

SEP (Canada) Statement of Principles

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
7 October 2026

Delegates to the Socialist Equality Party's founding congress held in Montreal from August 22 to 24 unanimously adopted the following Statement of Principles. The World Socialist Web Site previously published a report on the congress as a whole, which marked a major milestone in the struggle to build the world party of socialist revolution.

The World Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

1. The Socialist Equality Party/Parti d'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 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 socialist revolution, which signifies the forcible entrance of the masses into conscious political struggle, portends the greatest and most progressive transformation of the form of man's social organization in world history—the ending of society based on classes and, therefore, of the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. A transformation so immense is the work of an entire historical epoch. The principles of the SEP are derived from and necessarily reference the experiences of this epoch, which opened with the eruption of World War I in 1914, followed shortly thereafter by the conquest of state power by the Russian working class in the 1917 October Revolution.

2. The Fourth International emerged out of the implacable struggle waged by Marxist internationalists, led by Leon Trotsky, against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union and the betrayal of the program of world socialist revolution by the dictatorial regime headed by Stalin and his henchmen. The political source of that betrayal, which led ultimately, in 1991, to the dissolution of the USSR, was the substitution of nationalism for internationalism by the Stalinist regime.

3. The socialist revolution is international in scope. As Trotsky wrote, "The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet." This fundamental principle of the Fourth International, which primarily defines the program and political identity of the SEP, was forged in the struggle against the Stalinist "theory" of "socialism in one country." The era of national programs ended with the outbreak of World War I. Over a century later, given the colossal growth of the world economy and its global integration, world economic conditions and the exigencies of inter-imperialist and inter-capitalist rivalries are the principal determinants of national life. Therefore, as Trotsky explained, "the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not vice versa."

4. Wherever revolutionary struggles of the working class first break out, whether in an advanced or lesser-developed capitalist country, in Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America or Australasia, the social conflagration will inevitably assume global dimensions. The socialist revolution will not and cannot be completed within a national framework. It will, as foreseen by Trotsky in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, be completed on the world arena.

5. The strategy of the working class, in Canada as in all countries, must proceed from an analysis of world conditions. The logic of geography, history and economics dictates that the socialist transformation of 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 to establish workers' power and the United Socialist States of North America.

6. To this end, the SEP fights for Canadian workers to make the objective unity of the North American working class their conscious class strategy. They must revive and infuse with a higher socialist content the powerful traditions of common class struggle that exist between the Canadian and American working class, from the struggle for the eight-hour day and the Knights of Labour in the 19th Century, through the insurgent movement for industrial unions during the Great Depression and World War II, and the social struggles of the 1960s. To politically lead this fight, the closest collaboration between the SEPs in Canada and the United States, under the political authority of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is necessary at all times.

7. 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. The SEP strives, on the basis of this program, to unify and mobilize the working class for the conquest of political power and the establishment of a workers' state in Canada. It will create, thereby, the objective preconditions for the development of a genuinely democratic, egalitarian and socialist society. These objectives can be realized only within the framework of an international strategy, the goal of which is the global unification of the workers of all countries and the creation of a United Socialist States of the World.

The Crisis of Capitalism

8. Capitalism, and the imperialist system that has developed upon its economic foundations, is the fundamental cause of human poverty, exploitation, violence and suffering in the modern world. As a system of socio-economic organization, it long ago exhausted its historically progressive role. The blood-drenched history of the 20th century—including two world wars, innumerable "local" conflicts, Nazism and other forms of military-police dictatorship, eruptions of genocide and communal pogroms—constitutes an unequivocal indictment of the

capitalist system. The victims of capitalist-inspired violence number in the hundreds of millions. Added to these are the peoples of entire continents consigned to unrelenting poverty.

9. The gigantic scale of today's productive forces and the extraordinary advances in technology are more than sufficient not only to abolish poverty, but to guarantee every human being a high standard of living. Culture should be flowering amidst unprecedented material wealth. Instead, conditions of life for the working class are deteriorating and human culture, deprived of perspective and hope for the future, is in deep crisis. The source of the contradiction between what *is* and what *should be* is a global economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and the irrational division of the world into rival nation-states.

