

SEP (US) 2022 Congress Resolution

Build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees in the United States! For a global counteroffensive of the working class!

Socialist Equality Party (US)
17 August 2022

This resolution was adopted unanimously at the Seventh National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US), held from July 31 to August 5, 2022. Read the full report on the Congress and the other resolutions here.

1. The Socialist Equality Party (US) resolves to actively and systematically build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), the democratic organ of international working-class struggle in the 21st century.

2. The IWA-RFC was founded at the initiative of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) on May Day 2021. In its founding statement, the ICFI resolved that the IWA-RFC would fight “to develop a global counter offensive of the working class” in response to decades of social counterrevolution, imperialist war, the spread of the deadly coronavirus pandemic, and the growing danger of fascism and dictatorship. The founding document outlined the IWA-RFC’s historic task: to unite all the heterogeneous layers and sections of the international working class, coordinate its struggles on a world scale, and direct the tremendous social power of the modern world proletariat against the corporations and the capitalist system.

3. Across the world, the emergence of a movement of the international working class against social inequality and the rising cost of living confirms the historic necessity of building the IWA-RFC. The decades-long period of the artificial suppression of the class struggle is over, and the decade of socialist revolution has begun.

4. Triggered by rising living costs and scarcities exacerbated by the US led war against Russia in Ukraine, the emerging world movement is seeking historical retribution for decades of austerity, unemployment and attacks on wages and living standards. Adding to the explosive mood in the working class is deep social anger over the ruling class response to the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed over 20 million people so far. The prolongation of the US/NATO war against Russia leaves nearly two billion people confronting the threat of starvation, while workers in even the most advanced countries find it increasingly difficult to pay for food, rent and gas.

5. The American working class—the sleeping giant of world politics—is beginning to awaken. In the center of world imperialist reaction, where the ruling class is orchestrating a war between nuclear powers and directing a genocidal response to the coronavirus pandemic, inflation and the rising cost of living are forcing broader sections of the working class into social struggle. As in other countries, the strikes and protests that have

developed among workers in key industries more and more take the character of rebellions against the trade unions, which function as an institutionalized police force for the corporations and the state.

6. The Socialist Equality Party (US) has actively intervened in these struggles to encourage the democratic self-organization of the working class against the corporate-union alliance. Through its interventions, the party has facilitated the establishment of a network of rank-and-file committees linking workers together both within and between workplaces and industries. The committees that have been established among teachers, health care workers, autoworkers, oil and gas workers, rail workers, Amazon workers, bus drivers and other sections of the working class have become a critical vehicle for organizing and politically educating the American working class as it enters into struggle on a mass scale.

The fight for rank-and-file committees

7. In its statement announcing the formation of the IWA-RFC, the ICFI wrote, “For the working class to fight back, a path must be created to coordinate its struggles in different factories, industries and countries in opposition to the ruling class and the corporatist unions.” The task of the SEP (US) is to *actively and systematically intervene* in this movement, to build rank-and-file committees that forge this path by breaking the domination of the massive AFL-CIO bureaucratic apparatus over the working class.

8. Rank-and-file committees must create conditions for the development of genuine workers’ democracy, facilitating free discussion among workers, coordinating information-sharing outside the censors of the AFL-CIO, and planning common action among the broadest sections of the working class to achieve what workers need, not what the companies demand. As Leon Trotsky wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International, the aim is “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.”

9. While the IWA-RFC is not a replacement for the revolutionary party,

it is also not merely an instrument of conventional trade union struggles. Its aim is to facilitate the development of a movement out of the control of the corporate-state AFL-CIO apparatus and unleash the tremendous social power of the American working class. Trotsky wrote in *The Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*, the party must “mobilize the masses, not only against the bourgeoisie, but also against the totalitarian regime within the trade unions themselves and against the leaders enforcing this regime.” Smashing the AFL-CIO apparatus will require nothing less than a rebellion that transfers power to the workers themselves.

10. As an initiative of the party, the IWA-RFC is the organizational form through which such a movement can develop. To unite the working class, rank-and-file committees must encompass workers of various political views who are prepared to fight together to advance the class struggle. The development of an insurrectionary movement against the AFL-CIO will necessarily raise historical and political questions. The SEP must strive to introduce the lessons of the historical experiences of the international working class into these struggles in order to raise the political and cultural level of the class as a whole and create conditions for the development of socialist consciousness.

The decade of socialist revolution has begun

11. The SEP’s fight to build the IWA-RFC comes amid a global upsurge of the working class. In 2018-19, a series of mass protests broke out across the world against inequality and decades of austerity. In Ecuador, Lebanon, Iraq, France, Sudan, Chile and dozens more countries, a series of mass protests erupted, larger and more global than even the Arab Spring demonstrations of 2011. The onset of the pandemic in early 2020 brought this movement temporarily to a halt.

