Report to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party

Oligarchy, dictatorship and the political radicalization of the American working class

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We are publishing here the report to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US) given by Joseph Kishore, the national secretary of the SEP. The Congress was held from August 2 to August 7, 2026. This report introduced the second resolution, "The drive to dictatorship and the political radicalization in the United States," which was unanimously adopted.

Comrade David North's opening report established the framework within which all the resolutions before this Congress must be considered. It characterized the Ninth Congress as convening at "a critical turning point in the political history of the United States and the world—the point of intersection of war, economic crisis, and rapidly growing social radicalization."

The second resolution takes up the political and social consequences of that intersection within the United States itself. What is set down in the resolution—of the Trump administration, of the Democratic Party and of the radicalization and developing class struggle—is not an impressionistic response to the events of the past 18 months. It is the product of a sustained historical analysis carried out by the movement over an extended period.

Comrade David's opening report stated the essential fact from which the resolution proceeds: "The ruling class placed Trump in power in the belief that the interests of the oligarchy would be well cared for by a sociopathic gangster." He also referred to the recently published Mehring Books volume, *Oligarchy: Trump and the Breakdown of American Democracy*, as "the most important contemporary book on American politics."

This is an accurate appraisal. The volume is the documentary record of the analysis upon which the resolution rests. It assembles the work of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party from the first months of Trump's initial campaign in 2015 to the war against Iran under the second Trump administration. These documents represent, as the foreword to the volume states, "the only sustained Marxist analysis of the collapse of American democracy, carried out in real time across the entire period of Trump's ascendancy."

Oligarchy and the record of the party's analysis of Trump

The foreword to *Oligarchy* notes that the innumerable commentaries on Trump produced two interpretations. The first and the more common "depicts him as a monster risen from the depths, an inexplicable eruption into an otherwise healthy democracy." The second "invests him with the attributes of a satanic genius, imposing his will upon a helpless nation." Both interpretations are trivial, and the second attributes to this individual a significance far beyond anything he actually possesses.

These false interpretations have political consequences. If Trump is an aberration, then the task is restoration: the return of the Republican Party to its senses—which is what Biden meant when he referred to a "strong Republican Party"—the defense of the bourgeois state and, of course, the election of Democrats. If Trump, on the other hand, is an all-powerful demon, then the working class is merely a spectator to a drama conducted above its head, and opposition can only take the form of moral protest and appeals to the very institutions that produced him.

I cannot, in the space of this report, review the entire content of the book, which must be read by every member of the party and brought into our work on the campuses and in the working class. However, I do want to refer to a number of themes which characterize the analysis that we have made over the course of Trump's rise.

The first is the class analysis of Trump's rise. As early as March 3, 2016, in an essay by Comrade David entitled "What Political Conclusions Must Be Drawn from Trump's Super Tuesday?" written during the primaries of that year, we wrote that Trump's candidacy could "no longer be dismissed ... as merely a bizarre and even somewhat entertaining sideshow," and that the front-runner for the Republican nomination was "a candidate whose persona and appeal are of a distinctly fascistic character."

We rejected the explanation that predominated within the Democratic Party and the media—that Trump's rise was simply the product of racism, and above all the supposed racism of white workers. Overt appeals to racism, we noted, are the stock-in-trade of virtually all the Republican candidates. They do not explain, however, "the political phenomenon of Trump's dramatic rise."

The essay identified instead a sociopolitical process. More than any other Republican candidate, we wrote, Trump has pitched his message "to the intense anger and frustration of tens of millions of Americans who feel—quite justifiably—neglected and scorned by a political system that is indifferent to the problems with which they are confronted every day of their lives."

Why was it that Trump and the right, rather than a movement to the left, benefited from this anger? The answer lay in the character of the Democratic Party, which we referred to as "the political instrument of Wall Street and substantial sections of military and intelligence strategists," and the milieu of affluent middle-class organizations fixated on identity politics. The characterization written in 2016 reads as a portrait of the present:

> The essential characteristics of this political milieu are

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> complacency, self-absorption and, above all, contempt for the working class. In particular, the affluent "left" organizations—or, to describe them more accurately, the "pseudo-left"—make little effort to suppress their disdain for the white working class, for which they can find no place within the framework of identity politics. A vast segment of American workers is written off as "reactionary." Their essential class interests—decent jobs and a safe workplace, a livable income, a secure retirement, affordable health care, inviolable democratic rights, peace—are ignored.

The statement made the following prognosis:

> The American political system is rotten to the core. Even if Trump were to disappear tomorrow, it would not be long before another fascistic demagogue would emerge to take his place.

And a sentence written five years before January 6 should be read with those events and subsequent developments in mind:

> There is no small number of discontented military and police-intelligence operatives, with substantial combat experience and access to serious fighting forces, who are preparing to enter the political arena.

The repudiation of the racialist interpretation of Trump's rise is an important theme. In May 2016, Comrade Niles Niemuth, then the party's candidate for vice president, answered a *New York Times* op-ed claiming that white men supported Trump in order to recover advantages once enjoyed at the expense of black workers and women—exposing its "false reading of the history of the twentieth century in which rights and privileges were won or lost in a bitter competition between the races and genders." When, after the election, the claim of the inherent racism of the white working class became the official narrative of Trump's victory, Comrade Eric London answered with a detailed analysis of the returns themselves, which refuted that narrative. This fight against racialist politics, sustained through the 2016 campaign and its aftermath, anticipated the party's response to the 1619 Project three years later.

In the SEP statement on Trump's first inauguration, "The Inauguration of Donald Trump: An Event That Will Live in Infamy," we explained the historical and class roots of Trump's rise to power:

> History has caught up with American capitalism. The protracted process of economic and social decay has been covered over for decades with democratic phrases that served to disguise the gap between the official political myths and the underlying reality. But the mask has now come off. Donald Trump personifies the corruption, ruthlessness, parasitism and essentially fascistic mindset of the capitalist oligarchs who control the United States.

The second theme, connected to the first, is the class anatomy of the ruling class opposition to Trump. One of the most important documents of Trump's first term was published by the Political Committee of the Socialist Equality Party on June 13, 2017, under the headline "Palace Coup or Class Struggle: The Political Crisis in Washington and the Strategy of the Working Class." The anti-Russia campaign was then at full flood, and virtually the entire liberal and pseudo-left milieu had thrown itself behind it. We characterized the charges and allegations leveled against Trump by the Democratic Party as having "a synthetic and fraudulent character," in which "the real sources of the divisions within the ruling elite were deliberately obscured with a smelly heap of allegations."

The statement delineated the three forms of opposition to Trump, corresponding to three classes. The first is the opposition of a powerful faction within the capitalist class, whose methods, we wrote, are "fundamentally antidemocratic, involving behind-the-scenes plotting with elements within the military-intelligence establishment and corporate-financial elite." These are the methods of a palace coup. Its quarrel with Trump was not over his assault on democratic rights or his fascistic and anti-working class policies, but over the anti-Russia campaign laid down under Obama, which Hillary Clinton had planned on leading, focused at that point on Syria.

The second form of opposition is that of "affluent sections of the middle class, whose opposition to the Republican Party is focused on effecting a more favorable distribution of wealth within the wealthiest 10 percent of the population." We referred specifically to the Democratic Socialists of America, the now-defunct International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative and the Greens, and stated that their function is "to maintain the domination of the ruling class over the working class." The third is the opposition "between the ruling class and the working class, the broad mass of the population, which is suffering various forms of social distress and is completely excluded from political life."

From this threefold analysis followed the strategic conclusion that has governed the party's intervention in every subsequent crisis. The working class must fight for the removal of the Trump administration, but "this task must not be entrusted to Trump's factional opponents in the ruling class ... It must develop its struggle against Trump under its own banner and with its own program."

The third theme is the consistent and insistent warning of the fascist danger, the threat of dictatorship, in opposition to the universal complacency of official politics. In October 2019, as Trump responded to the impeachment then being waged with appeals to the police and military and warnings of "civil war," the Socialist Equality Party Political Committee issued a statement under the headline "No to American Fascism! Build a Mass Movement to Force Trump Out!" It declared: "The old refrain, 'It can't happen here'—i.e., that American democracy is eternally immune from the cancer of fascism—is hopelessly out of date." And it located the source of the danger not in the mind of Trump, but in the social structure of the United States: "The massive concentration of wealth within the richest one percent of the population and the unprecedented level of social inequality are incompatible with traditional democratic forms of rule."

On June 2, 2020, amidst the protests over police violence after the murder of George Floyd, and following Trump's law-and-order broadcast coinciding with the military assault on the peaceful protests outside the White House, we wrote that this "will live in infamy as the beginning of a coup d'état by a criminal administration." That was seven months before the storming of the Capitol, and Trump at that time was raising the initial threats to invoke the Insurrection Act in response to the protests over police violence and the brutal police crackdown he was overseeing.

On November 11, 2020, eight weeks before January 6, the Political Committee set out the mechanism of the conspiracy in advance: Republican-controlled legislatures repudiating the popular vote and selecting pro-Trump electors, legal challenges before a Supreme Court a third of whose members Trump had appointed, the precedent of *Bush v. Gore*. And this while Biden dismissed Trump's actions as "an embarrassment" and the Democrats treated them "as if they were a personal temper tantrum and not a deadly serious threat to overturn what

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remains of democratic rule in the United States."

On the morning after the January 6 coup itself, Comrade David wrote:

> Not only can a fascist coup happen here. It has happened here, on the afternoon of January 6, 2021. Moreover, even if the initial effort has fallen short of its goal, it will happen again.

Compare this response to that of the perennially complacent and self-satisfied Bhaskar Sunkara, the editor of *Jacobin*, who tweeted on the evening of the coup that he had "seen the stability of US republican institutions in the face of a right-wing mob," and asked rhetorically, "What's the advantage of saying 'this is a coup'?"

The fourth theme is the historical and international framework, which pervades the entire volume and all of our essays on the rise of Trump. In the lecture delivered 11 days after the coup, "The Trump Coup and the Rise of Fascism: Where Is America Going?" Comrade David rejected every explanation proceeding from Trump's personality or from purely domestic conditions: "The main cause of the eruption of January 6 is to be found in the global crisis of the capitalist system, rather than in specifically American conditions."

At the same time, the lecture situated the coup in the arc of American history since Kennedy's inauguration, 60 years to the day before Biden's. Kennedy's reformism was a strategy against socialism—"If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich"—and it rested on an economic dominance that was beginning to shift, expressed directly in the ending of dollar-gold convertibility by Nixon on August 15, 1971. From this, the lecture drew the conclusion that is the historical foundation of the resolution before this Congress:

> The abandonment of social reform required a turn toward increasing social repression. The trajectory of American democracy followed the trajectory of American capitalism—that is, downward.

The milestones included Watergate; Carter's invocation of the Taft-Hartley Act against striking miners, preparing Reagan's destruction of PATCO; Iran-Contra and Rex 84, the plan for mass detention within the United States; the theft of the 2000 election, uncontested by the Democratic Party; the Patriot Act and Guantanamo; and, under Obama, the targeted assassination of American citizens without due process. And running beneath it all, the growth of financial parasitism, from the bubbles of the 1990s and 2000s to the bailouts of 2008 and during the pandemic. Placed in this context, "January 6 marks a new stage in a protracted process of democratic breakdown," Comrade David explained. And the lecture posed the basic alternatives:

> Where is America going? Will it go toward fascism, or will it go toward socialism? These are the alternatives that confront Americans ... If democracy is to survive ... power must pass into the hands of the working class.

The fifth theme is continuity—through the Biden administration to Trump's return and the present drive to dictatorship. The Biden years must be understood not as a rupture from what preceded but, as the foreword to *Oligarchy* put it, as "an interregnum within a single process." Two days after the assault on the Capitol, Biden declared: "We need a Republican Party. We need an opposition that is principled and strong." The Democrats' 18-month investigation into the coup concluded that the central cause of January 6 was one man—a theory constructed, as Comrade Jacob Crosse wrote, "to whitewash the role of pillars of the US government that were deeply involved in the coup."

The Justice Department prosecuted the foot soldiers and left the network of officials, operatives and financiers untouched. The Democratic Party investigated a conspiracy to overthrow the Constitution and concluded that one man had done it, because any other conclusion would have obliged it to appeal to the working class. It feared the population more than it feared the coup, and it took no action against Trump for it.

In terms of policy, the Biden years were devoted to the initiation and escalation of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, toward direct confrontation between nuclear-armed states, and, from October 2023, the arming, financing and shielding of the Israeli genocide in Gaza. The Democrats' plea for bipartisanship was aimed above all at shoring up a ruling class consensus behind the strategic imperatives of American imperialism and the war against Russia.