10. This is exemplified by the development of AI. Produced by the collective labour and accumulated knowledge of humanity, AI possesses an immense progressive potential, including in developing socialist planning under the democratic control of the working class. Under capitalism, however, it is being turned into an instrument of exploitation and social destruction. It is being used not to lighten the burden of labour, but rather to ratchet up worker exploitation, slash jobs, augment state surveillance and wage imperialist war. For the progressive potential of AI, as all technological advances, to be realized, control over it must be wrested from the capitalist class, its states and corporate behemoths, and placed in the hands of the working class.

11. The devastating global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that the private profit system and its economic imperatives, the anarchy of the capitalist market, and the insatiable greed of the ruling class, are incompatible with the safeguarding of the very lives of working people around the world. While the scientists and technological know-how created by modern society proved capable of identifying the deadly virus in a matter of days and developing vaccines in several months, COVID-19 was allowed to run rampant because the ruling elites in every country would not tolerate any restrictions on their accumulation of profit. The ruling class's "profits before lives" policy of keeping the economy and schools open at all costs has led to the deaths of tens of millions. The world's financial oligarchy of billionaires has profited from this mass death, with its combined wealth skyrocketing during the pandemic.

12. The irreconcilable conflict between the profit system and the very survival of humanity finds further expression in the climate change crisis and the ravaging of the natural environment. The cause of the crisis is not overpopulation or overconsumption. Nor does it result from the development of science, technology and mankind's productive forces—which is critical to the advance of civilization—but from their misuse by an obsolete social and economic order that renders impossible any implementation of a rational solution. The scientific evidence indicates that only the socialist reorganization of the world economy—in which the environment is no longer held hostage to the private profit motive or destructive national interests—can achieve the enormous reductions in greenhouse gases necessary to prevent the collapse of human civilization.

13. The solution to the global economic crisis and the deteriorating social position of the working class lies not in the reform of capitalism, for it is beyond reform. The crisis is of a systemic and historical character. As feudalism gave way to capitalism, capitalism must give way to socialism. The key industrial, financial, technological and natural resources must be taken out of the sphere of the capitalist market and private ownership, transferred to society and placed under the democratic supervision and control of the working class. The organization of economic life on the basis of the capitalist law of value must be replaced with its socialist reorganization on the basis of democratic economic planning, whose purpose is the fulfillment of social needs.

Imperialism and War

14. While the economic system operates on a global scale, with industry and finance controlled by transnational corporations, capitalism remains rooted in the nation-state system. In the final analysis, the national state serves as a base of operations from which the ruling class of each country pursues its interests on the world stage. The uncontrollable drive of the main imperialist states for geopolitical dominance, spheres of influence, markets, control of vital resources and production networks, and access to cheap labour, leads inevitably to war. The very survival of humanity is called into question by these wars due to the looming threat posed by the use of nuclear weapons.

15. Since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union, the world has been swept up in an expanding maelstrom of imperialist wars led by the United States in which all of the imperialist powers, including Canada, have participated. The US/NATO war on Russia in Ukraine beginning in 2022 and the US/Israeli war on Iran in 2026 mark two stages of a rapidly escalating third imperialist world war for the redivision of the world among the great powers. The Socialist Equality Party insists that the only social force capable of halting humanity's renewed plunge into barbarism following the two catastrophes of the 20th century is the international working class armed with the program of world socialist revolution.