12. Now, in the first half of 2022, new protests, driven by the cost of living and the devastating impact of the pandemic, have broken out on an even broader scale and scope. The demonstrations, which involve tens of millions of people in both developing countries and centers of world imperialism, are the culmination of 20 years of growing working class discontent.

13. “There are times in history when large numbers of people protest about the way things are, demanding change,” write the authors of a recent study called *World Protests: A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century*. “It happened in 1830–1848, in 1917–1924, in the 1960s, and it is happening again today.” This movement is increasingly international and guided by a desire for radical political change. According to the *World Protests* authors, not only has “the number of demonstrations increased steadily since 2006,” but “protests have become more political due to disappointments with malfunctioning democracies, frustration with politicians, and a lack of trust in governments.”

14. This movement reflects the revolutionary power of an international working class that is stronger numerically, more interconnected and more urban than ever before. From 1980 to 2020, the development of the world’s productive forces increased the size of the working class by 2 billion people. A majority of the world’s population now lives in cities for the first time in world history, and this figure rises by the millions each week. Breathtaking technological advances have transformed the economy and open new horizons for the development of political consciousness and human culture. From 2000 to 2020, nearly 5 billion people accessed the internet.

15. The protests have either bypassed the trade unions or developed in rebellion against them. Over the decades in which the working class has grown immensely in size and economic weight, the national trade unions have not only failed to win a hearing, they have universally suffered

declining membership and a collapse in legitimacy. The percentage of workers who belong to trade unions fell from 36 percent in 1990 to 18 percent in 2016. The trade unions everywhere forced through the ruling class’s deadly COVID policies, facilitating death on a mass scale. A 2021 report by the International Labor Organization notes that “trade unions generally welcomed their governments’ covid-19 responses” and now confront opposition from below over widespread covid deaths.

The political awakening of the American working class

16. In the United States, a rapidly growing wave of strikes and working class protests, the largest in decades, is now under way. From January to May 2022, there were 153 strikes involving over 73,000 workers, more than triple the mark from the same time last year. The growth of working class opposition within the United States, the center of world imperialism, is of vital strategic importance for the class struggle all over the world. It can and will encourage and inspire resistance by workers internationally and exposes the lie peddled by middle class radicals that the American working class is “reactionary.”

17. The emergence of this movement is part of an objective process. In the world of globalized production, the class struggle is international in form as well as content, and American workers are a constituent part of a global movement. In the US and internationally, rising inflation and increases to the price of basic necessities, including food, gas and rent, have driven new sections of workers into social struggle. Strikes have taken place across geographic regions, including in the American South, as well as among workers of all ages and races and across various levels of pay and skill. Indices of economic and social desperation are rising as millions go deeper into debt and dip into their limited savings to stay afloat. The decision of the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates to stave off a wages push means layoffs, higher borrowing rates and explosive social struggles are on the horizon. In the US alone, there are already 6 million unemployed, who have little or no access to a rapidly evaporating social safety net.

18. Workers in the US have also passed through critical experiences in the class struggle since the start of the pandemic. At each stage, the Socialist Equality Party has played an active role in fighting to mobilize the working class and to assimilate the lessons of the experiences through which workers are passing, and incorporate them into the next stage of the class struggle. The role of the SEP has not been that of a passive observer, commenting on these struggles from afar, but of an active participant, fighting to cut a path for workers to break through the isolation imposed on them by the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, and to unite with the growing world movement of the working class through the building of the IWA-RFC.

19. From the very beginning of the pandemic, the SEP has fought to mobilize opposition among workers to the profit-driven policies pursued by capitalism in the pandemic. In March 2020, the SEP issued a statement, “Shut down the auto industry to halt the spread of coronavirus!” which was read by tens of thousands of autoworkers, who quickly put this program into practice themselves, launching a wildcat strike rebellion against attempts by the United Auto Workers to keep the plants open. This strike wave forced a two-month shutdown of the auto industry, saving countless lives. With the ending of lockdowns in the summer of that year, the SEP fought alongside workers to establish rank-and-file safety committees to provide workers in many key industries with the means to oppose unsafe working conditions, as the pandemic spread into new and more deadly waves and variants.

The working class confronts the AFL-CIO

20. The abandonment of the limited public health measures taken in the opening months of the pandemic proved deeply unpopular among workers, but the AFL-CIO, in collaboration with the corporations and the two parties, forced workers back on the job. After Congress voted overwhelmingly for the multi-trillion-dollar corporate CARES Act bailout, the American Federation of Teachers and its president, Randi Weingarten, beat back the opposition of teachers in order to force through the reopening of public schools, a necessary step to force parents to return to work across all industries. The SEP actively intervened against the reopening of schools through the formation of teacher rank-and-file committees in Chicago, Oakland and other major school districts.