These were the conditions that produced Trump's return. We demonstrated in November 2024 that there had been no surge of mass popular support for Trump—he had gained three million votes—but rather primarily a collapse of the Democratic Party vote, Harris falling 6.3 million below Biden and improving her position only among one group: those voters earning above $200,000 a year. Among the 29 percent of voters who described themselves as angry, Trump won by 71 to 27. The return of Trump to power, in class terms, however, represented, we wrote after the election, "the violent realignment of the American political superstructure to correspond with the real social relations that exist in the United States."

Comrades are familiar with the record of this government: the declaration of a Nazi-inspired "state of exception"; the transformation of ICE into a paramilitary force; ICE murder in Minneapolis and, in the weeks preceding this Congress, an escalating campaign of ICE murder; the deployment of federal troops, including National Guard troops, into American cities; and, of course, the invasion of Venezuela, the war against Iran and the systematic erection of a political dictatorship.

In September 2025, in "Trump's Fascist Conspiracy and How to Fight It," we set out the strategy that is necessary. The drive to dictatorship will continue even if Trump himself is removed from the scene, since it expresses the interests of a class. The starting point of any serious struggle against dictatorship is a break with the Democratic Party, and the fight must be based on the industrial mobilization of the working class through rank-and-file committees, on the basis of its own program and political perspective.

The analysis is drawn together in the lecture delivered by Comrade David in November 2025, "Where Is America Going? Oligarchy, Dictatorship, and the Revolutionary Crisis of Capitalism." Its central thesis is that the political structure of the United States is being brought into alignment with its class structure. Trump's cabinet and top appointees command a collective net worth of above $60 billion, and 16 of his 25 wealthiest appointees stand among the country's 813 billionaires. "This is not symbolic representation," Comrade David wrote. "It is direct rule by the oligarchy."

The lecture established the historical law governing the behavior of this class:

> It is a characteristic of every ruling class that as it heads for extinction, it becomes increasingly aggressive. The more irrational its system becomes, the more violent the efforts to legitimize it. The militarization of American cities, the support for fascism, the drive to war against Russia and China are not rational policy

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choices. They are the convulsions of a dying system.

The lecture's political conclusion stands at the center of the resolution before the Congress. Where is America going? The answer to this question is: to socialism. Not as an inevitability, but as the objective tendency, which raises the imperative of political leadership. As Comrade David stated in his lecture:

> The former stabilizer of world capitalism has now become the greatest source of global instability. Moreover, the most politically conservative working class, supposedly immune to the appeal of socialism, is now being politically radicalized.

I would note, as an aside, that it was also at that lecture that Comrade David announced the initiation of Socialism AI, which was released later that year and which will be the subject of discussion later in this Congress.

That is an overview of the analysis that we have made of the Trump administration, the political issues that arise out of it, and the political perspective that must be developed in opposition to it. The volume on oligarchy must be read as a record of the party's analysis of the political situation and as an elaboration in real time of the fundamental political events of more than the past decade. It is critical reading for all members and for workers and youth who are being politically radicalized.

The political role and history of the DSA

In its statement on the day of Trump's first inauguration, the SEP concluded that the administration "is, in the final analysis, the product of the desperate crisis that afflicts American capitalism. Its reckless policies will set into motion forces both within the United States and internationally that it cannot control." Those forces are now in motion.

I want to address in the second half of my report the domestic consequences of the policy—the rampage of the oligarchy that is represented by the Trump administration—and that is the developing political radicalization and class struggle. Under the blows of impossible living costs, endless war, ICE murder, the open construction of dictatorship and the extreme growth of social inequality, millions are being propelled into political life and are moving to the left—a movement that the Democratic Party seeks to smother and control.

In the days before the Congress, on July 31, we published an important perspective on the *World Socialist Web Site* examining what it refers to as "the remarkable shift to the left taking place among American workers and young people." Nearly 40 percent of registered voters would consider voting for a socialist presidential candidate, according to a *Washington Post*-Ipsos poll—46 percent among voters under 30. A CNN poll finds that roughly one-third of Democrats now identify as "democratic socialists," and that they are more likely to earn under $100,000 a year than Democrats as a whole. This reflects—in the limited way in which popular sentiment is reflected in polls—a significant political shift to the left and a growing support for and identification with socialism.

This has found initial expression in the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and in the votes for candidates who are members of the DSA, endorsed by the DSA or identified as socialists. The resolution before the Congress states that the millions voting for such candidates are "not voting for the Democratic Party's record but against capitalism, for candidates they understand to be socialists."

