

Socialist Equality Party (UK) holds Sixth National Congress

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Britain held its Sixth National Congress on October 22-25, 2022. It was held online due to the coronavirus pandemic, with party members attending from across Britain and Ireland, joined by large delegations from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) sections in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Oceania.

The congress was held under conditions of extraordinary economic, political and social crisis wracking British capitalism, including a Conservative Party government in near meltdown. Prime Minister Liz Truss had resigned just days earlier, after £300 billion was wiped from the UK's stock and bond markets.

In his opening report, National Secretary Chris Marsden defined the situation emerging in Britain as a revolutionary crisis, emphasising the impact of the escalating NATO war against Russia and a global resurgence of the class struggle expressed in a wave of strikes in Britain since the summer.

The congress discussed five resolutions presented by the SEP's outgoing National Committee, "The escalating class struggle in Britain and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party", "The COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for socialism", "Build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees in Britain! For a global counteroffensive of the working class!" and an emergency resolution, "Build the Assange defence campaign in the working class!"

Marsden said, "The resolutions before you for discussion collectively identify the emergence of a global revolutionary crisis of the capitalist system, of which the escalation of NATO's war against Russia and a worldwide eruption of class struggle are its most decisive features.

"To be more precise, the crisis of world capitalism drives the bourgeoisie inexorably towards a world war. But the same contradictions within world imperialism, between globally organised production and the division of the world economy into antagonistic nation states, and between mass social production and private accumulation, is also the driving force for the class struggle and for world socialist

revolution."

Congress delegates observed one minute's silence in honour of the memory of Wije Dias, long-time general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka who died on July 27, 2022. Dias was a founding member in 1968 of the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI, whose contribution to the fight for Trotskyism spanned six decades.

Marsden emphasised the intersection between the decades-long struggle of the Trotskyist movement to defend the strategy of world socialist revolution against Stalinism, social democracy and Pabloism, and the emerging struggles of the working class throughout the world.

"When we say the intervention of our movement becomes ever more decisive, this should not be understood primarily in an organisational sense. The real challenge as we develop the work of the party in the working class is to ground that work at every point firmly in a historical perspective."

He cited the Perspective authored that day by *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board Charman David North, "Leon Trotsky and revolutionary strategy in the 20th and 21st centuries". North's essay marked 100 years since Trotsky's remarkable speech to the membership of the Moscow organisation of the Russian Communist Party on the eve of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International.

North had written that Trotsky's speech "has barely aged. It is hardly even necessary to consult a glossary. Trotsky is dealing with economic, political and social issues that are comprehensible in fully modern terms. The essential significance of revolutionary leadership, the dynamic of world capitalist crisis, the political significance of fascism and the relation of objective and subjective factors in the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism are all dealt with in Trotsky's report.

"And, in what might appear as a remarkable coincidence, Trotsky even calls attention to the implications of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George's sudden fall from power on October 19, 1922, exactly a century before the precipitous collapse of Liz Truss' ill-fated premiership. Of

course, the six-year leadership of Lloyd George cannot be compared to the six-week farce of Liz Truss. But it is not difficult to imagine that Trotsky would have interpreted the Trussian farce as a symptom of the imminent breakdown of bourgeois rule in Britain and the development of a revolutionary crisis. Trotsky would have seen in this crisis an immense opportunity for Marxists to expand their authority within the working class and overcome the influence of the reactionary Labour Party and trade union organisations.”

SEP Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps presented the resolution “Mobilise the working class against imperialist war!” He stressed the anti-imperialist, socialist foundations of the ICFI’s fight against war, and its principled opposition to all forms of nationalism. He identified the rising tide of class struggle in the global working class as the social basis for a movement against war and argued that this depended on a struggle among workers for the programme of socialist internationalism.

At the end of the opening day, North delivered greetings from the ICFI and the SEP in the United States, “One could not be holding this Congress at a more auspicious time... It is evident that the war is the outcome not simply of a dispute between Russia and Ukraine, but of fundamental international contradictions of global capitalism which are embedded in deep-rooted historical issues.”

North referenced that day’s WWSW perspective, which provided a fitting framework for the discussion at the congress, explaining, “It is always a politically invigorating experience to read Trotsky’s writings, but it also once again underscored the monumental significance of Trotskyism, and why Trotskyism is indeed the Marxism of the 21st century.”

Online greetings were delivered by representatives from ICFI sections in Germany, France, Sri Lanka, Australia and Canada, and from the new Turkish section of the ICFI. Leaders from sympathising groups of the ICFI in Brazil and New Zealand spoke too. They made clear the common tasks confronting the world party in its fight to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class.

WWSW national editor Robert Stevens moved the resolution, “The COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for socialism”. He indicted the British ruling class for spearheading the murderous “herd immunity” strategy that has led to more than 20 million deaths worldwide. He reviewed the astonishing record of the ICFI and WWSW in championing the fight for COVID-19 eradication, its defence of science and its fight to mobilise the international working class against the profit-driven policies of capitalist governments worldwide.

WWSW writer Evan Blake and Dr. Benjamin Mateus, who

have played a leading role in the ICFI’s response to the pandemic, joined the congress online from the US. Blake emphasised the importance of the Global Workers Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, while Dr. Mateus reported on the ongoing spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, including the emergence of vaccine-resistant variants, making clear its ongoing threat to life across the planet.

Mack trucks worker and socialist Will Lehman, who is running for president of the United Autoworkers Union (UAW) in the US, the first direct election in the union’s history, addressed a session of congress devoted to the resolution “Build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees in Britain! For a global counteroffensive of the working class!”

Lehman explained how he became involved in building a rank-and-file committee at Mack Trucks after being inspired by workers at New River Valley Volvo in Virginia who had established a rank-and-file committee earlier that year. He discussed his development as a socialist, saying that he joined the SEP due to its political seriousness and high theoretical level. He described the warm response to the party’s campaign among US autoworkers, including their receptiveness to the ideas of socialism and the international unity of the working class.

A question-and-answer session gave delegates an opportunity to discuss some of the campaign’s experiences in greater detail and was joined by SEP (US) National Secretary Joe Kishore and SEP (US) National Committee members Eric London, Jerry White and Lawrence Porter.

An emergency resolution calling for the freedom of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, facing life imprisonment for his exposure of imperialist war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, was moved on the final day of Congress. It described his frame-up under the Espionage Act as “the spearhead of a global attack on democratic rights” led by the US and British governments. Congress affirmed that Assange’s freedom would be won through the revival of an international anti-war movement based on the working class.

The incoming national committee elected Chris Marsden as National Secretary, Tom Scripps as Assistant National Secretary and Robert Stevens as national editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*. A collection for the party’s £100,000 party development fund led by veteran British Trotskyist Barbara Slaughter raised more than £33,000.



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