16. Canada is an imperialist power, which aggressively pursues its predatory interests on the world stage, but especially in the Arctic, Latin America, Africa, and, increasingly, the Asia-Pacific. As an imperialist power of the second rank, Canada has always benefited from close collaboration with the dominant capitalist power of the day, from the British Empire until the outbreak of World War II to the United States thereafter. Canada was a major belligerent in both of the 20th century's world wars, enabling the Canadian bourgeoisie to rapidly strengthen its global position. After the Second World War, Ottawa used its close economic and military-strategic partnership with American imperialism, on the one hand, and its involvement in a series of multilateral institutions, like NATO, the IMF, the Commonwealth and the UN, on the other, to advance its global predatory interests behind a cloak of altruistic phrases about "peace" and "human rights." This included waging war on Korea, launching a Canadian military deployment to the peninsula that continues to this day. Ruling class claims—now long since discarded, but still promoted by the social democrats and pseudo-left—that Canada has a special "peace-keeping vocation" were always a lie. Throughout the Cold War, all but a tiny fraction of Canada's military were always engaged in preparations for war and potential nuclear conflict with the USSR, or in upholding the authority of the Canadian state at home. Moreover, like all UN "peace-keeping" missions, those in which Canada participated were sanctioned by the United States and aimed at securing imperialist interests, including suppressing anti-colonial struggles (e.g. Vietnam, the Congo) and defusing conflicts between the imperialist powers and their allies (Suez, Cyprus). Beginning with the 1990-91 Gulf War, Canadian imperialism has played a major role in the three-and-a-half decades of US-led wars of aggression that have now metastasized into a global conflict. This includes wars, interventions and regime change operations in Somalia, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Syria, Iraq, the Gaza genocide and the US-NATO instigated war with Russia over Ukraine. Today Canadian imperialism is in the frontlines of the developing world war.

17. The SEP demands the withdrawal of all Canadian troops from foreign interventions around the world, including in the Baltics and Eastern Europe, Middle East, the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific. We oppose all efforts to dragoon a new generation of workers and young people behind the aggressive global interests of Canadian imperialism on the

basis of fraudulent pronouncements about defending “human rights” and “democracy.” We demand the scrapping of all international imperialist alliances, including NATO, the Canada-US military-strategic partnership, Five Eyes and NORAD. We call for the withdrawal of all American military personnel from Canada and an end to all collaboration with the deadliest war machine on the planet. At the same time, we repudiate all appeals for a more “independent” Canadian military and foreign policy. What disputes the Canadian ruling class or any of its factions have with Washington revolve solely around how best to advance Canadian imperialist interests and secure their share of the spoils.

18. The SEP encourages mass protests in opposition to imperialist war. However, given that wars are rooted in the irreconcilable contradictions of the capitalist profit system, we reject all illusions in the possibility of persuading national governments or any section of the ruling class to change or moderate their policies. We defend the right of all oppressed peoples to resist imperialist violence and the neocolonial occupation of their countries, but this in no way lessens our implacable opposition to the bourgeois-nationalist and capitalist-restorationist regimes which are in imperialism’s crosshairs. The scourge of imperialist war can only be ended through the conquest of political power by the working class and the implementation of socialist policies. We adopt the following principles, first elaborated in the 2016 ICFI statement *Socialism and the Fight Against War*, for the construction of a global anti-war movement led by the working class. Today, this assumes the greatest urgency:

- * The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

- * The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- * The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

- * The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism. The permanent war of the bourgeoisie must be answered with the perspective of permanent revolution by the working class, the strategic goal of which is the abolition of the nation-state system and the establishment of a world socialist federation.

The Capitalist State and Parliamentarism

19. The essential precondition for the implementation of socialist policies is the conquest of political power by the working class and the establishment of a workers’ state. While the working class must make use of all the democratic and legal rights available to it in the struggle for power, vast historical experience has demonstrated that it cannot carry out the socialist reorganization of society within the framework of the existing institutions of bourgeois democracy and the capitalist state. There can be no parliamentary road to socialism. The classic Marxist definition of the state as an instrument of class rule, consisting “not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds” (Engels), is even truer today than when first formulated in the late 19th century. The state is not, as reformists habitually assert, a neutral arbiter of social conflict. Its very existence testifies to the fact that society is split into irreconcilably antagonistic classes. The bourgeois state is an instrument that upholds the political dictatorship of the capitalist class. Even as a matter of law, the bourgeoisie reserves the right to sweep aside

basic constitutional norms and legal precedents to defend its rule—as occurred under the War Measures Act throughout the first and second world wars. The monarch and their representative, the Governor-General, retain vast “reserve powers,” which the minority Harper government deployed in a constitutional coup in 2008 to prevent its defeat. Parliament, like the entire capitalist state apparatus, is an instrument of the financial oligarchy and big business. The multi-party parliamentary system is a mechanism of class rule. The rival parties of “left” and “right,” federalist and Quebec sovereignist play a complementary role in formulating and implementing ruling-class policy, molding and manipulating popular opinion and suppressing social opposition, above all from the working class.

