

## SEP (UK) 2022 Congress Resolution

# The escalating class struggle in Britain and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

15 November 2022

*This resolution was adopted at the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), held from October 22 to October 25, 2022. Read the full report on the Congress [here](#).*

1. British and world capitalism faces an economic, social and political crisis that increasingly assumes revolutionary dimensions. Under conditions of war against Russia in Ukraine, an economic recession, and a still raging pandemic, a major upsurge of the class struggle has erupted in the UK as part of a growing global movement of the international working class. Life is becoming impossible for the broad mass of the working class, pushing millions into a confrontation with the Conservative government, the major corporations and the state. The conditions exist for the construction of a revolutionary movement against capitalism, but this demands the intervention of the Socialist Equality Party. The working class must be armed with a socialist programme, organised to defeat the sabotage of their struggles by the trade union bureaucracy and the Labour Party, and unified in their fight with the struggle of workers internationally.

2. The NATO-Russia conflict is teetering on the brink of a nuclear war. COVID-19 is entering a new upsurge, with the danger that a new mutation will emerge yet more deadly than its predecessors even as millions already suffer from Long COVID. The UK is at the centre of a looming global economic crash. Central banks internationally, led by the US Federal Reserve, have responded to the re-emergence of the class struggle with a major shift in monetary policy. Under the banner of “fighting inflation,” their intention is to deliberately bring about a recession to crush the wages movement, fuel unemployment and create the basis for a massive ramping-up of the exploitation of the working class. This is to be combined with the wholesale destruction of social services that are considered an unnecessary drain on corporate profits. Britain, the weakest of the major imperialist powers, is most heavily impacted and will implement new rounds of brutal austerity to reduce its spiralling debt and restore the confidence of the global financial oligarchy in the British economy. Brexit, which the Tory right was convinced would transform the UK into a world-beating deregulated, cheap labour, low-tax investment hub, has instead exposed its extraordinary global decline. Cut off from Europe’s single market and without a voice in the European Union that made it a valuable ally for US imperialism, it has been driven into ever more craven economic and military subordination to Washington. Even the survival of the UK has been thrown into question by the encouraging of separatist demands in Scotland and Wales, together with the undermining of London’s stranglehold over its oldest colonial possession in Northern Ireland.

3. The most essential feature of the crisis of rule facing British imperialism is the explosive development of the class struggle provoked by the soaring cost-of-living and due to be intensified by a new round of “eye-wateringly difficult” austerity. This found initial expression in the

summer strike wave, after decades in which industrial action was ruthlessly suppressed by the trade union bureaucracy. This will only grow in intensity. Class antagonisms have reached boiling point after an historic decline in the social position of workers, as wealth has been funnelled into the coffers of the financial oligarchy. This has assumed malignant dimensions due to the efforts of the bourgeoisie to impose the full cost of its crisis on the working class—the trillions of dollars handed over to big business during the pandemic, and the massive surge in the price of electricity, gas, fuel and food due to war and anti-Russia sanctions. Wages are eaten away by inflation. Millions are in fuel poverty, cannot afford to eat and are struggling to pay the rent. Vital social services such as the NHS are falling apart. Schools can barely afford to stay open, and children are going hungry. Over 200,000 lives were lost due to the “let rip” policy of the government during the pandemic. To this must be added the staggering total of nearly 900,000 premature deaths due to social inequality in England among under 75s over the last 16 years—one third of all such deaths.

4. The ruling class will respond to any challenge from workers with an explosion of imperialist, counter-revolutionary violence. Capitalist democracy is falling apart in every country as dictatorial measures and far-right takeovers are plotted in parliaments and the courts to prepare an onslaught against the working class. Donald Trump’s fascist coup attempt of January 6, 2021, is only the highest expression of a global development that has seen the cultivation and promotion by the ruling class of far-right tendencies in Italy, France, Germany and throughout Europe. Short-lived former prime Minister Liz Truss initially won the support of the Tory party’s right-wing membership by declaring during the Tory leadership election that she was “prepared” for global nuclear annihilation and pledging to dramatically increase military spending. Her successor Rishi Sunak is moving forward with anti-strike laws aimed at making effective industrial action legally impossible. Strikers have been denounced as a fifth column, “Putin’s stooges”. The Tory government has already passed laws heavily restricting the right to protest, with extraordinary fines and sentences for violations. Attacks on migrant workers and asylum seekers are a spearhead for a broader assault on the democratic rights of the entire working class. A raft of legislation including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act sets out to establish a dictatorial state apparatus aimed at suppressing all opposition to the government’s austerity measures, murderous pandemic policies and warmongering against Russia and China.