21. In 2021 and the first half of 2022 there was an important growth in the size and authority of rank-and-file committees affiliated with the IWA-RFC across the United States. In one struggle after another—at Volvo Trucks, Dana, John Deere, and strikes by nurses at hospitals across the country—rank-and-file committees have emerged as the organizing centers of opposition, drawing into their ranks the most class-conscious layers of the working class.

22. The AFL-CIO has not succeeded in throttling the class struggle, only in further exposing itself. In each struggle, the collision between the workers and the pro-corporate unions has become more and more open and direct. Workers repeatedly reject sellout contracts by overwhelming margins and demonstrate their determination to fight through unanimous strike votes. The AFL-CIO has consciously sought to prevent a wage push in order to protect corporate profits and facilitate the Biden administration's war against Russia. As a result, between March of 2021 and March of 2022, wages increased for unionized workers at a slower rate than for nonunion workers, at a mere 3.3 percent.

23. Recent months have seen the entrance into struggle of strategically critical sections of workers in US and global supply chains, including dockworkers, railroaders and truckers. The SEP is intervening to mobilize workers for massive wage increases, cost-of-living adjustments on all wages and benefits and for workers' control of production to ensure proper COVID safety. The Biden administration is intervening more directly to bolster the institutional stability of the AFL-CIO and integrate the trade unions into the state, as a form of police guardianship to prevent the outbreak of strikes in critical industries and enforce massive concessions in real wages and working conditions. But these plans to enforce labor "peace" are backfiring. They are provoking immense anger and preparing the stage for a conflict not only with the executives who run and staff the AFL-CIO but with the capitalist state itself.

24. What is emerging in the United States is not merely an episodic reaction by workers to a downturn, but a social explosion produced by decades of social counterrevolution. Beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the crushing of the PATCO strike in 1981, the past four decades have witnessed the vicious suppression of the class struggle. But over those four decades, the condition of American capitalism has also undergone a vast change. Today, American society is collapsing. The material basis for the post-war "American dream" has been eviscerated and America has lost its position as the world's hegemonic power.

25. This means the objective conditions which allowed the AFL-CIO to dominate the working class have disappeared, and that the ideological influence of anti-communism has been drastically eroded. The transformation of the "land of unlimited opportunity" into the "land of unlimited suffering" is beginning to produce immense possibilities for the development of Marxism. As the SEP wrote in its 2010 program, "The change in objective conditions will lead American workers to change their minds."

26. In 2021, in response to the rank-and-file rebellion of Volvo Truck workers against the company and UAW, David North wrote:

In history there is such a thing as retribution. For all the crimes committed by capitalism against the working class over the past 40 years, the ruling class, in the very process of attacking the working class and vastly enriching itself, has overseen a vast expansion and integration of the capitalist system of production. The most significant and revolutionary outcome of this process—driven by staggering advances in science and technology—is the massive growth in the global working class.

27. Objective conditions are ripe for the revolutionary political awakening of the American working class as part of the growing movement of the global working class. The explosive crisis of the US political system, manifested in Trump's fascist coup attempt of January 6, 2021 and the Democratic Party's feckless response, is another expression of the historic collapse of capitalist democracy. It confirms that the solution to the crisis of American society will not come through the sclerotic two-party system, but by building a mass working class movement against it. But whether this movement achieves its revolutionary potential depends on the activity of the SEP.

The tasks of the SEP

28. This situation places immense responsibilities on the party and its cadre. A powerful movement in the working class is underway. If it is not to be disrupted and betrayed by the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, this movement must find the organizational and political means through which it can articulate itself as an independent force and as part of a world movement. Only the SEP can provide these means. The development of the IWA-RFC is a central task of the SEP in the coming period.

29. The party must forge this path by promoting and popularizing the network of international rank-and-file committees, drawing into it ever broader layers of workers and young people. The party must identify critical workplaces, neighborhoods and schools in which it will fight for influence. Its branches and members must systematically, consciously and creatively fight to build rank-and-file committees as leadership bodies for democratic discussion and common action, as well as schools for making the experiences of different struggles the common property of the class as a whole. The party must strive to unite workers of all races, national backgrounds, ages and skill sets, ruthlessly opposing all efforts to divide workers through racism, identity politics and anti-immigrant chauvinism.

30. An important element of the work of the IWA-RFC in 2022 will be the campaign of Mack Truck worker William Lehman for UAW president in the November election carried out under a court-appointed monitor. The SEP endorses Lehman's campaign, not as an attempt to "reform" the UAW by changing its leadership, but as a means of mobilizing the broadest section of autoworkers in a mass movement to liquidate the bureaucracy, transfer power to the rank-and-file, and return its resources to the workers themselves.

31. Through their interventions in every section of the working class, the members of the SEP will fight to establish the SEP's right to leadership in the working class by systematically developing contacts and political relationships with workers, training the best and most serious workers as socialists and recruiting them to the party.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact