

## Report to the SEP (US) Eighth National Congress

# 16 years since the Founding Congress of the Socialist Equality Party

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*We are publishing here the report to the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US) given by Joseph Kishore, the national secretary 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!" The opening report to the Congress was delivered by David North. This report introduced the main resolution.*

The reports and discussion yesterday established the political framework for the work of the Congress this week.

Among the central points that were stressed are (1) that we are a "party of history," as Comrade North noted in the introduction, "in the sense that its existence and work is concentrated on the problems of an entire historical epoch, the epoch of world socialist revolution"; (2) that our perspective is international, based, as the resolution states in points 3 and 4, on the theory of permanent revolution and the development of the Trotskyist movement since its foundation, with particular emphasis placed on what we referred to at the 2019 Summer School as the "Renaissance of Trotskyism" during and after the split with the WRP in 1985-86; (3) that the central strategic task is the building of a revolutionary leadership in the working class, based on Marxist theory, in opposition to the politics of the ruling class and its petty-bourgeois appendages; and (4) that the resolution of this task is both possible, because our program corresponds to the interests of the working class, and urgent, as the capitalist crisis is driving mankind toward the catastrophe of world war.

The Congress resolution distributed to the membership is the political basis for the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign. The basic aim of our election campaign is to raise the consciousness of the working class and build the party. We do not participate in elections for purely "electoral" reasons. To paraphrase Trotsky, votes and getting on the ballot and other aspects of election campaigns are means to an end, which is the full spiritual and material liberation of mankind through the conquest of power by the working class and the socialist transformation of economic life.

In some of the early discussions on the election campaign, we referenced the comment by Lenin that the socialist movement does not have a separate electoral program. "To every party at all worthy of the name," Lenin wrote in 1911, in advance of the elections to the Russian Duma, "a platform is something that has existed long before the elections; it is not something specially devised 'for the elections,' but an inevitable result of the whole *work* of the party, of the way the work is organized, and of its whole trend in the given historical period."

Indeed, the resolution itself draws heavily from documents that we have produced, the analysis that we have been making of the objective situation, of our relationship to it, and the tasks posed to the party. There are countless statements that one could cite, published on the *World*

*Socialist Web Site*, which elaborate the programmatic response of the party to national and international developments.

The resolution in particular relies heavily on the New Year Statement, published by the WSWs International Editorial Board between January 3 and January 6 of this year. It also draws on and copies language from the 2010 Congress resolution, "The Breakdown of World Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States," which is referenced in point 35. The resolution indeed incorporates that resolution as the program of the party. It is a comprehensive statement, written two years after the Founding Congress.

Comrades will speak in the course of the Congress on the extraordinary political situation in the United States and internationally, which we outline in points 5 and 6, and which is elaborated in the second and third sections. In this report and the report by Comrade Andre Damon, we will place this analysis in the broader context of the history of the movement.

It is a characteristic feature of our approach to politics that we do not respond impressionistically. We seek continuously to root our present analysis in the historical development of the capitalist crisis and the assimilation of the lessons of the experiences of the working class as they are consciously reflected in the history of the movement itself. Precisely because of this, any review of the history of the party is necessarily incomplete, as it begins at a point in the middle of a broader process.

These remarks will focus, however, on the period since the Founding Congress of the party in 2008.

As Comrade North noted in the introduction, there are younger comrades participating in this Congress who were born in the 21st century. It will not be long before we begin recruiting young people who were born after the Founding Congress. This time already encompasses a significant period. From 2008 to the present is 16 years. It is one year longer than the period between the founding of the Fourth International in 1938 and Cannon's Open Letter in 1953, breaking with Pabloism. We have developed during this period a certain conception, rooted in the antecedent history of the Trotskyist movement, of the nature of the epoch, of the tasks that the working class confronts, and of our own relationship to it.

*The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, reviewed exhaustively at the Founding Congress, remains essential for the political education of every member. We stated in the opening passages, "The program of the Socialist Equality Party is of a principled, not of a conjunctural and pragmatic character. It is based on an analysis of the crisis of world capitalism and an assimilation of the strategic revolutionary experiences of the working class and the international socialist movement."

Defining the nature of the epoch, we wrote:

The world economic and political system is, in its fundamental characteristics, imperialist. Despite the advances in technology, the growth of the productive forces, and the expansion of capitalist production relations throughout the globe, the world capitalist system is beset by the same insoluble contradictions that produced the 20th century horrors of two world wars, fascism, a virtually endless series of regional military conflicts and innumerable brutal political dictatorships.

The points made by Comrade North yesterday reviewing the changes in the forms of production and their relationship to imperialism, building on the analysis of the emergence of transnational corporations made following the split with the WRP, are extremely important. They raise to new levels the fundamental contradictions of the imperialist system identified in the Historical Foundations document.

We continue, “Political agreement within the party on essential issues of program and tasks cannot be achieved without a common evaluation of the historical experiences of the twentieth century and their central strategic lessons.” We might add here not only the 20th century, but now the first quarter of the 21st.

The Founding Congress, the adoption of the Historical Foundations document, along with the Statement of Principles and the party Constitution, was a response of the movement to our appraisal of the objective situation and its implications. In particular, by early 2008, the International Committee of the Fourth International [ICFI] had already taken note of the expressions of a profound and developing economic crisis.