But precisely for that reason, we must be entirely clear about the organization that has become its beneficiary. As Comrade David put it in the introductory report:

> The objective significance of this growth must be acknowledged: it registers a leftward movement of masses of workers and young people and the collapse of the decades-long anti-socialist taboo. But acknowledgment is not adaptation.

The resolution itself states that the Democratic Socialists of America is the initial beneficiary of this radicalization, but:

> the DSA is not a socialist party. It is a faction of the Democratic Party, and its principal role is to block the development of an independent political movement of the working class, to capture the movement toward socialism and bind it back to the capitalist two-party system.

The DSA presents itself—and is presented in the media, in the many articles now appearing in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, including over the past few days—as the natural home of a new American socialism. It is nothing of the sort. It is a 44-year-old organization resting on a political lineage of nearly 90 years, every stage of which was defined by a break from Marxism and from the working class.

The roots of the DSA—and this is a subject on which we have to write much more—lie in the break by Max Shachtman in 1940 from Trotsky and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) over the class nature of the Soviet Union. Trotsky's replies in that conflict—the brilliant critical essays collected in *In Defense of Marxism*—established that what was at issue was method and class orientation: the abandonment of dialectical materialism for petty-bourgeois pragmatism under the pressure of bourgeois public opinion. Trotsky insisted that the theoretical capitulation would be followed by a political one, and he was proved correct within a decade.

Having refused to defend the USSR against imperialism, Shachtman's tendency was by 1950 defending American imperialism in Korea. Shachtman supported the Bay of Pigs invasion and the war in Vietnam, and integrated his followers into the anti-communist apparatus of the AFL-CIO under George Meany.

Michael Harrington, the eventual founder of the DSA, was Shachtman's protégé and shared his pro-imperialist politics. Sent to the founding convention of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Port Huron in 1962, he attacked the draft statement of the SDS as insufficiently anti-communist. Out of the 1972 breakup of the Socialist Party, he founded the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) on the program of "realignment": socialists were to work within the Democratic Party, functioning as what he referred to as "the left wing of the possible"—the possible being defined at every point by what the Democratic Party and the ruling class would permit. This was a founding programmatic renunciation of the political independence of the working class, and it remains the program of the DSA today.

The break between Harrington and Shachtman was not of any principled character. It reflected certain conflicts within the ruling class, particularly related to shifts within the Democratic Party. 1972 was the year of the McGovern campaign—the beginning of a decisive shift of the Democratic Party toward taking behind it various forms of middle-class politics: environmentalism, feminism, various forms of identity politics. That was what Harrington was aligned with. Shachtman went in a different direction, and his acolytes ended up in the Republican Party and the

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neoconservative movement.

The DSA itself was formed in 1982 through the merger of Harrington's DSOC with the New American Movement (NAM). The title of that organization is itself an indication of what it was: not a party, but a "movement"; not socialist or communist, but "American"; and above all, "new"—new in relation to Marxism, to the Russian Revolution and to the entire strategic experience of the international working class, all of which were to be left behind.

NAM had been founded in 1971 out of the wreckage of the SDS, and it gathered up the residue of the New Left: a Gramscian vocabulary of hegemony and "war of position" substituted for the perspective of the political movement of the working class, and a considerable number of former Communist Party members, Stalinists and children of CP families, who brought with them the essential sensibilities of the Popular Front. The DSA is the organizational fusion of these two repudiations of Marxism: the Shachtmanite renunciation of the defense of the workers state and its adaptation to imperialism, and the New Left renunciation of the working class itself.

This history is not a matter of simply historical interest. It is the living program and continuity of the DSA itself.

As we hold our Congress, the DSA has just concluded its own national convention in Chicago—it concluded, in fact, yesterday. The program before the convention, "Workers Deserve More," presents itself as a socialist program. It is nothing of the sort. It is a compendium of reform proposals entirely oriented to working within the state, and particularly the Democratic Party. Its complaint against the Democratic Party is that it is "asleep at the wheel"—that is its characterization of a party of Wall Street and the Pentagon, which is described as a negligent institution that might be steered correctly with sufficient pressure. Its conception of change is stated in a single sentence: "Some of these demands may be won under our current system, but we know complete victory will require building a new society from the ground up."

There is no call for a workers party, no break with the two-party system beyond vague references to proportional representation, and no analysis of imperialism whatsoever—nothing on the war against Russia, nothing on the drive to world war, nothing on Iran—only a list of demands of the sort one might address to a sympathetic congressman, including, of course, DSA members themselves.