5. Workers cannot wage a counter-offensive by relying on the parties of Westminster, the legal system or any other pillars of the state, only in a rebellion against them. Their strength lies in unity with their class brothers and sisters internationally, facing the same brutal drive to austerity and war at the hands of their own ruling classes, in a fight for socialism.

This means opposing every manifestation of British nationalism and all

attempts to divide the working class along national lines to counter the global rise of class struggle. That includes the promotion of Scottish and Welsh separatism by regionalist bourgeois organisations seeking a more direct relationship with the major transnational corporations and global investors in return for policing the exploitation of the working class. The bourgeoisie of Europe is turning to militarism, authoritarian rule and the promotion of the fascist right. Against capitalist reaction, workers across the continent must raise the banner of socialist internationalism. The objective international unity of the working class can only be realised politically, in a Europe torn apart by national divisions and dominated by transnational corporations setting one group of workers against another, by the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.

6. The central task facing workers is to break free from the organisational and political stranglehold of the trade union and Labour bureaucracy, which acts as the essential prop of capitalist rule. Confronted with an insurgent working class, the vast bureaucratic apparatus of the trade unions has dedicated itself to delaying, dividing and demobilising strikes to force through below-inflation pay deals. National industrial action by the Rail, Maritime and Transport, ASLEF and TSSA unions and the Communication Workers Union has been strictly limited to no more than one or two days a week, and largely kept separate. Demands by workers for a general strike have been denied. Instead of leading an offensive against the government and the employers, the union bureaucracies call for reasonable “negotiations”, hoping to preserve their corporatist relationships with both. Their utilisation of the queen’s death to suspend all industrial action demonstrates their real role as guardians of the interests of British imperialism.

7. The trade unions politically disarm workers by encouraging support for a future Labour government led by Sir Keir Starmer. RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch told a rail strike rally, “That’s what we’ve got. He must win. We’ve got to push him and persuade him to get into a position where he’s in the front rank with you, all of you.” The bureaucracy is trying to corral workers behind a party no less hostile to the working class than the Tories. Starmer backs the government’s imperialist and class war policies to the hilt. He has denounced “magic money tree” economics and declared “unshakeable support” for NATO, levelling unprecedented threats of expulsion from the Labour Party against MPs who criticise the imperialist alliance and demotion for frontbenchers attending picket lines. He organised Labour’s 2022 party conference to display the party’s political credentials as a right-wing, nationalist party of business, austerity and war. The event began, for the first time in Labour’s history, with a rendition of the national anthem, *God Save the King*.

8. It is thanks to Labour and its allies in the trade unions that workers have been subjected to five Conservative prime ministers and 12 years of Tory rule. Throughout the protracted crisis of the government, Labour played the central role in disarming the working class. It first allowed the most right-wing sections of the Tory party and the state to engineer Boris Johnson’s replacement by the arch-Thatcherite warmonger Truss, refusing to call for an election and instead calling on Tory MPs to “do the right thing” and remove Johnson themselves in the national interest. It then facilitated Truss’s removal and replacement by Sunak after less than two months on the say so of the global financial oligarchy for announcing billions in additional government borrowing, demanding “economic sanity” be restored. The Tories’ sole concern has been to find someone the ruling class considers capable of waging war on the working class while escalating NATO’s war on Russia. Labour’s sole aim is to prove to the bourgeoisie its readiness to either join a possible government of national unity or to lead a government capable of imposing austerity measures and waging war against Russia while utilising the trade unions to control and suppress opposition in the working class.

9. Starmer’s leadership of the Labour Party confirms that Corbyn’s five years as Labour leader made no change to the anti-working-class character

of this right-wing, pro-imperialist organisation. He served as a temporary life support system for the despised Blairite party, concealing its implacable hostility to the social and political interests of the working class. His aim as leader was to block the leftward movement of the working class and its younger generation and corral it behind Labour. Having surrendered the party to Starmer, Corbyn still refuses to organise opposition to his relentless expulsion of left-wing members utilising the anti-Semitism witch-hunt Corbyn never opposed and even enforced. The former Labour leader focusses all his efforts on overturning his own suspension as a Labour MP, making repeated appeals to Starmer to restore the whip and rejecting entreaties from those who still support him to form his own party. The call instead is for Labour members to “stay and fight”, as the Corbynites turn their backs on the 200,000 who have left the party in disgust.