It is perhaps fitting that we meet amidst a sharp fall in global markets, as the ruling elites respond to signs of renewed economic crisis and bray for another bailout. In a report to a national aggregate meeting of the SEP in Michigan on January 5–6, 2008, Comrade North analyzed the significance of the collapse of housing prices. “2008 will be characterized by a significant intensification of the economic and political crisis of the world capitalist system,” the report stated. “The turbulence in world financial markets is the expression of not merely a conjunctural downturn, but rather a profound systemic disorder which is already destabilizing international politics.”

Rooting the crisis in the broader historical developments, the report explained:

The long-term decline in the profitability of US-based industry has propelled the drive by American financial institutions for alternative sources of high returns on investment. The mode of existence of the American ruling elite has been characterized for the last 30 years by the ever-wider separation of the process of wealth accumulation from the processes of industrial production.

We also connected the economic crisis to the eruption of imperialist barbarism, as expressed in what at that point was 17 years of unending war that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the supposed “end of history.”

The parasitic character of the American ruling elite is inextricably bound up with the extreme intensification of militarism. In the final analysis, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—while exploiting the events of 9/11 as a pretext—grew out of the drive by the American ruling class to maintain the hegemonic global position of the United States.

This in turn was connected to the protracted crisis of American democracy, which the party had been analyzing over an extended period of time, particularly since the Clinton impeachment in 1999. The report stated:

The stolen election of 2000—as the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* warned at the time—represented a historical milestone in the degeneration of American democracy. The willingness of the Democratic Party to accept the theft of the election demonstrated that no substantial section of the American capitalist class retained a compelling interest in the defense of the traditional institutions of bourgeois democracy.

If we consider the past 16 years, we can say with confidence that the analysis presented in 2008 only has to be modified insofar as the basic tendencies of development that were identified then have developed to a far higher level.

The Founding Congress was held seven months after this report, in August. It was in the immediate aftermath of the Congress that the economic crisis fully erupted, with the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the bailout of AIG, and the implementation of the trillion-dollar “TARP” bank bailout in September, passed in the final months of the Bush administration and with the support of the junior senator from Illinois and the senior senator from Arizona, Obama and McCain, the two candidates of the capitalist ruling elite in the 2008 election.

There were two major decisions taken by the Trotskyist movement that year. The first was the Founding Congress, which was followed by the Founding Congresses of other sections of the ICFI in subsequent years. The second decision was what may only loosely be called the “redesign” of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Many younger comrades are not familiar with the old form of the WSWS, which existed from 1998 to 2008. Many indeed are not familiar with the second version, which lasted from 2008 to 2020. More significant than the form of the WSWS, however, was the introduction in 2008 of the redesign of the daily “Perspective” statement.

Since we began this practice, we have published 4,865 Perspective statements, six statements a week for more than 15 years. If one were to print these in book form, assuming an average of five pages per perspective, it would be something on the order of 24,000 pages, or 48 volumes of 500 pages each. This by itself is an extraordinary record. Indeed if one wants an account, from a purely factual standpoint, of the major international developments of the past 16 years, there is no better place to begin than the Perspectives of the WSWS. As for political content, there is nothing like it.

John Kelly, in his book referred to by Comrade North yesterday, proclaimed the “unparalleled record of political failure” of the Trotskyist movement, citing as an exception only the Great Betrayal of 1964, when the LSSP entered a bourgeois government in Sri Lanka, prompting Comrade Fred Mazelis and other supporters of the ICFI to issue their open letter, for which they were expelled by the state agents that had come to control the SWP. The very existence of the WSWS refutes the likes of Kelly, who measure “success” only by the small change of bourgeois parliamentarism, as this can be measured in the size of their bank accounts. We have a different standard.

In the first Perspective statement published on the WSWS, on October 22, 2008, Comrade North reviewed the political appraisal that the IC was making of the developing crisis of the world capitalist system. He wrote:

1. The global financial crisis, centered in the United States, marks a decisive turning point in the historical crisis of the world

capitalist system. The Marxist analysis of the inherent and insoluble contradictions of the capitalist mode of production has received a stunning vindication.

2. The deepening economic crisis will exacerbate the already substantial tensions between the major imperialist and capitalist powers. The basic historical conflict between the internationally integrated development of the productive forces and the nation-state system will raise ever more openly the danger of global warfare. The efforts of the United States to offset the deterioration of its world economic position, dramatically exposed in the ongoing crisis, will assume an increasingly reckless and unrestrained militaristic character.

3. The worsening economic situation is leading inexorably to a renewed upsurge of class struggle on a world scale. The working class will resist with mounting determination the efforts of the old and corrupt bureaucratic organizations—political parties and trade unions—to block and betray its struggles.

4. A new audience for Marxist theory and the perspective and program of revolutionary socialism advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International will emerge among newly radicalized workers, students, youth and intellectuals. Only a party that is based firmly on Marxist theory and defends unambiguously the heritage of Trotskyism will meet the challenges of a new revolutionary epoch.

This was our appraisal, our estimate of the course of events that would follow.

There is a profound relationship between the offensive for Marxism in the working class and the offensive against the various conceptions that are promoted by the ruling elite and sections of the upper-middle class. The political independence of the working class is defined in the struggle against revisionism, opportunism and the politics of the pseudo-left.

It is significant that on the very day of the relaunch, October 22, 2008, we published Comrade North's "The Political and Intellectual Odyssey of Alex Steiner," which is included in the volume *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left*. As many comrades know, Steiner and his collaborator Frank Brenner were former members of the Workers League, who left revolutionary politics in the late 1970s. Steiner and Brenner had come back around briefly in the early 2000s but then became very hostile when it became clear that the newly formed WWS would not provide them with a platform for their reactionary political and philosophical conceptions.

In 2006, they published "Objectivism or Marxism," to which Comrade North responded in *Marxism, History and Socialist Consciousness*. They claimed that Marxism "lacked a psychology," that it was necessary to focus on issues of the family, sexual relations, "the repressed feelings of the unconscious" which persist in a human being's "congealed, unexamined past," according to Brenner.

This was the politics of the upper-middle class, hostile to the working class, a politics rooted in philosophical idealism and based on various anti-Marxist theories, particularly as developed by the Frankfurt School. A politics obsessed with itself, with what Trotsky referred to as the "philistines hunting their own individuality in empty space."

The essay on Steiner's "Odyssey" concerned itself not primarily with the individual, but how the individual expressed the movement of social layers, the process of social and political differentiation that developed in the aftermath of the defeats inflicted by Stalinism and then the end of the Vietnam War protest movement and the shift to the right of layers oriented to the Democratic Party.

Writing of the earlier theoretical conceptions from which Steiner and Brenner drew their inspiration, Comrade North wrote:

To the extent that Marxism was barred by unfavorable historical conditions from serving as the theoretical spearhead of mass revolutionary class struggle, the path was cleared for its corruption and falsification in the interests of social forces isolated and alienated from, and even hostile to, the working class. The Frankfurt School played a central role in this process.

It sought to convert Marxism from a theoretical and political weapon of proletarian class struggle, which Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse rejected, into a socially amorphous form of cultural criticism, in which the political pessimism, social alienation, and personal and psychological frustrations of sections of the middle class found expression.

The importance of this work has emerged even more clearly over the past decade and a half. In innumerable forms, the idealist, anti-working-class politics associated with these conceptions has emerged, from Syriza in Greece, to Podemos in Spain, to the statements of Chris Hedges, the demoralized skeptic, and Cornel West, the consummate pragmatist and "jazz man" of American politics. Steiner and Brenner have also become a resource and sounding board, perhaps a shoulder to cry on, for anyone seeking to desert the movement and find some semblance of political explanation for their abandonment of revolutionary politics.

Now, 2008 was also the year of the election of Obama, the "candidate of hope and change," the candidate of the CIA marketed on the basis of identity politics, the drone bomber, deporter and bank bailer-outer in chief.

In 2009, we published a New Year statement, which became an annual tradition, one of many statements analyzing the significance of Obama's election. We wrote:

There will be no peaceful and "socially-neutral" resolution to the crisis. The improvisational responses of the American ruling class to the economic upheaval will solve nothing. Already, hundreds of billions have been squandered in various hastily devised bailout schemes.

As for President Obama, he seeks the impossible: A solution to the crisis that does not touch the foundations of capitalism and the interests of the financial elite.

In the course of 2009, we published a series of essays and lectures by Comrade North, as well as important statements by Comrade Nick Beams, analyzing the economic crisis, its historic roots and its implications.

In "The capitalist crisis and the return of history," published on March 26, 2009, we wrote,

The rampant financial speculation, fueled by debt, is not the cause of the crisis, but, rather, a manifestation of deep-rooted contradictions in the American and global economy. ... [T]he very measures undertaken by American capitalism to respond to economic pressures that it confronted more than four decades ago prepared the foundations for the crisis that it confronts today.

Precisely because of the historic and global character of the contradictions that underlie the present crisis, the claims of the Obama administration that the present downturn will give way, within some sort of reasonable timeframe, to renewed and sustained economic growth, accompanied by a recovery and improvement in the living standards of the broad mass of the population, will be discredited by events.

“The economic crisis and the resurgence of class conflict in the United States,” published in May 2009, paid particular attention to the role of the trade unions in suppressing the class struggle and facilitating the extreme growth of social inequality over an extended period of time. It included a famous “scissors graph,” which showed the relationship between the decline in strike activity and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the corporate and financial elite.

The offensive for Trotskyism also took the form of the fight against a new brand of historical falsification that was aimed at the biography of Trotsky himself. This began with the biographies of Ian Thatcher and Geoffrey Swain, published in 2003 and 2006, respectively, to which we responded in 2007. They were followed, in 2009, with the biography by Robert Service, which Comrade North referred to in his review as a “piece of hack-work,” a conclusion that the *American Historical Review* later called “strong words, but entirely justified.” [See, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*]

The ruling class, aware of the extreme growth of social discontent and its revolutionary implications, responded with a form of “preemptive ideological warfare” aimed at blocking a turn by young people to Trotsky and his ideas, as had taken place in the late 1960s.

In an essay published somewhat later, in 2012, Comrade North remarked, “The new age of preemptive war produced a new literary genre: the preemptive biography!” He wrote:

More than 70 years after Trotsky’s assassination, his legacy remains the subject of the fiercest controversy. He has been denied the right to pass into the realm of dispassionate historical scholarship. Trotsky remains an intensely contemporary figure. He lives in history, not only as the leader of the greatest revolution of the 20th century, but as a political and intellectual inspiration of the revolutions of the future. ...

The defense of Trotsky’s legacy against historical falsification is an essential component of the political education of the working class and its preparation for the political demands of a new epoch of revolutionary struggle. [“Leon Trotsky and the Defense of Historical Truth,” David North, March 16, 2012]

The assault on Trotsky was closely connected to the ideological offensive of the far-right, particularly in Germany. In 2014, the fascist ideologue Jorg Baberowski invited Service, who laced his biography of Trotsky with antisemitic tropes, to speak at a meeting which Comrade North and other supporters of the IC were barred from attending.

It was in the immediate aftermath of this meeting that *Der Spiegel* published the infamous interview in which Baberowski declared that “Hitler was not vicious,” and that those who whitewashed the crimes of the Nazis were right. Baberowski’s co-thinkers in the German state moved to target the SGP and our comrades in Germany as “left-wing extremists,” and now the German state, as it upholds “democracy” in Ukraine in alliance with the heirs of the Nazi collaborators, proudly upholds the “traditions” of Hitler’s *Wehrmacht*. Historical falsification, fascist politics and political skullduggery are united in the attack on Trotskyism.

Returning to the main historical line of development, in 2010 we held the First National Congress of the SEP, which adopted the party program to which I referred earlier and is incorporated into the resolution before the Congress.

The document states, directly at the beginning, the revolutionary strategy of the SEP:

A new warning must be raised with all necessary urgency. The present crisis will not simply go away. There is no peaceful, let alone easy, way out of the economic and social impasse into which capitalism has led mankind. The program of the Socialist Equality Party—which works in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International—is not a collection of palliatives and half-measures.

The aim of this party and its co-thinkers in the Fourth International is not the reform of American and international capitalism. If anything is to be learned from the tragedies of the twentieth century, it is that the repetition of these horrors in the twenty-first century, on an even bloodier scale, can be prevented only through the revolutionary struggle of the American and international working class for socialism.

It is a comprehensive program that analyzes the significance of the economic crisis, the character of the Obama administration, which is focused on American imperialist policy, the bankruptcy of American liberalism and the evolution of American capitalism, the history of the class struggle in the United States, and the objective strength of the working class as an international class, united in the process of production.

“The Achilles heel of the working class,” it notes, “lay in the absence of an independent mass socialist movement, guided by Marxist theory.”

“The vast wealth and power of American capitalism was the most significant objective cause of the subordination of the working class to the corporate-controlled two-party system,” we explain. “The change in objective conditions, however, will lead American workers to change their minds.”

The program enumerates the social rights of the working class, which it calls “inalienable,” drawing on the revolutionary traditions of the Declaration of Independence. “The Socialist Equality Party states openly that the realization of these rights requires a frontal assault on the hitherto unchallenged prerogatives of the corporations and the rich.” It elaborates the essential elements of a socialist program, as well as democratic demands that can only be achieved through the transfer of power to the working class.

The period since the publication of this document has seen a wealth of experiences, and critical developments in the analysis of the party. In 2011, there were the revolutionary convulsions in Egypt, which forced the resignation of the hated US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power for four decades. This was followed by mass demonstrations in Madison, Wisconsin, as well as the “Occupy Wall Street” movement and the Libya war.

One saw in response to these developments a significant class differentiation. In Egypt, the pseudo-left, the organizations of the middle class, played the critical role in derailing the revolutionary struggle, channeling opposition behind one or another faction of the ruling class, and leading ultimately to the consolidation of power by Al Sisi, the butcher of Cairo and collaborator with imperialism in the genocide in Gaza.

At the same time, the organizations of the pseudo-left saw in the Libyan war, and the CIA-backed regime change operation in Syria, both overseen and directed by the Obama administration, an opportunity to abandon even the pretense of opposition to imperialism. University of Michigan professor Juan Cole, who had been active in the Iraq war protest movement, summed up the moods of many in this layer when he declared that if NATO wanted him to fight in Libya, “I’m there.” The pseudo-left denounced our opposition to the regime-change operation in Syria as “knee-jerk anti-imperialism.” This line has been continued in their complete support for the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The party responded to these developments in 2012, at the Second National Congress. Drawing on the experience of Egypt, we wrote in the main resolution:

It is not enough to predict the inevitability of revolutionary struggles and then await their unfolding. Such passivity has nothing in common with Marxism, which insists upon the unity of theoretically guided cognition and revolutionary practice.

Moreover, as the aftermath of Mubarak's downfall demonstrates all too clearly, the victory of the socialist revolution requires the presence of a revolutionary party. The Socialist Equality Party must do everything it can to develop, prior to the outbreak of mass struggles, a significant political presence within the working class—above all, among its most advanced elements. It must be a movement that has worked out the central problems of revolutionary perspective. The capitalist crisis radicalizes the working class and provides the objective conditions for socialist revolution.

We also made an analysis of the Occupy Wall Street movement, a movement of the middle class inspired by various anarchist conceptions. In particular we took up the slogan of “the 99 percent,” which we noted conflated the interests of the working class, the vast majority of the population, with the upper-middle class, the “Next 5 percent,” whose interests are tied to the capitalist system and imperialism. We wrote in the resolution:

The “anti-capitalism” of this stratum is fueled far more by envy of the rich than by solidarity with the working class. It desires not the destruction of private property (in the form of ownership of the means of production) but a larger share of the income derived from it.

Rejecting the demand for equality through the mass struggle of the working class for socialism, the embrace by the middle class pseudo-left of various forms of affirmative action—that is, preferential quotas based on race, ethnicity and gender—reflects the desire for individual access by privileged elites to career opportunities and greater wealth within the framework of capitalism.

The obsessive focus on issues related to personal identity—especially sexuality—is characteristic of middle class organizations that are determined to elevate individual interests above class issues and to separate the defense of democratic rights from the struggle for socialism.

It should also be noted that the opening report to this Congress by Comrade North is published in the *Frankfurt School* book as “The Theoretical and Historical Origins of the Pseudo-Left.” It is a critical document, which reviews, among other things, the writings of Laclau and Mouffe, whose nationalist, anti-working-class populism were key intellectual inspirations for Syriza and Podemos.

In the course of a broad survey such as this, it is impossible to refer to every major development. The year 2013, however, did see a very important initiative by the party in the US, which was the campaign against the bankruptcy of Detroit, and in particular the demonstration to defend the Detroit Institute of Arts, which was held by the SEP on October 4, 2013.

The campaign built upon the previous work of the party in launching the

Committee Against Utility Shutoffs in 2010-11, a critical initiative that came out of the Founding Congress and the Citizens Inquiry into the Mack Avenue Fire carried out by the Workers League in 1993.

The rally to defend the DIA won a powerful response from workers and young people in Detroit. Explaining why the connection between the defense of art and the interests of the working class, and in opposition to statements from well-healed union bureaucrats that “you can’t eat art,” we wrote after the rally:

The International Committee and the WWS have long insisted that culture is necessary for the working class and that the struggle of the working class for socialism is necessary for culture. Art cannot save itself. The whole progressive heritage of mankind, including its cultural heritage, depends upon the intervention of the working class in opposition to the plunder being carried out by the modern-day aristocracy.

The year 2014 was another critical nodal point, the year of the US and EU-backed coup in Ukraine, spearheaded by far-right forces but backed by the pseudo-left, which set the stage for the 2022 invasion by Russia and the present war. The fascists who now occupy leading positions in the Ukrainian state cut their teeth in the 2014 coup, and have been armed and funded ever since.

It was also the year of our First May Day Rally, which we have held every year since. In the rally this year, Comrade North referred back to the analysis made in 2014.

The purpose of this coup was to bring to power a regime that would place Ukraine under the direct control of US and German imperialism. The plotters in Washington and Berlin understood that this coup would lead to a confrontation with Russia. Indeed, far from seeking to avoid a confrontation, both Germany and the United States believe that a clash with Russia is required for the realization of their far-reaching geopolitical interests.

That same year, the ICFI published a critical statement, “Socialism and the fight against war,” posted on the WWS on July 3, 2014. It was followed less than two years later, in February 2016, with the more comprehensive document published under the same headline.

The 2014 document declared:

There can be no fight for socialism without a struggle against war and there can be no fight against war without a struggle for socialism. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) resolves to place the struggle against war at the centre of its political work. It must become the international centre of revolutionary opposition to the resurgence of imperialist violence and militarism. There is no other organisation that even aims to carry out this task.

Innumerable former pacifists, liberals, Greens and anarchists have positioned themselves behind the imperialist war drive under the fraudulent banner of human rights. Similarly, the pseudo-left tendencies such as the Pabloites and the state capitalists, having denounced “knee jerk anti-imperialism,” are lined up behind US aggression against Russia and China.

The same year, we published Comrade North's *The Unfinished Twentieth Century*, a comprehensive review of the fundamental theoretical and political issues of the 20th century that remain central to the strategy of the working class in the 21st—and, I would add, essential reading for every member. Comrade North already referred to the basic concept of the “unfinished 20th century” in the opening report.

Replying to the theories of Martin Malia, Eric Hobsbawm and Francis Fukuyama (the latter of whom has been recently cavorting with Ukrainian Nazis), Comrade North wrote in the Foreword:

[T]he central economic, social and political contradictions that confront mankind at the start of the twenty-first century are, in the main, the same as those it confronted at the beginning of the twentieth.

For all the scientific advances, technological innovations, political upheavals and social transformations, the twentieth century ended on a strangely inconclusive note. None of the great social, economic and political issues that underlay the struggles of the century had been conclusively settled.