The convention's own programming states the organization's character more plainly than the resolution. The electoral track is titled "Governing as Socialists: The DSA Difference," and promises to strengthen "co-governance with Socialists in Office"—a formulation that assumes the permanence of the capitalist state and assigns the DSA the role of its manager.

The DSA leadership is itself candid about what it is doing. Appearing on Fox News last week and asked about establishment Democrats, the co-chair of the New York chapter of the DSA answered that the hostility runs only one way—from the establishment Democrats to the DSA:

> We're very serious about winning, which is why we often run in Democratic primaries. But we're also very serious about governing. That means creating allyships, creating partnerships, building coalitions with people who are excited about the type of economic populism that we put forward, and building allies with, like, perhaps Governor Newsom in California.

The elevation of the DSA into the apparatus of the capitalist state has produced, or is producing, a crisis within the organization itself. The developing factional conflict now underway expresses—without any principled differences between the various factions—a concern within sections of the DSA that the DSA will be exposed before the millions now looking to it by the actions of its own members in office.

The conflict has crystallized around the question of a possible presidential campaign by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in 2028, which was among the major subjects of discussion at the convention over the weekend. In July, the National Political Committee of the DSA voted 15 to 8 to eliminate the all-membership poll as the mechanism for deciding the endorsement, reserving the decision to itself and the chapter-level processes that it controls.

To give a sense of the internal divisions—which is something we should pay attention to: Red Star, an internal DSA faction, opposes the endorsement on the grounds, as they put it, that Ocasio-Cortez "endorsed Biden in the midst of his genocide of Palestinians and actively pursued others to do the same." Reform and Revolution sets out a fuller indictment: that she voted to ban the railroad strike in 2022, that she endorsed Biden and Harris in 2024, that she voted to fund the war in Ukraine, that she described Israel's Iron Dome as "a positive good," and that she does not take "any kind of consistent, oppositional stance towards the two parties of Wall Street." These are, in fact, devastating indictments of the DSA and of Ocasio-Cortez, largely drawn from the *World Socialist Web Site*, exposing the whole politics of the DSA itself.

The frankest expression of this fear has come from within the Marxist Unity Group. On July 14, one of its members published a statement under the title "Just Say No: Avoiding the AOC 2029 Disaster," which begins by surveying the organization's electoral successes and then arrives at this conclusion: "in the wake of these victories it is clear that if we pool our resources and launch a serious campaign in 2027, we have a decent shot at electing AOC President, thus completely destroying our own movement almost overnight." A President AOC, they write, would enact *their* policies "while wearing *our* colors." It is, in fact, across the various statements, a real indictment of the DSA.

But none of these various internal factions and groupings has any principled differences with the politics of the DSA itself. The conclusions they draw are not a break with the Democratic Party, but various organizational adjustments: "setting clear boundaries," an "official, open selection process" before any presidential endorsement, the adoption of a scheme to make the DSA "a functional surrogate party," and similar organizational proposals.

The conflicts within the DSA are mirrored by conflicts within other tendencies. In April, *Cosmonaut*, a magazine associated with the Marxist Unity Group, published a letter from a group of members expelled from the International Socialist Alternative. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of their positions, which mirror those of the various tendencies within the DSA. But their own sentence exemplifies the approach and character of all these factions: "The correctness of our positions should be judged on the strength of our analysis, not fidelity to any 'tradition'." And the tradition they are particularly referring to—they say this directly—is the Trotskyist tradition.

What is rejected across the whole of this milieu—by those defending the DSA leadership and those attacking it, and by the various pseudo-left organizations that operate around and within the DSA—is any appeal to principled politics, to history, to the strategic experience of the international workers' movement, to principles established through decades of struggle and particularly, of course, the principles of the Trotskyist movement. "Tradition" is placed in quotation marks and set aside as an encumbrance. What follows from this is inevitable: an endless proliferation of tactical and organizational maneuvers within the framework of pseudo-left, petty-bourgeois, upper-middle-class politics. It is precisely the historical continuity that these tendencies dismiss and reject that provides the only basis for answering the basic questions confronting the working class.

The actual policies of the DSA in power are of a thoroughly

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establishment and even right-wing character. Last month, the *New York Times*' Ross Douthat conducted an interview with *Jacobin* founder Bhaskar Sunkara that gives a sense of the social and political types, in the course of which Sunkara defended and promoted the record of Zohran Mamdani in New York City. Asked by Douthat about the association of DSA candidates with police abolition, Sunkara declared: "Zohran Mamdani right now is administrating a police department with over 30,000 armed men and women, and he's administrating it by all accounts very well."