20. The Canadian bourgeoisie has always been haunted by the fear of a movement from below. Unlike its English, French and American counterparts, it has no bourgeois-democratic revolutionary tradition, as epitomized in the founding motto of its state: “peace, order and good government.” Confederation was not a popular democratic movement, but rather a business deal, carved out by bankers, railway promoters, businessmen and the British Foreign Office to secure the ruling elite’s control over North America’s northern tier. It laid the basis for the subsequent dispossession of the indigenous peoples of Western Canada through thievery and genocidal violence. Over the past three decades, democratic rights that were secured through struggle in an earlier period have been eviscerated. The so-called “war on terror” has been used to vastly expand the reach and arbitrary powers of the intelligence agencies, and attack habeas corpus and freedom of speech. The right to strike has largely been abolished, including through the federal government arrogating authoritarian powers by means of concocted “reinterpretations” of the labour code. The normalization of the use of the “notwithstanding clause,” which allows governments to abrogate basic rights supposedly guaranteed in Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, underscores that the ruling class is breaking with bourgeois-democratic forms of rule and embracing authoritarianism.

Democracy and the Fight for Workers’ Power

21. The defence of democratic rights and the fight against fascism and dictatorship are inseparably bound up with the struggle for socialism. Just as there can be no socialism without democracy, there will be no democracy without socialism. Political equality is impossible without economic equality. This is becoming ever clearer as the financial oligarchy in every country, driven by the deepening crisis of capitalism, hands power to far-right and outright fascist forces. Fascism is capitalist counter-revolution. Like the struggle against world war, the fight against the fascist menace is inseparable from the struggle to seize economic and political power from the oligarchy and abolish capitalism. The working class has learned through bitter historical experience that fascism cannot be prevented by forging “popular front” alliances based on the political subordination of the workers to bourgeois “democratic” forces in the name of defending “democracy.” The “Popular Front” alliances formed by the Stalinists and Social-Democratic parties in the 1930s, above all in Spain and France, paved the way for fascism to come to power precisely because they suppressed the revolutionary struggles of the working class against capitalism. As Trotsky argued in his theory of permanent revolution, the only social force today capable of consistently defending and expanding democratic rights is the international working class, leading all progressive elements of society in a struggle for workers’ power and the socialist transformation of society.

22. The establishment of workers’ power requires far more than the

election of socialist candidates to the existing institutions of the bourgeois state. New forms and structures of genuine participatory democracy—arising in the course of revolutionary mass struggles and representative of the working-class majority of the population—must be developed as the foundations of a workers' government, that is, a government of, for, and by the workers. The policy of such a government, as it introduces those measures essential for the socialist transformation of economic life, will be to encourage and actively promote a vast expansion of democratic working-class participation in, and control over, decision-making processes. It will favour the abolition of existing institutions that either curtail democratic processes or serve as centres of conspiracy against the people (such as the monarchy, the Senate, the standing army, police and the entire security-intelligence apparatus). These and other necessary changes of a profoundly democratic character, to be determined by the masses themselves, are possible only in the context of the mass mobilization of the working class, imbued with socialist consciousness.