The year 2015 was another with critical experiences. It was the year of the coming to power of Syriza, the “Coalition of the Radical Left,” championed by the pseudo-left throughout the world (including among them Steiner and Brenner). Based on our analysis of the class character and political program of Syriza, we warned from the very beginning, indeed before the beginning, that Syriza would betray all its promises of ending EU-backed austerity. It not only betrayed them, it oversaw even deeper cuts than its predecessor, while also becoming the frontline of the anti-refugee policy of the European Union.

The essential experiences of Syriza were summed up in the Foreword to the *Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-left*. It defines the “pseudo-left” as follows, which I think is worth quoting, as it is both based on the previous theoretical and political work and anticipated the developments of the past nine years:

- The pseudo-left denotes political parties, organizations and theoretical/ideological tendencies which utilize populist slogans and democratic phrases to promote the socioeconomic interests of privileged and affluent strata of the middle class. ...
- The pseudo-left is anti-Marxist. It rejects historical materialism, embracing instead various forms of subjective idealism and philosophical irrationalism associated with existentialism, the Frankfurt School and contemporary postmodernism.
- The pseudo-left is anti-socialist, opposes class struggle, and denies the central role of the working class and the necessity of revolution in the progressive transformation of society. ...
- The pseudo-left promotes “identity politics,” fixating on issues related to nationality, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality in order to acquire greater influence in corporations, the colleges and universities, the higher-paying professions, the trade unions and in government and state institutions, to effect a more favorable distribution of wealth among the richest 10 percent of the population...
- In the imperialist centers of North America, Western Europe and Australasia, the pseudo-left is generally pro-imperialist, and

utilizes the slogans of “~~Removal~~ *Removal* of rights” to legitimize, and even directly support, neo-colonialist military operations.

It concludes:

The analysis and exposure of the class basis, retrograde theoretical conceptions and reactionary politics of the pseudo-left are especially critical tasks confronting the Trotskyist movement in its struggle to educate the working class, free it from the influence of the petty-bourgeois movements, and establish its political independence as the central progressive and revolutionary force within modern capitalist society.

The year 2016 saw the election of Trump. The essential features of that election have developed to an extraordinary degree over the past eight years: the emergence of Trump as head of a distinctly fascistic political movement in the United States, and the Democratic Party as a party of war—particularly war against Russia.

Perhaps anticipating Biden's personal fate, we wrote in the resolution passed at our Fourth National Congress in 2016:

The two main parties of the ruling class exhibit advanced symptoms of political dementia. The Republican Party has nominated a fascistic demagogue, Donald Trump, who promises to “Make America Great Again” by employing the same fabled entrepreneurial skills with which he bankrupted several casinos. The Democratic Party offers Hillary Clinton, whose main qualification for the presidency is that she has survived more scandals than almost any other figure in American political history.

After a political career spanning more than four decades, which has made her a multi-millionaire, Hillary Clinton personifies the alliance of the military-intelligence establishment and Wall Street financial interests. [“Perspectives and Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party,” Congress Resolution, 2016]

The Democratic Party's political strategy in the election combined warmongering and increasingly ferocious anti-Russian hysteria, in which everyone from Julian Assange to Bernie Sanders was blamed on Russian propaganda, which laid the basis for the campaign of internet censorship that began in earnest with Google's algorithm changes in 2017.

This has been combined with the aggressive promotion of racial and gender identity politics. The latter became a focus of the Democrats' election campaign, in relation to the case of Brock Turner in California, which was used by the pseudo-left to initiate a campaign to demand harsher sentencing laws and the abrogation of democratic rights. This was followed in 2017 with the beginning of the #MeToo campaign, initiated by Democratic Party operatives.

As Comrade David Walsh wrote in 2018, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the #MeToo campaign:

Instead of bringing about an improvement in conditions, in fact, the #MeToo movement has helped undermine democratic rights, created an atmosphere of intimidation and fear and destroyed the reputations and careers of a significant number of artists and others. It has taken its appropriate place in the Democratic Party

strategy of opposing the Trump administration and the Republicans on a right-wing footing.

In 2016 we also published the volume *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony: 1990–2016* by Comrade North, which is both a summation of the eruption of American imperialism following the dissolution of the Soviet Union—from the first war against Iraq, to the bombing of Yugoslavia, through the “war on terror”—and an anticipation of what was to come.

The preface states:

The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China.

In 2017, the International Committee of the Fourth International marked the centenary of the Russian Revolution, which took the form of a series of lectures delivered by leading members of the IC, several essays, public lectures and a detailed chronology reviewing the central experiences of the conquest of power by the Bolshevik Party. We engaged in this review not merely for historical interest, however, but because the lessons of the Russian Revolution remain strategic experiences for the working class as a whole.

“In this centenary year of the Russian Revolution,” we wrote in introducing the year, on January 3, 2017,

there is a profound intersection and interaction between contemporary politics and historical experience. The 1917 Revolution arose out of the imperialist catastrophe of World War I. In the political maelstrom that followed the overthrow of the tsarist regime, the Bolshevik Party emerged as the dominant force within the working class. But the role played by the Bolsheviks in 1917 was the outcome of a long and difficult struggle for the development of socialist consciousness in the working class and the working out of a correct revolutionary perspective.

