

Opening report to the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US)

David North
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We are publishing here the opening report to the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US), given by David North, the national chairman of the SEP. The congress was held from August 4 to August 9, 2024. It unanimously adopted two resolutions, "The 2024 US elections and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party" and "Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!"

Upon beginning the work of this congress, it is appropriate that we pay tribute to the memory of a founding member of our party, Comrade Helen Halyard, who died on November 28, 2023 at the age of 73. If one includes, as one must, the history of the Workers League, the predecessor organization of the Socialist Equality Party, this is first time in more than a half-century that Comrade Helen is not in attendance at a congress of the American section of the International Committee.

Helen's membership in the party spanned 52 years. During those many years she occupied a leadership position in the party. She was a member of the National Committee of the US section from 1973 until her death. From 1976 until 2008, Helen held the post of assistant national secretary. In 1974 and 1976, Helen represented the Workers League as a congressional candidate. In 1984, she was its vice presidential candidate. Eight years later, in 1992, Helen was the presidential candidate of the Workers League.

Helen played a major role in the history not only of the Workers League and Socialist Equality Party but of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Her contribution is embedded in the foundations of our world party. Though Helen is no longer with us physically, all that she contributed to the party lives on.

The Fourth International is a party of history. Its cadre are collectively engaged in a struggle to put an end to the capitalist system and create the necessary economic and political framework for the liberation of the working class from exploitation and oppression. A task of this world historical magnitude, "the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom"—and upon whose attainment depends the survival of humanity—demands immense and enduring commitment. As Trotsky stated, "There never was a greater task on the earth. Upon each one of us rests a tremendous responsibility." And he continued:

Our party demands each of us, totally and completely. Let the philistines hunt their own individuality in empty space. For a revolutionary, to give himself entirely to the party signifies finding himself.

Comrade Helen exemplified the significance of the cadre in the struggle for socialism. The cadre of our world movement embody a vast collective historical experience. The oldest delegate in attendance—actually, she is participating as part of the British SEP's delegation to this congress—is Comrade Barbara Slaughter, who at the age of 96 has just completed a

draft of her autobiography. Comrade Barbara was born in 1927, 10 years after the October Revolution, among whose aftershocks was the British General Strike of May 1926. The betrayal of that historic strike by the bureaucratic leadership of the trade unions, facilitated by the opportunist policies of the British Communist Party, resulted in the extreme deprivation experienced by broad sections of the working class in the 1930s, the years of Barbara's youth.

Comrade Barbara first committed herself to the struggle for socialism during World War II. Upon entering Leeds University in September 1944, she joined the Student Labour Federation, which was controlled politically by the British Communist Party. That was 80 years ago.

Barbara was a member of the British Communist Party for a decade. But the exposure of Stalin's crimes by the then-Soviet Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev in his "secret speech" in February 1956—followed in October and November 1956 by the Kremlin's bloody suppression of the anti-Stalinist Hungarian Revolution—led to Barbara's break with the British Communist Party and, shortly thereafter, her joining the Trotskyist movement in Britain, which founded the Socialist Labour League in 1959. In 1973, the SLL—which was in the process of drifting toward centrist and Pabloite politics—"transformed" itself into the Workers Revolutionary Party.

The criticisms made by the Workers League between 1982 and 1984 of Gerry Healy's subjective idealist distortion of Marxism and the WRP's political opportunism were concealed from the rank-and-file membership of the British section. But when the documents of the Workers League became available for the first time in the autumn of 1985, during the crisis that ripped through the WRP, Barbara supported the orthodox Trotskyist tendency allied with the ICFI. For the last 40 years, continuing up to this very day, Comrade Barbara has played a critical role in the leadership of the British section of the ICFI.

Another member of the British delegation to our congress is Comrade Vicky Short, whose 90th birthday was celebrated during the past week. She was born in Spain in 1934, in a village on the outskirts of Madrid, just two years before the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution. Though this occurred when she was a young child, the tragic consequences of the betrayal of the revolution by Stalinism, resulting in the establishment of the fascist dictatorship under Franco, was to profoundly influence Vicky's intellectual and political development. She emigrated to Britain in 1959.

Though her father had been active in the politics of the Spanish Communist Party, Vicky was won to Trotskyism and joined the Socialist Labour League in 1967. In 1985, Comrade Vicky, like Barbara, supported the Trotskyist tendency in the WRP led by Dave Hyland that defended the International Committee's program of socialist internationalism and permanent revolution against the Pabloite national opportunist factions of Healy, Banda and Slaughter.

The activity of the senior member of the US section within the Trotskyist movement now encompasses 65 years. As you all know simply by reading the *World Socialist Web Site*, Comrade Fred Mazelis continues

to contribute, at the age of 83, some of the finest articles posted on the WWSW. During the past month, he has written two splendid articles on the German left-wing composer Hanns Eisler and, just six days ago, a review of the life of the French novelist Émile Zola.

Fred is a historic figure in the ICFI and the US section. Fred was born in May 1941. The historical events that shaped the cultural and political outlook of his family occurred in Ukraine. His grandmother and father came to the United States as refugees, who had escaped the murderous pogroms carried out by the anti-Bolshevik regime of Symon Petliura, which resulted in the murder of approximately 200,000 Ukrainian Jews between 1918 and 1921. Fred's grandfather, great-grandfather and great-uncle were all killed in a pogrom in early 1919. That regime is now glorified by the present fascistic government in Kiev. Within the United States, his parents—though not members of the Communist Party—lived within a social milieu that was influenced politically by Stalinism.

During his youth and teenage years in the 1950s, Fred experienced the reactionary climate of Cold War anti-communism: the McCarthyite witch-hunts, the ubiquitous blacklisting and the executions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Within the milieu of Stalinism and the radical left, Fred witnessed the impact of Khrushchev's Secret Speech and the Hungarian Revolution. Fred was a voracious reader, and he eventually came into contact with the youth movement that was developing under the influence of the Socialist Workers Party, which was still affiliated with the International Committee.

The leader of the SWP's youth work was Tim Wohlforth, who had broken with Max Shachtman, who had abandoned Trotskyism and had become a leading political adviser to the anti-communist AFL-CIO bureaucracy. Fred first met Wohlforth and another young Trotskyist, Danny Freeman, in 1958. Fred began to play a leading role in the work of the youth movement, which became known as the Young Socialist Alliance when it was established as a national organization in 1960.

But by then the SWP was already in the process of repudiating the principles for which it had fought in the 1953 struggle against Pabloism. Under the leadership of Joseph Hansen, the SWP was aggressively working for a reunification with the Pabloite International Secretariat. Wohlforth, who had declared his support for the criticisms made by the Socialist Labour League of the SWP's revisionist orientation, was removed from the leadership of the YSA. He was replaced by a group of students without previous connections with socialist politics, mysteriously recruited from Carleton College in Minnesota. Fred became part of the pro-ICFI minority in the SWP, which opposed the 1963 reunification with the Pabloites. In September 1964, Fred, along with Wohlforth and other members of the pro-ICFI opposition, was expelled from the SWP for demanding a discussion of the entry of the Ceylonese LSSP, which was affiliated with the Pabloite International, into the bourgeois government of Madam Bandaranaike.

Fred became a founding member of the American Committee for the Fourth International (ACFI) and represented it at the Third Congress of the ICFI in April 1966. In November 1966, he was a co-founder of the Workers League. When Wohlforth's increasingly opportunist and unprincipled conduct culminated in an irresponsible breach of the security of the Workers League and International Committee and his desertion from the party, Fred assumed the post of national secretary. He held that position from the autumn of 1974 until January 1976.

For the next 45 years, he continued to play a leading role in the Workers League and Socialist Equality Party as a member of the National Committee, from which he retired in 2014. In February 1984, Comrade Fred was part of the Workers League delegation to the ICFI meeting at which I presented detailed criticisms of the Pabloite politics of the WRP. Fred vociferously defended me against the unprincipled and scurrilous denunciations leveled by the WRP leaders.

