Socialist Equality Party (Canada) holds founding congress—a major advance in the building of the world party of socialist revolution

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
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The Socialist Equality Party/Parti de l'égalité socialiste (Canada) held its founding congress August 22–24, with delegates from across the country convening in Montreal or attending online. The congress represented a milestone in the fight for Trotskyism in the Canadian working class and an historic advance in the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) struggle on a global scale for the program of world socialist revolution.

Over the course of three days of deliberations, the congress adopted three critical resolutions. The "Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada)" draws the most essential strategic lessons of the struggles waged by the Trotskyist movement internationally and in Canada in the imperialist epoch of wars and revolutions. This epoch, dominated by the contradictions—insoluble under capitalism—between the evermore socialized character of production and the private ownership of the means of production, and between the evermore integrated character of the world economy and its division into rival nation-states, continues to this day. It began with the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the Russian working class's conquest of political power, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, in the October 1917 revolution.

Congress delegates also unanimously approved the party's "Statement of Principles," and a resolution calling for the freedom of Bogdan Syrotiuk, a Ukrainian Trotskyist sentenced to 15 years imprisonment because he has called for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against the NATO-instigated war and all the rival capitalist governments, Canada's included, that are waging it.

The SEP's founding congress took place amid an accelerating global capitalist crisis in what the ICFI has defined as the decade of socialist revolution. A third world war between the imperialist powers to violently redivide the world is no longer a future threat, but a rapidly unfolding reality. Social inequality is at the breaking point and the ruling class in all the major capitalist centres is turning to authoritarian forms of rule to impose the attacks on workers necessary to wage war and further enrich the financial oligarchy.

The party's fight to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership thus assumes enormous urgency. Discussion at the congress was motivated by the understanding that the radicalization of tens of millions of workers around the world, driven by war and deteriorating living conditions, is intersecting evermore with the ICFI's decades-long struggle to defend and develop the program of world socialist revolution. This process is not automatic, however. It depends on the conscious intervention by the ICFI and its sections into the working class to politically arm its struggles with a revolutionary program, strategy and leadership.

By strengthening the SEP's Trotskyist identity and elaborating the programmatic conceptions that must animate the fight for socialist internationalism within the working class of Canada, the founding congress has placed this struggle on a new and higher plane.

The SEP's historical and international foundations

The congress opened just hours after trade talks between the United States and Canada collapsed, and as Prime Minister Mark Carney declared that Ottawa was "at war." The internationalist character of the SEP's founding congress stood in stark contrast to the poisonous nationalism being promoted by all the imperialist powers, and their political agents in the respective labour bureaucracies and pseudo-left formations.

Giving conscious expression to the objective unity of the working class across the continent, a strong delegation from the SEP (US) participated throughout the congress's deliberations. Fraternal greetings were delivered in person by *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board and SEP (US) Chairman David North and by Joseph Kishore, the National Secretary of the IC's American section. ICFI members from other sections participated remotely and brought greetings. These included Peter Schwarz, the ICFI Secretary and a leading member of its German section; SEP (UK) National Secretary Chris Marsden; Ula? Sevinç, the chairman of the ICFI's Turkish section; and SEP (Sri Lanka) General Secretary Deepal Jayasekara.

In her greetings, SEP Australia National Secretary Cheryl Crisp observed: "The founding of a section of the International Committee is always an event of world-historical significance. It signifies that the objective crisis of world capitalism has produced, through decades of protracted struggle, the subjective factor required to resolve it—the construction of the revolutionary party..."

Animating the congress resolutions and proceedings was the understanding that the SEP is being built as the Canadian section of the world party of the working class, the ICFI—not a Canadian party. As the opening passage of the Statement of Principles declares,

> The Socialist Equality Party/Parti de l'égalité socialiste (SEP/PES) is the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. The principles of the SEP

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> incorporate the essential experiences of the revolutionary upheavals of the twentieth century and the corresponding struggle waged by Marxists for the program of world socialist revolution. … The program of the Socialist Equality Party expresses the interests of the working class, the leading and decisive international revolutionary social force in modern capitalist society. The central task of the SEP is to win the support of Canadian workers for the program of international socialism.

In his opening report, which motivated adoption of the Historical and International Foundations document, SEP National Secretary Keith Jones addressed the connection between the SEP as an international party and a party of history. He declared:

> Our task is to build a world party rooted in the working class, animated by Marxist theory, and educated in the revolutionary struggles and strivings of the working class and the Trotskyist movement's struggle to forge the international unity and political independence of the working class. As is stated in the founding document of the Socialist Equality Party of the United States (and quoted in our own): Revolutionary socialist strategy can develop only on the basis of the lessons of past struggles.
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> Above all, the education of socialists must be directed toward developing a detailed knowledge of the history of the Fourth International. The development of Marxism as the theoretical and political spearhead of socialist revolution has found its most advanced expression in the struggles waged by the Fourth International since its founding in 1938 against Stalinism, reformism, the Pabloite revisions of Trotskyism and all other forms of political opportunism.

This approach was reflected in the devotion of the bulk of the congress to a careful review of the key historical experiences of the Trotskyist movement dating back to its founding in the Soviet Union in 1923 in response to the emergence of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The congress's systematic review of the critical experiences of the Trotskyist movement over the past century involved the presentation of reports by more than a dozen comrades covering the entire contents of the Historical and International Foundations document.

The origins of the Trotskyist movement in North America

In his opening report, Jones gave special attention to two critical chapters in the development of the world Trotskyist movement. These were: the joint decision in 1928 of James P. Cannon, a leader of the American Communist Party, and Maurice Spector, the editor of the Communist Party of Canada's newspaper and its principal theoretician, to smuggle Trotsky's Critique of the Draft Program of the Comintern out of the USSR and, based on the principles outlined therein, to win their respective Communist Parties back to the program of world socialist revolution; and second, the ICFI's 1982–86 split with the British, neo-Pabloite Workers Revolutionary Party.

Jones also discussed at some length the political liquidation of the original Canadian Trotskyist movement in the early 1960s—its causes, ruinous political consequences and lessons for today.

As Jones explained, Cannon and Spector were summarily expelled from their respective Stalinized Communist Parties for circulating and fighting for Trotsky's critique (which has come to be known as the *Third International After Lenin*). It exposed the Stalinist bureaucracy's program of "socialism in one country" as a reactionary nationalist utopia, and its relationship to the Stalinists' pursuit of opportunist alliances with non-proletarian forces, which had led to the betrayal and defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese revolution and the 1926 British general strike.

Cannon and Spector's courageous stand laid the basis for the establishment of the Communist League of America, as the Trotskyist movement in North America was first known. By breaking the Stalinist regime's enforced isolation of Trotsky and his supporters in the Soviet Union, it also made a major contribution to the subsequent development of the International Left Opposition.

Jones also drew attention to the analysis that Trotsky developed in the 1920s, in opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy, of the significance of American imperialism's emergence as the premier global power for world politics and revolutionary strategy. Trotsky's recognition that American imperialism was compelled to absorb all the contradictions of world capitalism as it asserted its global hegemony—and that, as he wrote in *The Third International After Lenin*, a crisis of US capitalism would herald a new era of global wars and revolutions—remains central to the perspective of the SEP and ICFI.

Because it fought for the program of world socialist revolution—exposed the Stalinist and social democrats' refusal to mobilize the working class against the Nazi menace in Germany; opposed the strangling of the Spanish revolution under the banner of a "popular front" with the ostensible democratic wing of the bourgeoisie; and fought for the political independence of the working class in opposition to Canadian imperialism during World War II—the Canadian Trotskyist movement was politically persecuted by the Canadian state, the Stalinists, CCF social-democrats (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and union bureaucrats. The party was illegalized and forced underground during World War II. Yet at the war's end, it emerged as a vibrant political force fighting to give political leadership to a militant wave of struggles, as the working class, alongside its class brothers and sisters in the US, made clear that it would not accept a return to the "Hungry Thirties" and the days of the non-union "open shop."

The founding of the International Committee in struggle against Pabloite revisionism

As Jones explained, what ultimately destroyed the first Canadian Trotskyist movement was not political persecution, but rather Pabloism, a petty-bourgeois liquidationist tendency that emerged within the Fourth International in an adaptation to the post-war restabilization of capitalism, which was only made possible by the Stalinist suppression of the global revolutionary upsurge fueled by the second imperialist world war, and the resources of a triumphant US imperialism.

Pabloism rejected the working class as the revolutionary subject, and instead sought to find surrogates that would supposedly blaze an alternate path to "socialism." It claimed that the Stalinists, the other labour bureaucracies and, in the historically oppressed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the national bourgeoisie would, under the pressure of events, be forced to take the road of revolution. In so far as the Fourth International was to have any role, it was as a left pressure group on, and adviser to, these anti-working class forces.

The Pabloites' hostility to the struggle to win the working class to socialist internationalism determined their rejection of and drive to break up the revolutionary party and its cadres.

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In November 1953, Cannon, then the foremost leader of the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP), issued the Open Letter, the founding document of the ICFI, in opposition to Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel's arbitrary use of the administrative powers of the Fourth International's International Secretariat to expel their Trotskyist opponents, including entire sections, so as to impose their liquidationist politics.

The Canadian section, which was led at the time by Ross Dowson, ultimately supported the Open Letter and joined the ICFI, but not without hesitation and suffering the break-away of a pro-Pablo faction.

"Pabloism represented a virulently liquidationist tendency," Jones said in his opening report. "It sought to overturn the Trotskyist program and use the International Secretariat of the Fourth International to persecute the genuine Trotskyists. James P. Cannon declared that the cleavage between Pabloite revisionism and orthodox Trotskyism was so deep that no compromise was possible."

However, the Canadian section fatally underestimated the issues at stake in the split with the Pabloites. It failed to review the political foundations of its entry into the CCF, although this had been motivated in 1951 on the basis of the political line advanced by the Pablo-led International Secretariat. It ignored Cannon and the SWP's warnings that such a tactical adaptation to a hostile political tendency, even if motivated by the need to reach sections of the working class, would inevitably lead to liquidationism without a continuous fight to train a Trotskyist cadre and to differentiate the independent class standpoint of the proletarian internationalists from all other tendencies.

"By the early 1960s," explained Jones,

> the Dowson group (then the League for Socialist Action-LSA) was openly working with the SWP to break the International Committee and reunite with the Pabloites. This was based on an explicit repudiation of permanent revolution, with the bourgeois nationalist Cuban revolution hailed as the beginning of the socialist revolution in the Americas. The LSA hailed Castro as a "natural Marxist"; asserted that Cuba showed the leadership of the revolution "can originate outside the working class" and be based on "non-proletarian forces" (i.e., petty-bourgeois guerrilla fighters and the peasantry); and proclaimed the formation of the reformist NDP, as the result of a bureaucratic maneuver by the union bureaucracy and what remained of the CCF, the "most important event" in the history of the "struggle of the Canadian people for political and social justice."
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> Within five years of breaking with the ICFI in 1963 to rejoin the Pabloites, the LSA was promoting Canadian and Quebec nationalism, which it hailed as incipient anti-imperialism. The Pabloites thus helped propagate and lent legitimacy to the central political-ideological forms the Canadian bourgeoisie has used to maintain its control over the working class for the past six decades.

The LSA and SWP's reunification with the Pabloites based on the promotion of Castro, Che Guevara and petty-bourgeois guerrillaism had devastating consequences in Latin America, contributing to the political disorientation of a generation of workers and youth. They were turned away from the fight to forge the political independence of the working class in struggle against the Stalinists and the nationalist union bureaucracies, and into student and peasant-based guerrilla movements that mounted suicidal challenges to authoritarian regimes in which tens of thousands died.

The fight to reconstitute the Trotskyist movement in Canada following the 1963 reunification was begun in the early 1970s by young people attracted to the ICFI's principled record of struggle against social democracy, Stalinism and Pabloite revisionism. The more than five-decade-long struggle for Trotskyism prior to the formal founding of the SEP in August 2026 testifies to the powerful roots struck by the program of world socialist revolution in the Canadian working class and the tenacity of the cadre who have waged a battle against revisionism and for the ICFI for over half a century.

The split with the national-opportunist WRP

Jones' report and the Historical and International Foundations document placed especial emphasis on the significance of the ICFI's 1982–86 split with the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), and the exposure of its national-opportunist politics. The split brought a definitive end to an entire period in the post-war history of the Fourth International, which had been dominated by the fight against Pabloism and the influence of opportunism within its ranks under conditions where the Stalinist, social-democratic and union bureaucracies continued to wield great influence over the working class. The split and the reworking of its lessons laid the basis for the ICFI to not only reassert the historic principles of the movement, but to develop the program of world socialist revolution.

The split with the WRP was led by the Workers League (US) and politically and theoretically prepared by the detailed critique developed by Workers League National Secretary David North, beginning in 1982, in a series of documents and letters that remain foundational to the training of Trotskyist cadre today.

Extended contributions by North and Chris Marsden during the congress discussion stressed the importance of the Trotskyist foundations of the world movement in explaining the rapidity with which the IC's sections came to an agreement on the essential theoretical and political issues at stake when it became possible to discuss the WRP's opportunism in the open. WRP leaders Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter and Mike Banda had used their authority in the ICFI, which was due to their role in opposing the SWP/LSA's reunification with the Pabloites, to block discussion on their evermore opportunist course. A particularly egregious example of this was the deliberate exclusion of IC sections from a February 1984 IC meeting where North delivered a comprehensive political report examining the WRP's abandonment of permanent revolution and craven adaptation to bourgeois nationalist regimes and movements in the Middle East, and trade union and Labour Party bureaucrats in Britain.

Summing up the significance of the split, the Historical and International Foundations of the SEP declares,

> The 1982–86 split brought to a conclusive end the three-decade long civil war in the ICFI by re-establishing the political control of the genuine Trotskyists over their own organization. Based on the lessons of the split, the ICFI would develop the program and strategy of world socialist revolution amid and in response to profound economic, political and geopolitical shifts.
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> The Workers League of Canada's unanimous support for the ICFI during the split with the neo-Pabloite WRP and the contributions it subsequently made to the political and theoretical exposure of the WRP renegades were seminal to its development as a genuine Trotskyist party, oriented to the fight to win and mobilize the working class on the basis of the program of world socialist revolution. Based on the lessons of the split and working under the political guidance and authority of the ICFI, its Canadian supporters were able to clarify key questions vital to the struggle to forge the political independence of the Canadian working class and

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make socialist internationalism the axis of its struggles. Critical in this regard was the delineation and elaboration of the programmatic foundations of the struggle for proletarian internationalism against "left" Canadian and *indépendantiste* Quebec nationalism.

The creative development of the IC's Trotskyist program found expression during this period in the stand taken by the American and Canadian Trotskyists in response to the nationalist split in the UAW in 1985 and the "free trade" debates of the late 1980s. The Canadian supporters of the ICFI, then organized in the International Workers Party, stood alone in fighting for a socialist-internationalist alternative in the working class amid Canada's constitutional crisis of the early 1990s and the Quebec independence referendum of 1995. The IWP opposed the right-wing, pro-imperialist program of Quebec separatism, while making no concessions to the dominant faction of the Canadian bourgeoisie and its federal state.

Summing up the discussion and motivating adoption of the Historical and International Foundations of the SEP (Canada), Jones emphasized the necessity of bringing forward the history it contains into the class struggle amid the decade of socialist revolution. Resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership depends on the development of a party whose leadership and cadre are systematically working off of the historically developed analysis of the Trotskyist movement and that roots the initiatives that the party undertakes to expand its influence in the working class in its history, principles and traditions.

He noted that the period from the split with the WRP to the end of the 2010s is particularly rich in lessons. It was during this period that the ICFI developed the program of world socialist revolution in response to the advent of globally integrated production and the Stalinist bureaucracies' ultimate betrayal with the restoration of capitalism and dissolution of the USSR; transformed the national sections from leagues into parties, and established the *World Socialist Web Site*.

This renaissance of Trotskyism sets the stage for the ICFI to emerge in the leadership of a mass revolutionary movement of the working class for socialism under conditions where billions of workers around the world are being driven into mass struggles by the deepening capitalist crisis, which finds its sharpest expression in the escalating third world war.

An offensive for Trotskyism amid the decade of socialist revolution

Realizing the revolutionary potential contained within the present objective situation depends upon the activity of the party. As the Historical and International Foundations document stresses in its concluding section, entitled "Trotskyism and the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership,"

> The struggle of the ICFI and its national sections to imbue the working class with socialist consciousness and provide its struggles with a revolutionary perspective, program and strategy is the key to overcoming the gap between the depth of the capitalist crisis and the current low level of working-class consciousness. Only through the efforts of the revolutionary vanguard can and will the consciousness and activity of the working class be brought into alignment with its historic task of putting an end to the capitalist profit system.

North American imperialism is at the centre of the world crisis. Central to the strategy of the SEP (Canada), as outlined in the documents adopted at the founding congress, is the recognition that the logic of geography, history and economics dictates that the socialist transformation in Canada will only be realized through the unification of the struggles of the working class in Canada, the United States and Mexico and their joint revolutionary struggle for the Socialist United States of North America.

In his greetings to the congress, David North noted that in August 1936, almost exactly 90 years ago, the first Moscow Trial of leading old Bolsheviks began, initiating a campaign of mass murder on the part of the Stalinist bureaucracy aimed at exterminating all Trotsky supporters in the USSR and uprooting the entire socialist culture that had given rise to the October Revolution. He stressed the enduring significance of Security and the Fourth International, the investigation initiated by the ICFI in 1975 into the assassination of Trotsky in August 1940 and the network of agents that perpetrated it. This investigation has exposed the joint counterrevolutionary campaign of violence and subversion directed against the Trotskyist movement by Stalinism and imperialism, and documented the vast network of Stalinist agents who infiltrated the movement to sabotage its work and organize assassinations. Security and the Fourth International has above all been a political struggle that has exposed the Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism who covered up for the blood-soaked Stalinist bureaucracy and its agents because of their determination to politically conciliate and collaborate with it, and who, in keeping with their complacent, petty-bourgeois perspective, downplay the need for revolutionary vigilance and distort the Marxist understanding of the state.

Addressing the contemporary political situation, North remarked, "The development of Canadian politics, as is often the case, has been somewhat more protracted, but now events are rapidly bringing Canada into the forefront of this global maelstrom, and so the founding of the party comes at a critical moment. The party is at a very auspicious time, and I'm sure it is going to intersect and play a significant role in the developing radicalization of the working class."

In his greetings, Joe Kishore emphasized the necessity for the Canadian and US sections of the ICFI to deepen their collaboration in the best traditions of the Trotskyist movement. "In relationship to the work of our two sections—the section in the United States and Canada—I want to particularly stress the significance of the origins of Trotskyism, which we will soon be marking the 100th anniversary of in the United States and Canada," he said. "Spector's joint support with Cannon for Trotsky's critique of the draft program in 1928 led to them forming at that time a single organization devoted to a common political struggle. At the center of the document that they had read and then subsequently fought for—that is, the critique of the Comintern's draft program—stood the social internationalist principle that this congress upholds, that is, that not a single Communist Party can establish its program by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of development in its own country. The assault on Marxism has been invariably connected to a repudiation of this principle."

The congress, which had adopted a party constitution on its second day, concluded with the election of a new National Committee to lead the party's work in the coming period, which will be increasingly dominated by the mounting global resistance of the working class to war, austerity, dictatorship and unparalleled social inequality.

Before the congress adjourned, it was announced to the delegates that the incoming National Committee had elected Keith Jones as the SEP Canada's national secretary, Louis Girard as assistant national secretary, and Roger Jordan as WSWS national editor.

The WSWS will post the three congress resolutions in the coming days.

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