10. Corbyn’s biggest betrayal is the refusal of the former head of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) to mount an opposition to NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine, which threatens a nuclear world war. When Starmer threatened to expel 11 Labour MPs for signing a February STWC letter opposing NATO’s eastward expansion and accusing the imperialist alliance of pouring “oil on the fire” in Ukraine, they surrendered in less than an hour. Corbyn did not say a word against Starmer, or against his own allies’ cowardice.

11. The group avoids any mention of the NATO-Russia war. Were Corbyn to establish a new party, its role would be to demobilise and disarm the working class as the ruling class prepares state repression. He would preach and enforce social peace at whatever cost the big corporations and banks demanded. Criticising the Tories’ austerity policies, Corbyn’s former shadow chancellor and closest ally John McDonnell’s overriding concern was for the preservation of social peace, warning that they would produce “a relentless deterioration in our economy, and the potential for deep societal division leading to outbreaks of large-scale protest, perhaps even degenerating into riot.”

12. The pseudo-left play a vital role for imperialism is sowing political confusion in the working class. Their nationalist advocacy of a “left Brexit” and claims that this would create the conditions for the implementation of social reforms by Corbyn instead facilitated an historic lurch to the right under successive Tory governments. Britain’s main pseudo-left tendencies championed Corbynism as an attempt “to re-establish a new workers’ party” (the Socialist Party) and proof of the “rebirth of social democracy... The wellspring that gave life to social democracy long ago still pours forth and will find a channel for expression if given the opportunity, whether that be in Syriza, Corbyn or another vessel” (the Socialist Workers Party). The WSWS explained in May 2021:

What politically animated such claims was opposition to the struggle to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class, by forces whose political origins are in the ranks of the Stalinist parties or as opponents of Trotskyism who had broken from the Fourth International decades previously. Corbyn’s heading of the Labour Party was used as an argument for similar efforts to build “left populist” parties to fill the political void created by the collapse of social democracy. These were to be non-socialist, anti-working class parties, promising personal advancement for sections of the upper middle class by utilising various forms of identity politics, and based on a pro-capitalist programme opposed to the class struggle and socialist revolution.

13. The pseudo-left’s promotion of Scottish and Welsh independence is animated by similar concerns for self-advancement. Their claim that the formation of tiny new capitalist states from the remains of the UK can

somehow create new platforms for policies of social reform are a chimera. Their fronting of campaigns for independence divides workers along regional lines, while solidifying their own alliance with sections of the financial oligarchy, regional bourgeoisie and trade union apparatus and demonstrates their bitter hostility to international socialism.

14. Today the SP and SWP's attention is focussed on shoring up the trade union bureaucracy—promoting the idea that union leaderships can be reformed by pressure from below. In every sector, the pseudo-left urge workers to call on the trade union bureaucracy, backed by so-called “union activists”, to escalate the industrial action which they inevitably demobilise, and unify strikes they seek to divide. Writing in 1929 on the “Errors of syndicalism” and addressing the members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Leon Trotsky explained:

In Britain, more than anywhere else, the state rests upon the back of the working class which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population of the country. The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers, and the state indirectly, through the intermediary of the trade union bureaucracy...

[T]he Labour Party which, in Britain, the classic country of trade unions, is only a political transposition of the same trade union bureaucracy. The same leaders guide the trade unions, betray the General Strike, lead the electoral campaign and later on sit in the ministries. The Labour Party and the trade unions – these are not two principles, they are only a technical division of labour. Together they are the fundamental support of the domination of the British bourgeoisie. The latter cannot be overthrown without overthrowing the Labourite bureaucracy.

15. The working class must be politically prepared for the decisive struggles now on the agenda, not only to take on the Tory government but to be able to confront the efforts of a Labour government and its backers in the trade union bureaucracy to continue its agenda of austerity and war should it take office. This is what Starmer openly offers the ruling elite with his declaration, “I’m not just pro-business, I want to partner with business... a true partnership between government, business and trade unions.”

16. The central task facing workers is to create the means to bring to bear their enormous social power in an industrial and political struggle for their own independent interests. The Socialist Equality Party advocates the building of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, democratically accountable and led by trusted militants. These will enable workers to break through the policing operation of the union bureaucracy and unify their struggles in a general strike against the government and the employers. We offer every assistance in building these committees.

17. The political perspective fought for by the SEP is that of socialist internationalism. The allies of British workers are the workers in Europe and worldwide already coming into struggle. We urge the affiliation of rank-and-file committees in the UK to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, so that the British working class can forge an alliance with workers throughout the world facing the same dangers. This centres on the struggle against war and nationalism, which must be at the heart of the SEP's political responsibilities in this period, and of any genuine movement in defence of the working class. As Trotsky explained in “War and the Fourth International” in 1934, it is possible “to follow not the war map but the map of the class struggle” only if the party and the working class has “already declared irreconcilable war on the national state”.