The last essay published in 2017 by Comrade North, “Final Reflections on the Centennial Year of the October Revolution,” drew attention to statements from leading figures within the bourgeois media establishment that capitalism remained vulnerable to the threat of socialist revolution, and that governments should not be complacent, indeed should take proactive measures against revolutionaries. The major achievements of this year are included in the two-volume book, *Why Study the Russian Revolution?*

The year 2017 was of course the first year of the Trump administration, and, within the state apparatus, was dominated by the conflict within the ruling class over foreign policy, and the frustration of the Democrats that the plans for an escalation in Syria and war against Russia were undermined by Trump, who had different foreign policy priorities. Mass popular protests against Trump’s inauguration, motivated by opposition to his fascistic and pro-corporate politics, were smothered and channeled behind a thoroughly right-wing campaign.

Among the documents we produced is the seminal statement, “Palace coup or class struggle: The political crisis in Washington and the strategy

of the working class,” published on June 13, 2017.

We explained the fundamental difference between the opposition to Trump from sections of the ruling class as well as sections of the middle class, on the one hand, and the opposition of the working class.

The opposition within the ruling class is “determined to prevent Trump from weakening the anti-Russia policy developed under Obama, which the Hillary Clinton campaign was dedicated to expanding.”

In a statement that retains its validity, under new conditions, seven years later, we wrote:

The political conclusion that flows from this analysis is that the fight of the working class against Trump and all that he represents will raise ever more urgently the necessity of a political mass movement, independent of and opposed to both the Republicans and the Democrats, against the capitalist system and its state.

I am going to review the past five years in more abbreviated form, in part for time reasons, in part because the more recent experiences will be covered more exhaustively by other comrades in the course of this Congress, and in part because the sheer mass of material and developments makes a comprehensive review impossible.

I will, however, point to several of the strategic experiences and conceptions developed by the movement during this period.

First, was the SEP 2019 Summer School, which consisted of a comprehensive review of the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party and the development of the political line of the movement after the split.

It was there that we developed the concept of the “fifth stage” in the history of the Trotskyist movement, which Comrade North defined as “the stage that will witness a vast growth of the ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.”

He continued:

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.

The Summer School in 2019 was followed almost immediately by the publication of the *New York Times’* 1619 Project, which combined a racist falsification of history with the denigration and denial of the revolutionary traditions of the United States itself. It was the reflection in historiography of the Democratic Party’s promotion of identity politics and the abandonment by any section of the ruling class of the democratic principles established by the American Revolution and the Civil War.

The response of the IC to the 1619 Project is historic in several different ways. In interviews with leading historians we refuted the lies of Nikole Hannah-Jones and others and dealt a staggering blow to the Democrats’

“project.”

In *The 1619 Project and the Racist Falsification of History*, co-edited by Comrade Tom Mackaman, Comrade North wrote in the Introduction:

The interaction of racist ideology as it has developed over several decades in the academy and the political agenda of the Democratic Party is the motivating force behind the 1619 Project. Particularly under conditions of extreme social polarization, in which there is growing interest in and support for socialism, the Democratic Party—as a political instrument of the capitalist class—is anxious to shift the focus of political discussion away from issues that raise the specter of social inequality and class conflict. This is the function of a reinterpretation of history that places race at the center of its narrative.

In the years that followed the 1619 Project, the Democrats have doubled down on the promotion of racism to divide the working class. The pseudo-left took up the campaign when it sought to divert mass protests against police violence in 2020, a product of capitalism, into the reactionary attack on monuments to Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln. The movement’s defense of these traditions is the political expression of the fact that the defense of basic democratic rights is a class question.

At the beginning of 2020, we published the New Year statement, “The decade of socialist revolution begins,” which detailed “the ‘obvious’ signs that existed, as the 2020s began, of the revolutionary storm that was soon to sweep across the globe.”

The anticipation that the decade would be one of massive crises did not take long to be realized, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the first months of 2020, though the virus had already begun to spread in the final months of 2019. The pandemic, a colossal experience for the international working class, will be the subject of the report by Comrades Evan Blake and Benjamin Mateus later in this Congress.

I will limit myself to stressing the fact that the IC’s response to the pandemic is unparalleled. We are the only movement on the left that has treated and continues to treat the pandemic as a significant political event. The WSWS is the most important resource for basic science of the pandemic, including our many interviews conducted with leading epidemiologists and other scientists, both before and after the launching of the Global Workers Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. Most importantly, we have advanced a perspective capable of stopping the deadly disease, rooted in the mobilization of the working class and the socialist reorganization of economic life, based on a strategy of global elimination.

The first year of the pandemic was followed by Trump’s attempted coup of January 6, 2021, the outcome of an extended conspiracy developed throughout the previous year.

In our Congress resolution of 2022 we stated that the coup was

an irreversible turning point in the breakdown of American democracy. The sitting US president led a vast conspiracy involving the leadership of the Republican Party and substantial sections of the military, police and intelligence apparatus to overthrow the 2020 election and keep himself in power as president-dictator.

