

Greetings from the ICFI to the SEP (US) 2022 Congress

The fight against Canadian imperialism and for socialist internationalism

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These remarks were delivered by Keith Jones to the Seventh National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US), held from July 31 to August 5, 2022.

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Read the full report on the Congress and the resolutions adopted at it.

It is a privilege to extend the fraternal revolutionary greetings of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) to this your Seventh National Congress.

In reviewing the work of the American section and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) as a whole during the past two years, your Congress has provided flesh and blood to our conception of this as the fifth phase in the development of the world Trotskyist movement. The phase in which the ICFI's long struggle to defend and develop the program of world socialist revolution intersects with the developing global upsurge of the working class, and through our strategic and tactical initiatives realizes its objective logic—the overthrow of capitalism and the reactionary system of rival nation-states.

The challenges are enormous. But the work of the Congress, which at every point has sought to lay bare the relationship between the principles and analysis historically defended and developed by the party and its response to the series of intersecting crises now roiling world capitalism, indicates the path forward.

The themes that are the subject of your four resolutions—the global pandemic, the struggle against imperialist war, the breakdown of bourgeois democracy and the threat of dictatorship, the upsurge in the global class struggle and fight to build the IWA-RFC (International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees)—would be central to any discussion of the perspectives and tasks of the SEP (Canada).

This only serves to underscore that we are in the throes of a systemic crisis of world capitalism and that the class struggle has been globalized.

The Canadian bourgeoisie, like its imperialist rivals, has been staggered by the events of the past two-and-a-half years. It now confronts growing social opposition in the form of a strike wave, which, while still in its initial stages, is increasingly taking the form of a rebellion against the trade union apparatuses.

A third-rank imperialist power, Canadian capitalism has historically been privileged due to its close partnership with the predominant global capitalist power, with Britain and its empire in the 19th Century and American imperialism in the 20th.

However, the sun set on the British Empire long ago, and US imperialism—having had to assume responsibility for resuscitating world capitalism at the end of World War II and in so doing subsume within itself all of its maladies and contradictions—is today the very center of the global capitalist crisis.

The response of the Canadian ruling class has been to lash out with the aggressiveness and violence that have been integral to its rule ever since it consolidated its control over the northern tier of North America through the dispossession of the native peoples. This is epitomized by its homicidal response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its bellicose and provocative role in the US-NATO war against Russia.

Working in tandem with Washington, Canadian imperialism played a major role in preparing and instigating the NATO war on Russia and now in its prosecution. Along with the US and British militaries, Canada's armed forces helped train and reorganize the Ukrainian security forces, during the seven years between the 2014 coup and the Russian invasion, including through the integration of the Azov battalion and other fascist militia. Since January, it has funneled hundreds of millions of dollars in weapons to Ukraine and, as the *New York Times* recently revealed, Canadian Special Forces are deployed in Ukraine.

In provoking and waging a proxy war with Russia that at any time could easily spiral into a direct clash between Russia and NATO and one fought with nuclear weapons, the Canadian bourgeoisie is recklessly pursuing its own predatory interests.

The Canadian ruling class believes it essential that it maintain and expand its three-quarter-century-old military-strategic alliance with Washington as the basis for defending and pursuing its own increasingly significant global economic and strategic interests.

Canada also has its own longstanding strategic rivalry with Russia. In this the Arctic, whose sea lanes and abundant sea-floor oil and mineral wealth are becoming ever more accessible due to the perverse effects of climate change, figures large.

Canadian imperialism's major role in the war with Russia is also bound up with its seven-decades-long alliance with the Ukrainian far right, which we documented in the five-part series, "Canadian Imperialism's Fascist Friends." Canada provided a safe haven to tens of thousands of Ukrainian fascists who had collaborated with the Nazis during World War Two in the Holocaust and their war of extermination against the Soviet Union. The Canadian ruling class helped them whitewash the monstrous crimes they had committed as members of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) or the Waffen SS, using them as instruments of its Cold War policy at home and abroad.

