Resolution of the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US)

The drive to dictatorship and the political radicalization in the United States

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

1. Since its return to power in January 2025, the Trump administration has implemented a systematic plan to establish a presidential dictatorship. The social character of this government was defined by the party at the outset, as a government of the oligarchy, by the oligarchy and for the oligarchy. The Congress endorses the analysis of the WSWS on Trump's re-election in 2024, that it marks a "violent realignment of the American political superstructure to correspond with the real social relations that exist in the United States" and what the WSWS wrote on the day of the second inauguration: Trump "represents the quintessence of the American ruling class. His personal characteristics are a hideous expression of the main features of the oligarchy of billionaires whose wealth and power have swelled to unprecedented dimensions over the past four decades."

2. In 18 months, the Trump regime has transformed ICE into a paramilitary force operating beyond all legal restraint, which has seized hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers, constructed a nationwide network of concentration camps, rendered detainees without charge or hearing to foreign prisons under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 and killed workers in the streets with impunity. It has deployed National Guard troops against Los Angeles, Washington and Memphis. Through National Security Presidential Memorandum-7—which names "anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, and anti-Christianity" as the "common threads" of domestic terrorism—and the designation of "antifa" as a terrorist organization, it is turning the machinery of the "war on terror" against the left. The federal conspiracy indictments of the University of Michigan Eight and the Minnesota Fifteen, prosecuted with the collaboration of Democratic officials, are the first applications of this framework. It has weaponized the federal agencies against political opponents and operates under the protection of a Supreme Court that has placed the president above the law.

3. In advance of the midterm elections, the Trump regime is manufacturing the pretexts for suppressing, rigging, or overturning the vote. Trump has ordered the intelligence agencies, the FBI, and the Justice Department to purge officials accused of concealing the supposed fraud and demanded passage of the SAVE America Act, which would disenfranchise millions of working-class voters through proof-of-citizenship requirements, photo-ID mandates, and the effective abolition of mail voting. The regime has declared that it will not accept defeat, stating that the ruling party "will not lose an election for 100 years."

4. The SEP calls on workers to oppose the deployment of troops, ICE and other federal agents at the polls and repudiates Trump's efforts to undermine the legitimacy of the vote. This entails no political support for the Democratic Party, whose complicity strengthens the White House drive toward dictatorship, and whose response to an electoral victory would be to press the foreign policy demands of its "CIA Democrats" for escalation of war.

5. The entire political system is wracked by extreme crises. Trump's approval has collapsed to the lowest level of his presidency. The war against Iran has failed to achieve a single one of its aims, while its escalation drives up oil prices and inflation, threatens the collapse of vastly overvalued financial markets, and balloons an already unsustainable national debt. The looting of society by Trump, his family and his accomplices has all the characteristics of a criminal underworld in power.

6. The Trump government can be described as a Bonapartist regime with overtly fascistic characteristics. As the conflict between the classes grows ever more intense, enormous power is being concentrated in an executive that rests ever more directly on the massive military-police apparatus and the forces of the far right. As Trotsky explained, such regimes arise organically out of conditions of extreme social polarization.

7. Beginning with Trump's first election in 2016, the SEP has rejected every attempt to explain his rise to power as an accident, insisting that he is the product and culmination of a crisis decades in the making. As David North writes in the foreword to *Oligarchy: Trump and the Breakdown of American Democracy*, which assembles the party's analysis over the past decade: "It is impossible, at this point, to portray Trump as an aberration or an accidental intrusion of the serpent into America's democratic Garden of Eden." Trump's domination of American political life "testifies to a protracted and staggering breakdown of American democracy," a breakdown whose deepest roots lie in the transformation of the American economy itself.

8. The extreme concentration of wealth in America is inseparable from the financialization of its economy. Confronted from the 1970s onward with the erosion of its industrial dominance, the American ruling class subordinated the entire economy to finance. Wealth was progressively divorced from the production of real value and amassed instead through speculation, asset inflation, stock buybacks, and outright plunder. This parasitism has been underwritten by the state, which rescued the oligarchy's fortunes in the bank bailout of 2008 and the multi-trillion-dollar COVID-19 pandemic bailout of 2020. The fortunes of the oligarchy are claims on the social wealth created by the working class, extracted through the looting of society.

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9. This parasitic accumulation has produced a concentration of wealth without precedent in history. Musk has become the world's first trillionaire, commanding wealth equal to some 3 percent of American GDP. The top 1 percent of households control 31.7 percent of the national wealth, the highest share ever recorded, while the bottom half of the population holds just 2.5 percent. Such extreme levels of inequality are incompatible with democratic forms of rule. Trump—the casino operator, the serial bankrupt, the crypto profiteer—is the personal embodiment of this mode of enrichment: a class that accumulates wealth by such methods produces, as its natural representative, a gangster.

10. The greatest asset of the Trump administration is the character of the so-called opposition. The Democratic Party covered up the coup of January 6, 2021, and Biden repeatedly declared the need for "a strong Republican Party." It was the Biden administration and the Democrats who spearheaded the crackdown on protests against the Gaza genocide, on the campuses and in the workplace, constructing the framework for Trump's persecution of political dissent. The Democrats have answered the assault on democratic rights with appeals for bipartisanship and budget deals that fund the machinery of repression.

11. The response of the Democratic Party is governed by two concerns. The first is to prevent the emergence of an independent movement of workers and youth from below, which it fears far more than it fears Trump. The second is to press for the escalation of war, above all a deeper commitment to the conflict against Russia in Ukraine. Both concerns flow from the character of the party as a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus.

12. Under the blows of impossible living costs, endless war, ICE murder, the destruction of jobs and the open construction of dictatorship, millions are being propelled into political life and are moving to the left. These experiences are compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in the death of tens of millions worldwide due to the subordination of public health to private profit, a policy now extended in the Trump administration's destruction of all remaining public health infrastructure. Capitalism's standing among young people has fallen to the lowest level ever recorded, and a majority of youth view socialism at least as favorably as capitalism. This politicization has been expressed in the mass "No Kings" demonstrations involving millions of people across the US, and the deepening strike wave affecting every section of the working class.

13. To these must be added the accelerating climate catastrophe, which capitalism is organically incapable of resolving. Record heat, wildfires and floods strike with growing intensity, while the Trump administration dismantles climate science, guts environmental regulation and hands energy policy to the oligarchy. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz in the war against Iran has produced a global fertilizer shortage now working its way through the world food system, compounded by a developing El Niño that is itself intensified by climate change, threatening crop failures and famine across both food-producing and food-importing countries. A crisis global in its causes and consequences can be answered only through the internationally coordinated, scientifically planned reorganization of production—that is, through socialism. The convergence of imperialist war, climate catastrophe and food crisis will immensely accelerate the radicalization of the working class in the United States and internationally.

14. In *The Breakdown of Capitalism and the Fight for Socialism in the United States*, the party explained: "As long as the United States was an ascending economic power … perceived by its citizens as the 'land of unlimited opportunity' … American workers were not convinced of the necessity of socialist revolution." But "the change in objective conditions," it insisted, "will lead American workers to change their minds." That change is now developing.

15. The wave of votes for candidates identified as socialists is the initial electoral expression of this politicization, including the election of Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York, the victory of self-defined socialists in Seattle and the Washington D.C. mayoral primary and the defeat of entrenched congressional incumbents in Colorado and New York by candidates claiming to be socialists. Millions are not voting for the Democratic Party's record but against capitalism, for candidates they understand to be socialists.

16. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) 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 confine it within the framework of the capitalist two-party system. Wherever it holds office, this function is on display. In New York, Mamdani governs in coordination with the Democratic establishment and the Trump White House, imposing austerity on the workers who elected him, while DSA-aligned officials preside over the destruction of public education and expanding police budgets across the country.

17. The DSA's central claim, that the Democratic Party can be transformed from within into an instrument of progressive change, is refuted by all historical experience. It is also exposed by the party's own response to the DSA's electoral victories. The Democrats' "centrist" wing has issued a manifesto reaffirming that its members are "capitalists" and launching a new witch-hunt against the party's own left.

18. The history of the DSA confirms that it was never a socialist organization. Its lineage runs through Max Shachtman, who broke with Trotskyism in 1940, repudiating the defense of the Soviet Union against imperialism, and traced a trajectory that ended in support for the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Vietnam War and in the service of the anticommunist AFL-CIO bureaucracy. Shachtman's protégé, Michael Harrington, founded the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee in 1973 on the program of "realignment": socialists were to function as "the left wing of the possible" inside the Democratic Party, renouncing independent working-class politics on principle. The DSA, formed in 1982 through the merger of Harrington's organization with remnants of the middle-class protest movements of the 1960s, has adhered to this program for more than four decades, subordinating itself at every juncture to the Democratic Party, integrating its personnel into the trade union bureaucracy and serving as a mechanism for capturing each successive wave of radicalization over the past decade.

19. 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 took office in Greece in 2015 pledging to end austerity. Within months, trampling on the result of its own referendum, it imposed the most savage austerity in the country's modern history, as dictated by the European banks. Podemos entered a Spanish government that increased military spending and administered the European Union border regime. Germany's Left Party has governed states and presided over deportations, and the Corbyn movement in Britain ended in capitulation to the Labour right and the abandonment of its own supporters. Wherever the pseudo-left has held power, it has administered the capitalist state against the working class.

20. Socialism is not a handful of reforms grafted onto capitalism—reforms which, under conditions of crisis, the ruling class cannot and will not concede. The fight for the urgent needs of the working class is inseparable from the fight for socialism: 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

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international. The program of the SEP is the program of world socialist revolution.

21. The politicization of the working class and youth poses, above all, the questions of program, perspective and leadership. The Socialist Equality Party is the American section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, and its program rests on the theoretical and historical foundation of the Trotskyist movement's fight against Stalinism, social democracy, and the pseudo-left. As David North wrote in the introduction to a new edition of Leon Trotsky's *My Life*, Trotsky's "name evokes the theory (permanent revolution), strategy (world socialist revolution) and organization (Fourth International) of Marxism as the revolutionary movement of the working class in the contemporary world. 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.

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