The work of the International Committee is conducted by comrades

whose collective personal and political experience spans two-thirds of the 20th century and the first quarter of the twenty-first. Comrade Barbara was born in the 1920s, Comrade Vicky in the 1930s, and Comrade Fred in the 1940s. The generation of party leaders of which I am a part were born in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Our political development occurred under the enduring dark shadow of World War II and the mass radicalization of the 1960s. While there are a few members of the SEP born in the 1970s and early 1980s—the limited number reflects the climate of political and cultural reaction of that period—a significant number of younger leaders were born in the late 1980s and early 1990s. And at this congress there are comrades, already playing important roles in the work of the party, who were born during the first decade of the 21st century.

We are confronted with the extraordinary fact that almost eight decades separate the birth of the oldest and youngest members of our party. The oldest comrade, Barbara, came into the world when Trotsky, though persecuted, was still a leader of the Soviet Union. The youngest of our comrades came into the world more than 60 years after Trotsky's assassination and a decade after the dissolution of the USSR.

What is the significance of the fact that the lives of the delegates present at this congress encompass such a vast expanse of history; and, moreover, that the political experiences through which the oldest comrades passed retain immense relevance for the political work of the youngest of our comrades? It exemplifies the essential nature of the Fourth International. It is a "Party of History," in the sense that its existence and work is concentrated on the problems of an entire historic epoch, the epoch of world socialist revolution. The fundamental political problems which Comrades Barbara, Vicky, Fred and, I might add, the now septuagenarian youngsters of my generation confronted remain the issues that confront the comrades who are now in their early thirties, twenties and even late teens.

Little more than one year after Barbara's birth, Trotsky concisely formulated the Marxist perspective:

The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national state. From this follows on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet. [*The Permanent Revolution*, Chapter 10: "What is the Permanent Revolution?"]

The last century ended without completing its historic tasks. It was, as we have written, the unfinished century. It left to the 21st century the problems posed by the contradictions of world capitalism that it could not solve in practice. But the solution of these problems cannot be long postponed. We are presently at a very advanced and late stage of the historical epoch that opened exactly 110 years ago, on August 4, 1914, with the outbreak of World War I. But a warning must be made: The process of capitalism's death agony cannot and will not last forever. We are already confronted with the specter of a Third World War, which if not stopped will undoubtedly lead to the use of nuclear weapons. Capitalism must be overthrown and replaced by socialism before it results in the destruction of human civilization. The present objective situation imparts the greatest urgency to the work of the International Committee of

the Fourth International and of this congress.

The historic objective to whose fulfillment the Socialist Equality Party is dedicated is defined by its program. At its Founding Congress in August 2008, the SEP adopted a resolution, titled *The Historical & International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*. This document elaborated the history of the struggle for the program of the SEP. The Founding Congress devoted several days to a detailed discussion of the document. All of the 255 numbered paragraphs that comprise this document were discussed and approved by a unanimous vote of the delegates in attendance at the congress. The congress also adopted another document, the *Statement of Principles*. Each of the 40 numbered paragraphs were exhaustively discussed and unanimously approved by the delegates.

These two documents clearly established the historically grounded political identity of the Socialist Equality Party as a Trotskyist organization that “is in solidarity with and accepts the political authority of the International Committee of the Fourth International.” Opposing the shortsightedness and impatience that is characteristic of all opportunist organizations, which habitually dispense with principles and adapt their programs to vulgar pragmatic considerations, in pursuit of cheap and ephemeral success, the *Statement of Principles* declared:

The socialist revolution, which signifies the forcible entrance of the masses into conscious political struggle, portends the greatest and most progressive transformation of the form of man’s social organization in world history—the ending of society based on classes, and, therefore, of the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. A transformation so immense is the work of an entire historic epoch. [Page 1, paragraph 1]

For the opponents of the Fourth International, it is the concern for principles and program that constitutes the greatest sin of the Trotskyist movement. A British academic, John E. Kelly, has recently written two books, both published by Routledge, in which he denounces Trotskyism. The first, titled *Contemporary Trotskyism*, was published in 2018. The second, *The Twilight of Trotskyism*, was published last year. One might wonder why a major publisher like Routledge decided to expend considerable resources within the space of five years on the publication of two books devoted to the study of an irrelevant movement which is descending into the “twilight” of its history.

