

Public Meeting: Trotskyism and the fight for revolutionary leadership

40 years since the expulsion of the Workers Revolutionary Party from the International Committee of the Fourth International

Socialist Equality Party (UK)

11 February 2026

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In 1938, the co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky, founded the Fourth International: “Its task—the abolition of capitalism’s domination. Its aim—socialism. Its method—the proletarian revolution.”

Announcing that the social democratic Second International and the Stalinist Third International were “dead for the purposes of socialist revolution”, Trotsky declared, “The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”

The Fourth International’s task was to resolve that crisis, carrying forward the revolutionary legacy of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party—architects of the world’s first socialist revolution and workers’ state—into the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and world socialist revolution.

In 1985–6, a political battle was fought within the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, to defend that legacy. The leadership of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in Britain—at the time the largest and most influential section within the ICFI—had abandoned and betrayed the struggle against Stalinism, bourgeois nationalism, social democracy and the trade union bureaucracy.

At stake was the survival of Trotskyism, of revolutionary Marxism, as an organised political tendency. The ICFI’s victory over the WRP, and expulsion of those who refused to accept its socialist internationalist principles, was an event of global, historic significance.

In the years that followed, the ICFI led a renaissance of Marxist thought, producing an unparalleled analysis of globalisation, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the wave of anti-socialist renunciationism which swept across the social democratic parties and trade unions. Its work laid the foundations for the foundation of the Socialist Equality Parties and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Trotskyism and the ICFI in today’s revolutionary times

The political issues fought out in the conflict with the WRP and clarified in its aftermath anticipated those that confront the international working class as life-or-death questions today.

Trotskyism’s defence of the perspective of world socialist revolution against national reformism and the disastrous Stalinist theory of “socialism in one country”, and of Permanent Revolution against policies of adaptation to the national bourgeoisie, are of burning contemporary relevance.

Events in Venezuela have demonstrated the bankruptcy of the Pink Tide’s “21st century socialism”; in reality, a form of bourgeois nationalism whose ability to provide certain social concessions to the masses based on oil revenues has given way to a right-wing, dictatorial puppet regime acting directly in the service of US imperialism.

Across Latin America, Africa and the Middle East—from Gaza to Iran—the subordination of the international working class to bourgeois nationalist movements and governments has produced tragedy after tragedy.

In the imperialist centres of Europe and America, countless “left” projects—from Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain to Zohran Mamdani’s mayorship in New York, Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party and his Your Party initiative with Zarah Sultana—confirm the bankruptcy not only of the old social democratic parties, but of all programmes opposed to the class struggle of the international working class.

The cancerous growth of war and far-right reaction, arising out of capitalism’s fundamental contradictions between global social production and private, nationally based appropriation, poses the choice starkly: international socialism, or capitalist barbarism.

Two veteran Trotskyists to speak

Our speakers marking the 40th anniversary of the split with the WRP and its central leaders—Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter and Michael Banda—are Peter Schwarz and Chris Marsden.

Schwarz is the Secretary of the ICFI and played a major role in the struggle against the WRP led by the National Secretary of the US Workers League, David North.

Marsden is the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK). He was a leading member of the internationalist faction of the WRP which sided with the ICFI in 1985–6.

Peter and Chris have both written thousands of articles for the WSWS, authored essays and delivered lectures ranging across European and international politics, history and philosophy. They are well placed to explain these issues to a younger generation grappling with revolutionary questions.

Acutely aware of the sharpening relevance of Trotsky’s ideas, opponents of socialist revolution have sought to pre-emptively discredit Trotskyism among workers and young people.

British academics have played a particularly vile role. The ICFI crushingly refuted the anti-Trotskyist lies of Oxford’s Robert Service, Brunel’s Ian Thatcher and Glasgow’s Geoffrey Swain. It answered the Stalinist apologetics of Eric Hobsbawm.

Birkbeck’s John Kelly has devoted two volumes to “proving” Trotskyism is “a tragic and wasteful misdirection of political energy and resources away from serious radical politics.” By “serious radical politics” is meant the deeply discredited programme of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders.

Kelly’s work was followed by Aidan Beatty’s *The Party Is Always Right*—an attempt to supplant the ICFI’s principled political critique of the WRP with a reactionary hatchet job seeking to discredit its leader Gerry Healy’s earlier struggles to defend Trotskyism and to denigrate the ICFI historically and today.

The speakers will answer these political efforts to cut students and the working class off from their revolutionary heritage, without which there can be no successful struggle against capitalism for world socialism.

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Trotskyism is the theory of the socialist movement