With the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union, these forces were redeployed to press for Ukraine to be harnessed to NATO and the EU. The political-ideological spearhead of this campaign was the re-injection and promotion of a fascist Ukrainian nationalism, based on vehement anti-communism, extreme hostility to Russia, and glorification of the Nazi collaborator and fascist Stepan Bandera and those who fought alongside him for an ethnically pure "Ukraine for the Ukrainians."

As we have explained, the reactionary alliance between the Ukrainian

far-right and Canadian imperialism is embodied in the person of Chrystia Freeland, the leading anti-Russia war-hawk in Canada's government, its deputy prime and finance minister and the likely successor to Justin Trudeau as Liberal leader and Canada's prime minister. Freeland's maternal grandfather, Michael Chomiak, who she publicly lionizes for schooling her in Ukrainian nationalism and culture, was a prominent Nazi collaborator.

The exposure of Canada imperialism's alliance with the Ukrainian fascists is a crucial element in the SEP Canada's fight to mobilize the working class against the war and more generally to counter the fraudulent lies promoted by the social democrats and pseudo left about Canadian capitalism's supposed democratic and pacific character.

2022 began with a ruling class debate, played out on the pages of the *Globe and Mail* and other leading dailies, about the significance of Trump's January 6 coup, the ongoing breakdown of American democracy, and how Canadian imperialism could maintain its alliance with Washington while insulating itself from the political and social crisis roiling the United States and the threat of civil war spilling into Canada.

Events, however, were to quickly demonstrate that Canada's bourgeois democratic order is also collapsing under the same pressures—a massive decades-long growth in social inequality, militarism and war, and the ruling class's cultivation of reaction and increasingly openly fascist forces. How could it be otherwise? No country is more economically, geopolitically and culturally integrated with the US, and American imperialism remains the cornerstone of world capitalism on whose decrepit foundations the entire system rests.

With the aim of eliminating what remained of anti-COVID public health measures, pushing politics far to the right, and, if possible, bringing down the minority Liberal government, an important faction of the Canadian ruling class, led by the Conservative opposition and openly encouraged by Trump and his supporters, instrumentalized the far-right Freedom Convoy. With their support, a movement actively supported by a few thousand and opposed by the vast majority of working people was able to menacingly occupy the national capital for close to a month.

Just days after the occupation of Ottawa began—basing ourselves on the ICFI's analysis, important elements of which Comrade Patrick Martin reviewed in his report this morning—we identified the readiness of powerful sections of the ruling class to whip up a far-right extra-parliamentary movement as a nodal point in the breakdown of Canadian democracy. Moreover, we warned that absent the independent intervention of the working class, no matter how this crisis was resolved it would be to the detriment of the democratic and social rights of the working class.

This assessment was rapidly vindicated. After weeks of allowing the far-right Convoy to occupy downtown Ottawa and terrorize its residents, the Liberal government, with the support of the social-democratic NDP and trade unions, invoked for the first-time ever the draconian Emergencies Act. It thereby set an ominous precedent for the suspension of basic democratic rights that can and will be used against the working class.

At the same time, with the greenlight of the federal Liberal government, governments across the country rushed to implement the Convoy's demand—and that of corporate Canada—for the scrapping of all anti-COVID measures, from testing and quarantining to mask mandates.

As a result, Canada has experienced sixth and seventh waves of the pandemic, fueled by the Omicron subvariants. The official death toll now stands at almost 43,000. With more than 12,700 deaths in the first seven months of this year, and schools set to reopen next month without even the most minimal of mitigation measures, 2022 is on track to be by far the most lethal to date.

In late March, the NDP, with the enthusiastic backing of the trade unions, formed a governmental alliance with the minority Trudeau government under which they have pledged to prop it up in parliament

until June 2025. In the name of so-called “political stability”—that is the stability of Canadian capitalism through the suppression of the class struggle—the NDP is giving the Trudeau government and the ruling class free rein to wage war, massively hike military spending, modernize the Canada-US NORAD joint aerospace and maritime defence command for war with Russia and China, and bolster the competitive position of Canadian capitalism through austerity and inflation driven real-wage cuts.

The union-NDP-Liberal alliance is the most important contemporary political expression of the corporatist integration of the unions with big business and the state that has served as the principal mechanism for suppressing the class struggle for decades. With the outbreak of the pandemic and now the war, this anti-working class corporatist partnership has reached a qualitatively new level.