Kelly, who had been (and may still be) a member of the British Communist Party, asserts that the major flaw of Trotskyism is that

It foregrounds class exploitation, class struggle, the building of a vanguard party and the battle between revolutionary and reformist politics. Trotskyist language about political action, in programmatic and perspectives documents, invariably centres on those abstract actors, the working class or the masses, occasionally accompanied by an ill-defined petty bourgeoisie. [*Contemporary Trotskyism*, p. 237]

The working class is, according to Kelly, an “abstract actor.” The more significant actors, which the Trotskyists either ignore or give insufficient attention to, are determined by “Other forms of oppression, based on gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity...” [p. 237] From a scientific materialist standpoint, it is Kelly who is counterpoising abstract social categories, devoid of precise socio-economic content, to the concrete analysis of the socio-economic relations that are formed within and operate on the basis of the capitalist mode of production.

As a result of its commitment to Marxist orthodoxy:

The Trotskyist movement has an unparalleled record of political failure. In almost a century of existence, Trotskyists have never led a revolution, won a national election or built an enduring, mass political party (with the possible exception of the Sri Lankan Lanka Sama Samaja Party, LSSP, in the 1950s). [*Twilight of Trotskyism*, p. xi]

Continuing his diatribe, Kelly asserts:

The Trotskyist-led revolutionary scenario, never enacted anywhere despite almost a century of effort, amounts to a tragic and wasteful misdirection of political energy and resources away from serious radical politics. [*Twilight of Trotskyism*, p. xiii]

The worst of all the Trotskyist sects, according to Kelly, is the ICFI. He writes:

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was initially founded in 1953 but re-emerged from the implosion of the WRP in 1985 under the leadership of the American activist David North, an immodest and arrogant individual. For North and his colleagues, there is only one current of Marxism: “Trotskyism is the Marxism of the 21st Century,” and within the Trotskyist universe, there is only one genuine Trotskyist party. [*Twilight of Trotskyism*, p. 96]

To substantiate his indictment, Kelly cites the following passage from the New Year’s statement posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* on January 3, 2019, which stated:

Theoretically and in practice, the ICFI has established that it is the sole revolutionary party of the international working class and the sole representative of genuine Marxism. There is not a political tendency in the world outside of the ICFI that can plausibly claim to represent the continuity of the international party founded by Trotsky in 1938. [Originally posted on the WSWS under the title: “The Strategy of International Class Struggle and the Political Fight Against Capitalist Reaction”]

This is not the time and place for a detailed response to Mr. Kelly, but two points must be made. While sarcastically dismissing the failure of the Trotskyist movement to lead a socialist revolution, Kelly ignores the counter-revolutionary actions, frequently involving murderous violence, taken by the mass Stalinist and social democratic party and trade union organizations, in alliance with the state, to isolate and destroy the Trotskyist movement and defend the capitalist system. Kelly pretends that the Trotskyist movement was conducting its revolutionary work in ideal laboratory conditions.

The second point, actually a question, is this: What are the great political successes achieved by those organizations and their leaders that are engaged in what Kelly calls “serious”, i.e., non-revolutionary, politics? Mr. Kelly informs his readers that he was a member of the British

Communist Party during the 1980s. What were the great and lasting achievements of this party, which was implicated in every crime and betrayal carried out by the Stalinist regime in the Kremlin from the 1920s until the catastrophic dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991?