The Political Independence of the Working Class

23. A struggle for power requires the unconditional political independence of the working class from the parties, political representatives and agents of the capitalist class. The working class cannot come to power, let alone implement a socialist program, if its hands are tied by politically enfeebling compromises with the representatives of other class interests. Of paramount importance is breaking the working class from the politics of national reformism (historically identified with the social-democratic NDP), the trade union bureaucracy and “left” Canadian and Quebec nationalism. Since its founding in 1961, the NDP has been a capitalist party, opposed to Marxism and the class struggle. Its formation was not the outcome of the forcible entry of the working class into political struggle from below. Rather it was a maneuver of the trade union bureaucracy and the reformist CCF aimed at shoring up their political control over an increasingly restless working class and their influence in establishment politics. Like social-democratic parties around the world, the NDP repudiated its reformist program in the 1980s to openly support the intensification of worker exploitation. Over the past four decades, it has advocated for global competitiveness, supported Canadian imperialism's wars and foreign intrigues, and taken a wrecking ball to the very social reforms it once touted as evidence capitalism could be humanized. The SEP emphatically opposes all efforts to revive illusions in national reformism whether packaged as an attempt to revive the NDP by returning it to its so-called “socialist roots” or the building of a new “left” party. The experience of the Jeremy Corbyn-led movement to “take back” the British Labour Party and of the Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) government in Greece have conclusively demonstrated not just that such initiatives are bankrupt. They are mechanisms for politically disarming and suppressing the working class. Under conditions of a systemic crisis of global capitalism and mass alienation from the traditional political establishment, a myriad of new parties and groupings may emerge. In evaluating such political tendencies, the SEP considers the decisive criteria to be not their episodic position on one or another question, but, rather, their history, programme, perspective, social basis and class orientation.

24. The ruling class's monopoly over political life is enforced by the corporatist trade unions. They are implacably opposed to the development of a mass industrial and political movement of the working class for workers' power. The union bureaucracy systematically suppresses the class struggle. Confronted with worker opposition, they strive to isolate, defuse and derail it, by straitjacketing it within the anti-worker, state-

designed and regulated collective bargaining system, and electoral/parliamentary and protest politics. Fervent proponents respectively of Quebec and Canadian nationalism, the union apparatuses in Quebec and English Canada enforce the ruling class-incited divide between workers in Quebec and the rest of the country. Similarly, the unions cleave to Canada's federal structure and division of powers to quarantine struggles against the ruling class's cross-Canada drive to dismantle public services and attack worker's rights within provincial boundaries and establishment politics. In the name variously of advancing a “progressive” agenda, opposing the most avowedly right-wing representatives of the ruling class (“lesser-evilism”/ “strategic voting”) and “advancing Quebec's interests,” the unions openly support right-wing capitalist parties—most commonly the NDP, Liberals, Parti Québécois and Bloc Québécois—and uphold, as a whole, the multi-party system, through which capital exercises its domination.

25. The struggle for the political independence of the working class requires the systematic exposure of “left” Canadian and Quebec nationalism—with their fraudulent claims that Canadian capitalism constitutes a “kinder, gentler” society and progressive alternative to US imperialism and that the Quebec nation is based on bonds of “social solidarity” alien to “Anglo-Saxon capitalism.” Canadian and Quebec nationalism are ideological twins, serving the same essential class function. They obscure the imperialist character of the Canadian bourgeoisie and its Québécois component and mystify class relations through the promotion of a supra-class identity. They serve to bind workers to their capitalist exploiters and impede the unification of their struggles within Canada and with the international working class.

Against Opportunism

26. In its approach to all political questions and in its selection of the appropriate tactics, the Socialist Equality Party upholds the fundamental interests of the working class, based on a scientific understanding of the law-governed nature of the capitalist system, the political dynamics of class society and a systematic assimilation of the lessons of history. It is this approach that places the SEP in irreconcilable opposition to opportunist politics, which, in the pursuit of short-term tactical gains, sacrifices the long-term interests of the working class. Time and again opportunists have defended their betrayal of principles by claiming to be realistic politicians, not guided by “inflexible” dogmas and who understand how to adapt their practice to the requirements of any given situation. Opportunism is invariably an adaptation to the prevailing national milieu. Time and again, such “realistic” politics have led to disaster for the working class—precisely because they were based on superficial, impressionistic, non-Marxist and, consequently, unrealistic and false appraisals of objective conditions and the dynamics of the class struggle.