Sunkara and Mamdani defend the capitalist state—the bodies of armed men, in fact, which Engels referred to as the essential character of the state. Mamdani, according to Sunkara, is administering it very well. The general lesson he drew himself: "I think in practice, the experience of governance, of competing in elections, is a moderating force on a lot of these issues." That is to say, the DSA in power will repudiate its various rhetorical statements about social reforms and other policies which it proposes, and safeguard the interests of the capitalist class.

Comrades are very familiar with the actions of Mamdani in New York City: the implementation of austerity, the betrayal of the nurses' strike, a developing conflict with the teachers and, of course, Mamdani's two meetings with Trump in the White House, including only two days before the initiation of the Iran war. This is the character of the DSA in power.

On the economy, Sunkara stated the following about the governing law of his "socialism": "Any form of social democracy is grow, give. There needs to be profitability in order to have something to redistribute." Asked directly whether democratic socialism is compatible with capitalism, he replied: "In the long term, no, we're anti-capitalist. But in the short term, while we're within a capitalist economy, of course, we need firms that are profitable." He said elsewhere in the interview that his conception was that socialism would emerge centuries from now—and he was completely comfortable to wait through those centuries of capitalist states administered by the DSA. His socialism is way down in the future. In the short term, Sunkara said, we have to make sure the companies are profitable.

On immigration, he called for abolishing ICE and added in the same breath: "Obviously, we still need some sort of border enforcement and customs." On Biden: "I hate to defend Biden," followed by the judgment that "Biden, I think, had it right. I think his faults, his failures, were fundamentally the failure to communicate." What we have here, it seems, is a failure to communicate. His line is that the DSA would provide better communication of the policies of the Democratic Party.

The theoretical formula that ties it all together is Sunkara's statement: "American socialists are way more liberal than they themselves think." There has been, he says, a sort of reconciliation of liberalism and socialism. Sunkara should speak for himself and for the DSA, not for socialism. But what he is saying is that the politics of the DSA is the politics of the Democratic Party—that is what is meant in this context by liberalism. There is no fundamental conflict between their socialism and the capitalist state, the Democratic Party, capitalism—and certainly no relationship between socialism as they speak of it and the development of the working class struggle.

The DSA, it is important to stress, is not in class terms a working-class organization. It arose from two petty-bourgeois tendencies; it rests today on the affluent layers of the professional middle class; and its function within the political system is not to represent workers, but to manage them on behalf of the Democratic Party. It is pro-imperialist. It brings to the assignment of defending the Democratic Party the worst traditions of two political currents which are not antagonistic: the accommodation to imperialism of social democracy, and the subordination of the working class to bourgeois parties, which was the cardinal service of Stalinism to American capitalism.

This is another element of the politics of the DSA which we have to examine more fully: its Stalinism, which is a significant element within the DSA. Sunkara himself is really a Stalinist. In his *Socialist Manifesto*, he upholds the Communist Party's Popular Front policies of the 1930s as a model. He compares it favorably to the politics of the Socialist Party at that time, which was still running candidates against Roosevelt and independent of the Democratic Party. Of course, the other thing the American Communist Party was doing in the 1930s was preparing the assassination of Trotsky—which he doesn't mention. But the Stalinist Popular Front politics is very much the politics of the likes of Sunkara.

We should also recall that in 2021, DSA officials, including a member of the National Coordinating Committee of its youth organization, posted memes celebrating the assassination of Leon Trotsky—which is no accident. The organization never repudiated them. The national secretary of the DSA at the time, Maria Svart, didn't repudiate them. We wrote an open letter that was never answered. That expressed something really rotten, filthy and Stalinist within the DSA.

And in the weeks preceding this Congress, neither the DSA nor any of the pseudo-left groups or internal factions has said anything about the death threat directed against Comrade Will Lehman by Raymond Jensen, a high-ranking UAW official who supports Shawn Fain. They have not issued statements of defense. Of course, Fain is their candidate. Jensen came out of, and is part of, that milieu; he was at a Labor Notes conference promoted by the pseudo-left. This is the pseudo-left. This is the DSA's character.