The unions and NDP played a vital role, at the beginning of the pandemic, in pushing through the massive bailout of the banks, big business and the financial markets, then in enforcing the ruling class's homicidal back-to-work/back-to-school policy. Now whilst the NDP props up a Liberal government waging war overseas and class war at home, the unions are desperately trying to keep the lid on a mounting wave of workers struggles fueled by soaring inflation, years of concessions, and the ruling class's ruinous profits before lives pandemic policy.

The pseudo-left functions as the left flank of the trade union-NDP-Liberal alliance. While various Pabliste organizations like the International Marxist Tendency's Fightback group formally claim to oppose the NDP's propping up of the Trudeau government, they never—and I mean never—make mention of it. Moreover, as part of their efforts to bolster the unions and keep workers trapped inside them, these groups suppress the fundamental political fact that the unions are the chief architects and pillars of the NDP-Liberal governmental alliance.

In subordinating the working class to the union-NDP-Liberal alliance and working to entrap it within the framework of capitalist politics, the pseudo left are also helping create conditions where the far-right can exploit the growing social anger and frustration.

The far-right Freedom Convoy has become the defining issue in the Conservative leadership race, with Pierre Poilievre the prohibitive favourite and full-throated Convoy advocate pledging to make Canada the world's “free-est country”—through privatization, the gutting of environmental regulations, and the evisceration of all the social rights of the working class.

The effort of the unions and NDP, and their pseudo-left accomplices, to suppress the class struggle must and will fail. Their authority has been massively eroded as the result of their decades of betrayals. Over the past year there have been a wave of militant worker struggles, involving wide layers of the working class, including miners, food-processing workers, New Brunswick government workers, various groups of railway workers, and Ontario construction workers.

As in the US, numerous strikes have erupted only because workers repudiated, in some cases repeatedly, sell-out tentative contracts.

In these struggles, we have increasingly emerged as the pole of opposition to labour bureaucracy on the basis of the fight for rank-and-file committees as the part of the IWA-RFC. Through the work of the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee we have given concrete expression to the fight for the independent mobilization of the working class to enforce a science-based Zero COVID strategy in opposition to the unions. Underscoring the nervousness with which the bureaucracy views these developments, leading union officials, including most recently the head of the 50,000 member Ontario School Board Council of Unions, have denounced and/or sought to intervene in the work of the CERSC and the CP Rail workers Rank-and-File Committee.

Will Lehman's intervention in the UAW presidential, based as it is on

the fight for a rank-and file rebellion against the union bureaucracy and the need to unite the working class on a global scale, affords us a major opportunity to develop rank-and-file committees among autoworkers in Canada, a key section of the working class. The break-up of the UAW by the rival wings of the bureaucracy in Canada and the US was a critical part of their repudiation and trampling on all the militant traditions of working class.

Important as these initiatives are, we are acutely aware that outside of the strengthening of the SEP Canada's Trotskyist foundation these gains will prove fleeting.

The formal founding of the SEP Canada, as a section of the ICFI, must serve as a critical step in strengthening its Trotskyist identity, by reasserting and defining still more clearly our attitude to the struggles of the Fourth International, led since the 1953 by the ICFI, to uphold and develop the program of world socialist revolution. An important element in this, is drawing a balance sheet of the roots and consequences of the liquidation of the first Canadian section of the ICFI, which in 1963 joined the American SWP in reuniting with the Pabloites. Especially important will be to demonstrate how the struggle the ICFI waged against the national-opportunist WRP and, subsequently, to draw the lessons of the 1985-86 split found expression in and drove the programmatic clarification of the Canadian supporters of the ICFI to key questions of political perspective that remain to this day at the center of the struggle to win the Canadian working class to the program of world socialist revolution. In particular, the fight against left Canadian and Quebec nationalism.

In conclusion, we also recognize that placing the work of the SEP Canada on a higher plane is a necessary contribution to strengthening the work of the ICFI globally, above all in the US. The defeat of US imperialism is a strategic task of the world working class and the Canadian working class, given its long traditions of joint struggle and objective unity with the American working class, must make a major contribution to its realization.



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