27. But opportunism is not merely the product of an intellectual and theoretical error. It has substantial socio-economic roots in capitalist society and develops within the workers' movement as an expression of the pressure of hostile class forces. All significant manifestations of opportunism—from that of Bernstein, which arose within the German Social Democracy at the end of the 19th century, and that of Stalin, which grew inside the Bolshevik Party in the 1920s, to that of Pablo and Mandel, which developed in the early 1950s inside the Fourth International, and, finally, the opportunism of the British Workers Revolutionary Party that led to its break from the ICFI in the mid-1980s—can be traced to the influence exerted by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois social forces upon the working class. This is the underlying cause and significance of

revisionism and opportunist politics. The struggle against such tendencies is not a distraction from party building, but, rather, the highest point at which the fight for Marxism in the working class is engaged.

Socialist Consciousness and the Crisis of Leadership

28. The Socialist Equality Party, as a section of the ICFI, defends the classical conception—developed systematically by Lenin in the construction of the Bolshevik Party and carried forward by Trotsky in the struggle to found and build the Fourth International—that revolutionary socialist consciousness does not develop spontaneously in the working class. Socialist consciousness requires scientific insight into the laws of historical development and the capitalist mode of production. This knowledge and understanding must be introduced into the working class, and this is the principal task of the Marxist movement. This was precisely what Lenin was emphasizing in *What Is To Be Done?* when he wrote, “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” No matter how powerful the spontaneous movement of the working class, bourgeois ideology, far older, more widespread and with greater means of dissemination than socialist theory, spontaneously imposes itself. Therefore, without the efforts of the revolutionary party to introduce Marxist theory into the workers’ movement, it remains under the ideological domination of the bourgeoisie. The greater the upsurge of the working class and the more widespread its development, Lenin insisted, the greater the need for consciousness in the theoretical, political and organizational work of the revolutionary party. Historically, the most widespread form of mass working-class consciousness has been trade unionism. But, as Lenin explained, and the experience of more than a century has demonstrated, trade unionism is the “bourgeois consciousness” of the working class. Denigration of the struggle for revolutionary consciousness, which is usually combined with demagogic attacks on intellectual and Marxist “elitism,” is the stock-in-trade of reactionary academics and political opportunists.

29. The victory of socialism—and, therefore, the survival and progressive development of human civilization—requires the construction, on the foundations of Marxist theory, of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution. Socialism will not be realized merely as the inevitable outcome of an unconscious historical process. The entire history of the 20th century testifies against such fatalistic “inevitabilism,” which is a caricature of historical materialist determinism and has nothing in common with the dynamic interaction of cognition, theory and practice exemplified in the work of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Capitalism survived the 20th century not because objective conditions were insufficiently mature for socialism, but rather because the leadership of the mass working-class parties was “insufficient” for socialist revolution. The working class again and again entered into epic struggles. But these struggles, misled by the Stalinists, social democrats, centrist and reformist organizations, ended in defeats.

30. Capitalism exists today because of the betrayals of the working class by its own organizations—the social-democratic and Stalinist political parties and the trade unions. “The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” These words, with which Leon Trotsky began the founding document of the Fourth International, remain supremely relevant as a definition of contemporary political reality. There is not a single mass organization in the world today that presents itself as an opponent of the existing world capitalist order, let alone summons the working class to revolutionary struggle. But as Trotsky also wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International, The Transitional Programme: “The

orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers’ organizations. Of these factors, the first of course is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus.”

Marxist Theory and the Working Class

31. The Socialist Equality Party bases its activity on an analysis of the objective laws of history and society, particularly as they are manifested in the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. Rooted in philosophical materialism, Marxism insists on the primacy of matter over consciousness. “The ideal is nothing else than the material world,” wrote Marx, “reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.” The materialism of Marx is dialectical, in that it regards the material world and the forms of its reflection in thought not as an aggregate of fixed objects and concepts, internally undifferentiated, but, rather, as a complex of processes, in constant movement and interaction, with antagonistic and divergent tendencies.