We understand, as the resolution stresses—and it is important to emphasize this—the objective significance of these votes for DSA candidates, of the shift taking place to the left. But that does not imply any adaptation; rather, it requires a deepening political offensive. Nor is any of this an American peculiarity. As the resolution states, the DSA is "the American representative of an international phenomenon: the pseudo-left, the political tendency of affluent layers of the middle class that employs socialist phrases in defense of capitalism." Syriza, Podemos, Germany's Left Party, the Corbyn movement in Britain—wherever the pseudo-left has held power, "it has administered the capitalist state against the working class."

Conclusion

What we counterpose to this entire framework of pseudo-left politics is not a better set of reforms, but a different—a revolutionary and internationalist—program. Socialism, as the resolution states, is:

> the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production and the conquest of political power by the working class. It means the expropriation of the financial-corporate oligarchy and the transformation of the banks and major corporations into public property under democratic control. It means social equality, the principle inscribed in the name of the Socialist Equality Party, as the organizing basis of economic life. And it must be international. The program of the SEP is the program of world socialist revolution.

The analysis presented in this report leads to a single conclusion. The same crisis that is producing global war and has placed a fascist gangster in the White House is driving the working class into struggle. The prognosis advanced in the party's 2010 program—that "the change in objective conditions will lead American workers to change their

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minds”—is being confirmed in developments. The conditions for a significant growth of this party exist.

As Comrade David stated in the opening report, the necessary conclusion from our analysis of the political situation is, “above all, the building of the party in the working class.” The analysis presented in this report is not a commentary on events, but a guide to intervention in them. The turn deeper into the working class requires a sustained political offensive by this movement.

The campaign of Will Lehman for the presidency of the UAW is a spearhead for our intervention into the industrial working class and the working class as a whole. Rank-and-file committees must be built—and we must fight for this in every factory, workplace and neighborhood where the party is active, in all industries and sectors of the working class. The UAW campaign itself over the coming months must be taken up by the whole party and all the branches. Branches of the IYSSE must be built on campuses throughout the country as we develop our forces among a politicized and politicizing generation of young people. Socialism AI must be brought into the daily political activity of the membership and used as a means of educating and training a new generation of workers and young people. And the *Oligarchy* book, which is a powerful foundation and necessary basis for understanding the political situation, must be distributed and studied on the widest possible scale.

But an offensive in the working class is inseparable from an offensive for history and theory, and this is the decisive point I want to conclude on. As the opening report stated:

> The growth of the party is not a merely quantitative process. Recruitment must be accompanied by—and is, in fact, inseparable from—the systematic education of the cadre. ... Marxist theory is not an ornament of the party’s practice but its foundation.

Our task is to transform a political radicalization into a conscious revolutionary movement, to arm workers and young people with a knowledge of the history of the Marxist movement, and to train them as cadre of the Fourth International. What stands between the workers and young people now moving toward socialism and the fight they are looking for is a body of political experience that has not yet been assimilated, embodied in the history of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Trotskyist movement. To bring that experience into the developing class struggle is the most critical political work that this party performs. It must be waged aggressively and every day, and it must also be waged within our own party.

The opening report recalled the warning of the Socialist Labour League against the drift of the OCI:

> There is always a danger at such a stage of development that a revolutionary party responds to the situation in the working class not in a revolutionary way, but by adaptation to the level of struggle to which the workers are restricted by their own experience under the old leaderships, i.e. to the inevitable initial confusion.

The safeguard against this danger—the essential weapon against it—is historical education. The conditions in which this party works are complex, they are becoming more complex, and they are shifting rapidly. Orientation under such conditions cannot be improvised from the events of the week or the month, or from responding to what is happening in the news on any given day. It is derived from the strategic experiences of the international workers movement. And for that reason, the development of the party and every aspect of our political work requires a sustained offensive for the history of the Fourth International. The five phases in the history of the Trotskyist movement identified at the 2019 school are not an academic periodization. They are, in the report’s words, “the accumulated strategic capital of the world socialist revolution.”

As the resolution before this Congress concludes, the politicization of the working class and youth “poses, above all, the questions of program, perspective, and leadership,” and those questions have a definite historical answer: “Trotskyism is the Marxism of the 21st century. It is to these foundations and the party built upon them that the workers and young people now entering political life must be won.” On the outcome of this fight—more than on anything that Trump does, that the ruling class does—depends the answer to the question: socialism or barbarism?

Comrades, the resolution before you is the codification of this analysis and the guide to the work of the party in the period ahead. I move its adoption, and I look forward to the discussion.

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