Explaining the response of the Democratic Party, we stated that it

has done nothing to politically mobilize the population against Trump. It has implemented no social reforms. It presides over rapid rises to the cost of living and is pouring tens of billions of dollars into a war against Russia that has no support in the population beyond a small section of the affluent middle class. Biden and the entire Democratic Party, including its Democratic Socialists of America faction, are creating conditions favorable to the far right in this November’s congressional elections.

We need only add that this now applies to the 2024 presidential elections. The Democrats’ response to the fascist transformation of the Republicans is to attempt to force a bipartisan agreement on war, while joining hands with the antisemites in the Republican Party to slander those protesting the genocide as antisemitic.

As we state in point 27 of the resolution before the Congress, the SEP “rejects the claim that the growth of the extreme right can be countered by supporting the Democratic Party.” The working class and youth now have had a significant political experience with the likes of Bernie Sanders, Alexandria-Ocasio Cortez and what Comrade North referred to as the “political eunuch” Jeremy Corbyn. They are the “priests of quarter truths,” that is, the worst forms of falsehood, who propagate the lie that democratic rights can be defended and fascism opposed while supporting imperialist war and without socialist revolution.

The same year, 2021, the ICFI initiated the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. In its statement announcing the IWA-RFC, published as a call for the May Day rally of that year, 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 IWA-RFC will work to develop the framework for new forms of independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces on an international scale. The working class is ready to fight. But it is shackled by reactionary bureaucratic organizations that suppress every expression of resistance.

I have in the course of this review not been able to detail the many expressions of class struggle and the critical interventions of the party in them. Comrades Tom Hall and Jerry White will address this experience in greater detail in their report. It should be noted, however, that the launching of the IWA-RFC was followed almost immediately, in June 2021, by the strike at Volvo Trucks, which involved a rank-and-file rebellion against the apparatus that the party essentially led.

This was followed, in 2022, by one of the most important initiatives of the party, the election campaign for UAW president of Comrade Will Lehman, who was won to the party in the course of the Volvo Trucks intervention. The nearly 5,000 votes for Comrade Lehman, under conditions of systematic voter suppression by the apparatus in league with the state, expressed the real state of opposition in the working class. As we noted:

The broad support Lehman received among rank-and-file workers across the US reflects the rapidly developing political radicalization of the American working class. The vote explodes the myth that workers in the United States are intransigently hostile to socialism.



The past three years—from the beginning of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine in February 2022 through to the genocide in Gaza that began in October 2023 and continues to this day—have been dominated by the escalating global war, of which Comrade Damon will speak in greater detail.

Comrade Clara Weiss will also review the significance of the arrest of Comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk in Ukraine and important initiatives taken by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, including the November 3, 2022, IYSSE statement and the December 10 rally, which were followed by a series of meetings throughout the world against imperialist war, meetings that came under attack by a combination of the pro-imperialist pseudo-left and the fascistic right.

I will merely stress a few points:

First, the arrest of Comrade Syrotiuk is an attack on the entire international movement. It expresses the fear of the ruling class of the intersection of a movement against war with a movement of the working class for socialism, and is a statement from imperialism that it recognizes the danger of the ICFI, which we must take very seriously. And we must redouble our efforts to secure his freedom.

Second, in our response to the Ukraine war and the genocide in Gaza, we have not only elaborated a perspective for the working class, but brought forward and clarified fundamental historical and political issues. I would stress in particular the significance of the series of lectures by Comrade North published in *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*.

Third, our response to the eruption of a global war has been to deepen the struggle within the party for an assimilation of the entire history of the movement, expressed in last year's summer school, which consisted of lectures covering a vast period of the Trotskyist movement, from the founding of the Fourth International through the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party.

Finally, the rally that we held on July 24 was a major achievement. We are asserting that the fight against imperialism and war must be developed as a working class movement. It must be developed as an international movement. It must be developed as a revolutionary movement, which has as its aim the conquest of power by the working class. And it must be developed under the leadership of the International Committee, the world Trotskyist movement. In contrast to the shouting and demoralized histrionics of the pseudo-left, we are advancing an actual perspective, rooted in historical experience, to put an end to imperialist barbarism by putting an end to capitalism.

To return to the beginning, the party's intervention in the election campaign is, as Lenin put it, "the result of the whole *work* of the party, of the way the work is organized, and of its whole trend in the given historical period."

I hope that this review has been helpful in concretizing what this means. The political capital that we bring into our work is immense, and I am well aware that comrades may feel somewhat overwhelmed by the content of this review. I was somewhat overwhelmed in putting it together. No doubt, I have missed important experiences and initiatives. But the tasks before us are immense. As Comrade Barbara Slaughter put it yesterday, at stake is the very existence of human civilization.

In terms of themes that emerge out of this review, I would stress (1) The connection between the different elements of what we referred to in the beginning of 2023 as the "critical mass of intersecting crises"; (2) The relationship between the theoretical offensive for Marxism by the IC and the direct intervention by the party in the development of the class struggle; and (3) The decisive role of the party in realizing the potential in the objective situation in the political initiatives that we take.

As Comrade North put it in the introductory report, "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."

We must ensure that this alignment is realized in practice, through the systematic offensive to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class, elevate the theoretical and political level of the membership as a whole, and develop our collective political practice in the United States and throughout the world. On this basis I urge adoption of the resolution before this Congress.



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