As for the Labour Party, 118 years after its founding it is a ruthless instrument of British imperialism, led by a cabal of right-wing warmongers dedicated to the dismantling of even the limited reforms implemented by Labour governments in the years immediately following World War II. One can safely assume that Mr. Kelly is a devoted follower of Jeremy Corbyn, the political eunuch who epitomizes the impotence of the contemporary practitioners of pseudo-left, anti-Marxist and anti-Trotskyist politics. Swept into the leadership of the Labour Party with massive popular support, Corbyn proceeded to return power back to the Blairite right wing. Outside of Britain, similar examples of political bankruptcy were provided by Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

The great strength of the Fourth International, led by the International Committee, is that its program is in alignment with the objective situation and the logic of the class struggle on an international scale. However great the difficulties, the program of the Socialist Equality Party and the ICFI gives expression to the interests of the working class within the United States and on a world scale.

The Eighth Congress is being held under conditions of a massive economic and political crisis of the capitalist system. In just three months, the presidential election will take place. The SEP is intervening in this election and is seeking ballot status in several states. Two fundamental issues dominate this election: the escalation of American imperialism toward global war and the breakdown of democracy within the United States.

The Congress delegates have received a lengthy resolution that concisely states the position of the Socialist Equality Party on these two critical and interrelated issues. This resolution, in fact, summarizes the analysis developed by the SEP during the past decade and has been the subject of numerous statements published on the WSWS. In their reports, Comrades Joe Kishore and Andre Damon will be reviewing the historic development of the party's response to the eruption of US militarism.

However, I would like to preface their reports by stressing the essential political content of the party's campaign against war in the context of the election campaign. In 1911, at a time when the German Social Democratic Party was preparing for a critical election, against the backdrop of the escalation of geopolitical tensions that were eventually to erupt into war, Rosa Luxemburg wrote:

Until now, it has been the pride and firm scientific basis of our party that not only the general lines of our program but also the slogans of our practical everyday policy were not invented out of odds and ends as something desirable, but that, in all things, we relied on our knowledge of the tendencies of social development and made the objective lines of this development the basis of our attitude. For us, the determining factor until now has not been the possibility of implementing our demands from the standpoint of the relation of forces within the state, but the possibility of doing so from the standpoint of the tendencies of development of society....

World policy and the militarism serving it on land and sea, in times of war or peace, is nothing but the specific capitalist method to develop and settle international antagonisms. With the further development of capitalism and the world market, these antagonisms grow and increase immeasurably, together with domestic class contradictions, until they become intolerable and bring about the social revolution. Only those who believe in the mitigation and blunting of class antagonisms, and the possibility of

checking the economic anarchy of capitalism, can believe that these international conflicts could somehow be slackened, mitigated and wiped out. The international antagonisms of the capitalist states are but the complement of class antagonisms, and world-political anarchy is but the reverse side of capitalism's anarchic system of production. Both can only grow together and be overcome together. "A little order and peace" is therefore impossible; it is just as much a petty-bourgeois utopia with regard to the capitalist world market as to world policy, and the same applies to the limitation of crises or the limitation of armaments. ["Peace Utopias," by Rosa Luxemburg, in *Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy to World War I*, translated, edited, and introduced by Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012, pp. 448-49]

In quoting these words, written 113 years ago, we are not merely repeating old truths. They may, indeed, be "old truths," but these "old truths" acquire new and immense contemporary relevance in the present situation. There is, no doubt, a staggering degree of recklessness, not to mention ruthlessness, in the policies of the Biden administration in its escalation of the war in Ukraine against Russia and its simultaneous support for Israel's genocidal war in Gaza and continuous ratcheting up of the confrontation with China. But both the recklessness and ruthlessness are rooted in objective contradictions arising from the interaction of the nation-state system, the global character of the production process, and the desperate efforts, rooted in existential necessity, of the US corporate-financial elites to beat back all challenges to its global hegemony.