18. The working class must mount a direct challenge to the combined

efforts of the Tories and Labour to deny them any political voice and help the ruling class dictate political events. To this end, the SEP will continue to advance the demand for an immediate general election. Explaining the purpose of this demand, we wrote:

We advance this call to bring into the open the issues that underlie the present crisis: 1) The relentless escalation of the war against Russia, even to the point of risking a nuclear war; 2) The criminal refusal to stop the endless transmission of the Sars-CoV-2 virus and allow mass infection and death; and 3) The ruthless assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class...

The SEP is initiating the call for a general election as a means for the working class to break through the conspiracy of both major parties, oppose their policies, and assert its independent social interests.

We would use the election period to rouse opposition to the war policies of the government and to agitate for mass action by the working class to defeat the savage assault on living standards and democratic rights.

The party stressed:

The SEP's demand for a general election does not imply a shred of support for Labour, or for a non-existent parliamentary solution. In the event of an election, we will not call for a Labour vote. We will warn workers that Labour is their enemy and must be opposed just as decisively as the Tories.

We will use the general election to make the case for strikes, mass protests and the organisation of a general strike to stop the war, force the adoption of a zero-COVID policy, and build support for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

19. The SEP's response to the crisis of British and world capitalism is oriented theoretically and practically to the international working class. We understand that the struggle against war and for socialism can only be realised if fought for by workers in the factories, warehouses, depots, offices and garages who have been recruited to the party and trained as Marxists. The party bases its interventions on the understanding that workers' struggles are now intersecting with the decades-long fight of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for the political programme of Trotskyism, that is, of international socialism. In August 2019, the ICFI identified the beginning of the fifth phase in the history of the Fourth International founded by Trotsky in the fight against Stalinism:

This is the stage that will witness a vast growth of the ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution. The objective processes of economic globalization, identified by the International Committee more than 30 years ago, have undergone a further colossal development. Combined with the emergence of new technologies that have revolutionized communications, these processes have internationalized the class struggle to a degree that would have been hard to imagine even 25 years ago. The revolutionary struggle of the working class will develop as an interconnected and unified world movement. The International Committee of the Fourth International will be built as the conscious political leadership of this objective socio-economic process. It will

counterpose to the capitalist politics of imperialist war the class-based strategy of world socialist revolution. This is the essential historical task of the new stage in the history of the Fourth International.

20. Already at the start of the 2020, the WSWs wrote that the enormous global resurgence of the class struggle raised the prospect of “a decade of intensifying class struggle and world socialist revolution... the dominant and most revolutionary feature of the class struggle is its international character rooted in the global character of modern day capitalism. Moreover, the movement of the working class is a movement of the younger generation and therefore a movement that will shape the future.” The pandemic, which was declared just months later, the Sixth National Congress of the SEP explained, was “a trigger event in world history that has accelerated the already far advanced economic social and political crisis of the world capitalist system. It is creating conditions for an immense intensification of the class struggle on an international scale.”

21. In such conditions, the active intervention of the SEP in the class struggle acquires immense significance. The party itself, and its revolutionary perspective, becomes a major factor in the development of the objective situation, which makes possible an enormous growth in the SEP and the ICFI. As the SEP (US) Fifth National Congress cautioned, “An evaluation of the objective situation and realistic appraisal of political possibilities, which excludes the impact of the intervention of the revolutionary party, is utterly alien to Marxism. The Marxist revolutionary party does not merely comment on events, it participates in the events that it analyzes, and, through its leadership in the struggle for workers’ power and socialism, strives to change the world.” Only through the work of the party can the revolutionary potential that presently exists be realised.

22. The party’s campaigns in the working class must be grounded in a historical perspective. Our approach to political questions is rooted in our assessment and understanding that we are living in the epoch of world socialist revolution. We are presented with major opportunities to secure the party’s leadership of the working class and must respond by bringing to bear the rich political history embodied in our party, above all the October Revolution and Trotsky’s struggle against Stalinism, the centenary of which takes place in 2023.

23. We will educate workers in the strategic experiences of the working class, including the 1926 general strike, the 1972-74 miners’ strikes that brought down Edward Heath’s Conservative government, and the 1984-85 miners’ strike, which demonstrated the absolute hostility of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy to the class struggle and socialism. Our central political task is to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership. Fundamentally, the party’s ability to recognise political opportunities and formulate a correct tactical response is only possible to the extent that the movement and its cadre are grounded and educated in the political history and traditions of the Fourth International.



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