrounding the crisis in Ukraine clearly poses what would have once seemed an unthinkable question. The Obama administration is playing a very dangerous game of Russian Roulette.

In the last 48 hours, the Pentagon has announced the deployment of US paratrooper units to Poland and the three former Baltic republics of the Soviet Union—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—bringing US troops to Russia’s very border. Another American warship has been dispatched to the Black Sea and more US forces are slated to deploy to Ukraine itself this summer under

an exercise known as Operation Rapid Trident.

These military moves by Washington are unfolding in the context of an acute crisis within Ukraine that, thanks to the machinations of Washington and its puppets, threatens to erupt into full-blown civil war.

Less than one week after signing a joint statement with Russia, the US and the European Union in Geneva pledging to end all violence in Ukraine and disarm illegal groups, the US puppet regime in Kiev has ordered its military to carry out an 'anti-terrorist' crackdown against the restive Russian-speaking population in the country's industrial southeast. To that end it has dispatched not only troops, tanks and warplanes, but also armed thugs from the neo-fascist Right Sector.

The Putin government in Moscow, which has desperately searched for an accommodation with Washington, appears to be waking up to the deadly seriousness of the situation. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned in an English-language interview with the state-run RT television channel Wednesday that his government would treat an attack on Russian citizens in Ukraine as an attack on Russia itself...

Every word in this statement written eight years ago has been substantiated. Now, however, the US and European powers are playing Russian Roulette at an even more dangerous level. They are even preparing for a thermonuclear conflict with Russia in pursuit of their agenda of global hegemony and the imperialist redivision of the world.

I could quote many other statements made by the IC. However, I think the document that is more relevant for the present-day orientation of our party's work is the WSWS statement posted at the very beginning of 2020, which stated that this will be the decade of the world socialist revolution.

Just a few months before this statement, at the 2019 Summer School of the Socialist Equality Party in the US, we stated that the fifth stage of the history of the Trotskyist movement had begun, and that it would be characterized by the direct struggle of our movement to win the leadership of the working class. We said that this is a period in the history of the Trotskyist movement that is characterized by the direct and immediate intersection of the struggle waged by the IC and the growing movement of the working class.

There is no question that this analysis of the objective situation and its relationship to the history and practice of the ICFI has been profoundly and irrefutably vindicated.

It is worth recalling that within only a few weeks of the publication of our statement at the beginning of 2020, the world was confronted with the sudden outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Precisely because the IC had correctly evaluated the crisis of global capitalism, we were able to recognize, almost immediately, that this was not only a public health crisis. This was a crisis that would have the most far-reaching social, political, and economic consequences. And we defined the pandemic as a trigger event that would intensify and escalate all the contradictions of global capitalism.

The pandemic exposed the contradiction between the imperialist-dominated nation state system and the fundamental reality of world economy and global interconnectedness. It also exposed the completely irreconcilable antagonism between the private ownership of the means of production and finance and the social nature of production. The capitalist system and the governments that preside over it are completely incapable of responding to a global crisis of this magnitude. All the decisions related to the pandemic were and are determined not on the basis of the needs of people and protecting human lives, but solely on the basis of what will increase the wealth of the ruling elites. We can all see the consequences of

the policies they have pursued.

The IC defined the pandemic as a trigger event. And we can say at this point that the trigger has clearly been pulled in Ukraine. World imperialism—and most explosively in its center, the United States—faces an unprecedented combination of social, political, and economic crises.

In many studies of World War I and World War II, the most perceptive historians noted that both wars began under conditions of extreme and mounting internal domestic crisis.

There is no question that World War I was to a great extent triggered by the anxiety of the ruling elites over intensifying social conflicts within their own countries. It is well-known that the apparently mad policies pursued by the Nazi regime and the launching of war in 1939 were a response to an intractable internal crisis for which Hitler had no solution except war and mass murder.

In relation to the present situation, how else can one explain the willingness of the American and European ruling classes to take the incredible risk of provoking war with Russia, knowing full well that the crisis can escalate into a nuclear war?

This level of recklessness is bound up with the extremity of internal crisis confronting all capitalist countries, the most extreme expression of which has been the complete incapacity and unwillingness to deal with a pandemic that has claimed an extraordinary number of human lives. Notwithstanding the violence within Ukraine, the daily death toll from the war does not begin to approach the number of people who are dying each day all over the world as a consequence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

Finally, I will comment on one critical point that relates to the actions of the Russian government itself. We reject and oppose the policies of the Putin government. We analyze these policies in the context of the historical consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the culmination of the Stalinist betrayal of the October Revolution. At the time, the justification given by the Stalinists for this reactionary decision was that the return of Russia to capitalism would bestow upon Russia great wealth and would open up a path to a blossoming of bourgeois democracy. Moreover, by repudiating the supposedly outmoded class-struggle doctrines of Marxism, it would be possible to integrate Russia peacefully into the capitalist community of nations.

All these illusions have been comprehensively and totally exposed. The dissolution of the USSR has led to a catastrophe. The war itself has produced a disaster for the Russian masses and even threatens the outbreak of a full scale global nuclear war. We do not attribute to Putin's actions any progressive character whatsoever.

In fact, not only does the present crisis confirm the analysis made by the IC of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but it also demonstrates once again the impossibility of resolving any of the great global problems faced by mankind on the basis of policies driven by national considerations.

The same is true for China itself. We have acknowledged and argued that the Chinese government is the only government that responded in anyway appropriately to the outbreak of the pandemic. China demonstrated that it was indeed possible to adopt a policy of Zero-COVID and prevent a massive loss of life.

Indeed, compared to all other countries, the scale of death has been remarkably contained within China. However, that very achievement has also exposed the fundamental flaw of the strategy and the policy of the Chinese regime and its program of capitalist restoration. It is becoming ever clearer that not only it is impossible in the long term to contain the virus within one country, but at the same time the correct public health policies pursued by the Chinese regime are also intensifying its conflict with the major imperialist powers.

It is not possible to pursue a correct public health policy to combat the deadly virus on a purely national level. American and European imperialism are making it very clear that they will not accept the continuation of the Zero-COVID policy within China. This policy is seen

as destructive to capitalist interests all over the world. Enormous pressure is being brought to bear upon China to alter its policy. It is well understood that if China abandoned its policy of Zero-COVID, it would lead to a massive growth of infections and deaths. Within months of abandoning Zero-COVID, it has been estimated that China would lose about as many as one and a half million of its citizens to the virus.

This Congress must confirm—as it is developing its response to the present crisis within Sri Lanka—that the solution to the crisis depends upon a global strategy of internationally-directed class struggle and world socialist revolution.

And because our party has opposed every form of bourgeois nationalism and bourgeois separatism within Sri Lanka and Eelam, it has prepared the Sinhala and Tamil working class to develop its unified struggle based on a global perspective.

The class struggle is intensifying in every part of the world, particularly within the US itself. American capitalism is not invincible. American capitalism is torn by internal crisis, and there are innumerable signs that the American working class is undergoing a process of profound radicalization.

We are confident that it will be possible to win the American working class to the program of World Socialist Revolution. I want to stress this because it must be a source of encouragement to the working class all over the world. Within the center of world imperialism, a revolutionary crisis is developing. We are convinced that in the period directly ahead, these struggles within the United States will become the catalytic force in the growth of the revolutionary movement of the working class all over the world.

These are not separate struggles. These are combined struggles. In fact, as we meet, in your congress in Sri Lanka today, we are witnessing the fullest clarification of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, which remains the great strategic perspective for our movement and the international working class.

Thank you very much comrades for your attention.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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