In September 1987, the opening report presented at the summer camp of the Workers League—based on a discussion at the Fourth Plenum of the International Committee several weeks earlier—called attention to certain critical developments in the economic structure of world capitalism. The first of these was:

The unprecedented integration of the world market and internationalization of production, which has raised the fundamental contradiction between the world economy and the nation-state system, and between social production and private ownership, to a historically unprecedented level of concrete intensity. The absolute and active predominance of world economy over all national economies, no matter how large, is an unchallengeable fact of life. ["Political Report on the Perspectives of the International Committee of the Fourth International," by David North, in *Fourth International*, January-March 1988, Volume 15, No. 1]

The distinctive feature of this new development of capitalist production was the emergence of the *transnational* corporation, which organized and coordinated an international process of commodity production. This was a development beyond the multi-national corporation, which maintained facilities for a firm's product in a range of countries, mainly for the purpose of penetrating national markets in foreign countries. The International Committee recognized the far-reaching and revolutionary implications of this development for the working class. First, it drastically undermined the viability of forms of class struggle based primarily on national strategies and organization. Second, it necessitated and, at the same time, created the conditions for the strategic unification of the global working class in an international struggle against world capitalism.

The analysis of the International Committee has long since been confirmed. There is now a vast body of literature that has studied and

explained the dynamic of transnational production and its economic, geopolitical and military implications. It is well recognized that at the heart of the escalating conflict between the United States and China is a struggle for dominance over the global production networks that characterize the world economy of the 21st century.

Driven by the revolution in digitally-based communications technologies, there now exists an “interconnected world of production” that was concisely described by economist Martin Kenney:

The goods we buy are the end result of an elaborately choreographed transnational odyssey. These objects are part of an economy whose tendrils reach ever further outwards, linking, integrating, and transforming both far-flung and nearby places. [Cited in *Global Production Networks: Theorizing Economic Development in an Interconnected World*, by Neil M. Coe and Henry Wai-Chung Yeung, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 2]

In a massive study of the new global production networks, titled *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*, economist Peter Dicken has written that

... during the last three decades of the twentieth century the *globalization* of the world economy developed and intensified in ways that were *qualitatively* very different from those of earlier periods. In the process, many of the things we used in our daily lives became derived from an increasingly complex geography of production, distribution and consumption, whose geographical scale became vastly more extensive and whose choreography became increasingly intricate. Most products, indeed, developed such a complex geography—with parts being made in different countries and then assembled somewhere else—that labels of origin began to lose their meaning. Overall, such globalization increasingly came to be seen by many as the “natural order”: an inevitable and inexorable process of *increasing geographical spread* and increasing *functional integration* between economic activities. [p. 1]

The crisis of September 2008 nearly brought about the collapse of the international financial system and threatened the entire process of globalization. But in the aftermath of the massive rescue operation undertaken by the Federal Reserve, the actual impact of the crisis was to increase the financial imperatives for the expansion of global production networks.

An inevitable consequence of the process has been the extreme intensification of geopolitical conflicts. The *World Socialist Web Site* has published an important article by Comrade Gabe Black which explains the struggle for critical minerals and metals in the context of the technologies that are the operational foundation of transnational production. Alongside and connected with the struggle for unfettered access to and control of critical minerals and metals is the struggle for dominance in the production networks of the interconnected world economy.

In a recently published scholarly article in the journal *Geopolitics*, titled “The Second Cold War: US-China Competition for Centrality in Infrastructure, Digital, Production, and Finance Networks,” the nature and significance of the conflict is explained:

... the US and China seek to establish centrality in networks

through which they can project geopolitical and geoeconomic power. In practice, this is done through a range of strategies, such as (1) establishing rules of the game that determine how networks are integrated, who can participate in them and enforcing compliance, (2) restructuring networks, or, in limited cases, (3) building alternative competing networks. ...

By achieving and leveraging network centrality—notably by connecting and controlling key nodes—actors can gain privileged access to strategic inputs, manage the circulation of information, exert control over the wider division of labor, establish standards and exclude competitors (or ensure that they remain in a subordinate position), and capture value within production networks. Centrality in one network is a source of strategic advantage, power, and profit that may lead to advantages in interrelated networks. [pp. 1094-95]

The subject of global production networks is complex and requires detailed study. But it is already clear that the enormous advances in the process of economic globalization have vastly intensified the contradictions of the world capitalist system, which must result either in the escalation of military conflict to the point of a catastrophic Third World War or to the politically conscious unification of the international class struggle, based on the strategy of world socialist revolution.

The task of the SEP and all the sections of the ICFI is to expand the influence of the party in the working class so that the objective tendency toward socialist revolution prevails over the tendency toward world war.

One hundred years ago, in the autumn of 1924, Trotsky wrote a pamphlet titled *Lessons of October*. Its purpose was to examine the critical issues that confronted the Bolshevik Party during the revolutionary struggles of 1917. His frank discussion of the differences that arose within the party—identifying the political errors of “Old Bolsheviks,” such as Zinoviev and Kamenev—outraged Trotsky’s political enemies. But Trotsky’s intentions had not been factional. He identified the critical lessons of the October Revolution that had to be assimilated by the cadre of the international revolutionary movement in order to achieve the victory of the working class.

The first lesson was that in the epoch of imperialism, the struggle for democracy could not be separated from the struggle for socialism. Those leaders in the Bolshevik Party who had believed that the fight for “democratic demands” constituted a distinct stage in a long-drawn-out struggle for socialism had been proven wrong. The achievement of the critical democratic demands was possible only within the context of the overthrow of bourgeois rule, the establishment of workers’ state power, a direct assault on capitalist property and the initiation of the transition to socialism.

The second lesson related to the response of the Marxist party and its cadre to the emergence of a revolutionary situation; that is, the relationship of objective and subjective factors in a situation in which the problem of political power is directly posed. Basing himself on the positive experience of the Bolshevik victory in October 1917 and the negative experience of the defeat of the German Communist Party in October 1923, Trotsky developed the argument that actions of the subjective factor, i.e., the party, at a critical juncture in the struggle—within a time frame that may be no longer than several weeks, or even several days—could determine the fate of the revolution for years and even decades ahead. Putting the matter as bluntly as possible, Trotsky warned: “the party that does not keep step with the historic tasks of its own class becomes, or runs the risk of becoming, the indirect tool of other classes.” [The *Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), p. 261]

Both lessons drawn by Trotsky in the autumn of 1924 are of decisive importance for the party in the autumn of 2024. The defense of democratic

rights against the growth of authoritarianism and fascism and the fight against war can be waged successfully only within the political framework of the fight for socialism. Further, the level of the party's work must be raised to meet the demands of the objective situation.

That principle determines our approach to work in the working class. As Trotsky said in discussions on the *Transitional Program*, he could write a very nice program, a very simple program that could be easily accepted, but that would not serve the interests of the working class. We must tell the workers the truth. Our program is not based on the subjective moods and conceptions that may at one moment or another obtain popularity among the masses. Our program is based on objective necessity. And as Trotsky said at that time, if the workers are not prepared to accept our program, they may be compelled to accept the program of fascism. Those are the alternatives that will present themselves.

The United States is entering into such a situation. We will use the election period to convey to the working class the lessons of the great historic experiences of social revolution and counter-revolution over an entire century. The central challenge of our time—the development in the working class of that level of consciousness necessary so that it can at long last fulfill its historic tasks on a world scale—that objective will drive all our work in the weeks and months ahead.

This is the approach we will take to the election campaign. It places an enormous challenge before the cadre of our movement. We are not making idle boasts when we speak about our party being the sole representative of revolutionary Marxism, of socialism. It is a fact that there is no other organization contesting this election that will raise before the working class the immense danger of war that it is now confronting or even raise the question of fascism and the danger which the rapid disintegration of the existing forms of bourgeois democracy represent. One can already see the bandwagon of pseudo-leftism trailing behind the candidacy of Kamala Harris.

We will have none of that. We will present the working class with a program that is based on an objective, scientifically grounded assessment of the crisis of world capitalism. We will call upon all the intellectual and political resources of our movement to explain the tasks confronting the working class, to reach the best elements among the workers and the youth, to provide a progressive, revolutionary outlet for the growing militancy and radicalization that is now sweeping through this country and throughout the world.

The work of this congress will be devoted to preparing our party for the enormous challenges that lie ahead, understanding this election as an intense and critical period of work that will lay the foundations for the development of the party not just during the election but in its aftermath.



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