32. The SEP seeks to develop, within the advanced sections of the working class, a scientific understanding of history, knowledge of the capitalist mode of production and the social relations to which it gives rise, and an insight into the real nature of the present crisis and its world-historical implications. The SEP strives to transform the material potential for social revolution created by an objective historical process into a class-conscious and self-confident political movement. Applying the method of historical materialist analysis to world events, the SEP anticipates and prepares for the consequences of the intensification of the world capitalist crisis, lays bare the logic of events and formulates—strategically and tactically—the appropriate political response. The SEP insists that the progressive and socialist transformation of society can be achieved only through the mass struggle of the politically conscious working class. The actions of isolated individuals, resorting to violence, can never serve as a substitute for the collective struggle of the working class. As long political experience has shown, acts of individual violence are frequently instigated by provocateurs and play into the hands of the state.

33. The SEP upholds under all conditions the essential revolutionary socialist principle: *to tell the working class the truth*. The program of the party must be based on a scientific and objective assessment of political reality. The most insidious form of opportunism justifies itself on the grounds that the workers are not ready for the truth, that Marxists must take the prevailing level of mass consciousness—or, more precisely, what the opportunists imagine it to be—as their point of departure and adapt their program to the prejudices and confusion existing among the masses. This cowardly approach is the antithesis of principled revolutionary politics. “The program,” declared Trotsky in 1938, “must express the objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers. It must reflect society as it is, and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness. That is why we must express in our program the whole acuteness of the social crisis of the capitalist society, including in the first line the United States.” The first responsibility of the party, Trotsky continued, is to give “a clear, honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which flow from this situation, irrespective of whether or not the workers are today ripe for this. Our tasks don’t depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the workers. That is what the program should formulate and present before advanced workers.” These words define precisely the approach taken by the SEP.

The Working-Class Rebellion Against the Trade Unions and the Struggle for Rank-and-File Committees

34. As the ICFI long anticipated and has politically encouraged, the upsurge of working-class struggles around the world is taking the form of an ever more conscious rebellion against the nationalist and pro-corporate trade unions. The objective roots of this conflict lie in profound transformations in the structure of world capitalism that have unified working people in a global process of production like never before and turned the nationally-based unions into appendages of the capitalist state and big business in every country. Insulated from and indifferent to the hardships suffered by their membership, the unions are protected from rank-and-file protests by anti-democratic labour relations laws. To assert their independent class interests, workers must organize their struggles internationally in opposition to the nationally-based, pro-capitalist union apparatuses.

35. The conflict between the rank and file and the union apparatuses expresses the vast social gulf that has opened up over the past four decades between the privileged union bureaucrats and the workers they falsely claim to represent. Officials for the United Auto Workers in the US or IG Metall in Germany earn six-figure salaries, sit on co-management boards, promote trade war and militarism, and specialize in sabotaging strikes and imposing concessions-filled contracts. In Canada, the unions affiliated to the CLC, QFL, CNTU and Unifor, to mention only the most important, are controlled by and serve the interests of a substantial stratum of middle-class functionaries whose personal income is derived from their active and conscious role as facilitators of the corporate exploitation of the working class and enforcers of the interests of Canadian imperialism at home and abroad. Through their suppression of the class struggle and promotion of Canadian, American and Quebec nationalism, the unions in North America have collaborated with big business and governments since the 1980s in destroying entire sections of industry, eliminating hundreds of thousands of full-time jobs and driving down wages and conditions in the name of “international competitiveness.” They have enforced the brutal speedup and dangerous working conditions that have produced an accelerating crisis of workplace injury and death. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unions collaborated with employers and governments to keep workers on the job at all costs, exposing workers to the deadly virus. While the percentage of workers represented by unions has plummeted, the revenues of the trade unions and the salaries of their functionaries have continued to rise. They have benefited financially from their involvement in investment funds (like the QFL’s Solidarity Fund), other commercial ventures and control of vast union assets. This insulates them from the concerns of their own members and makes them indifferent to the suffering of the working class, the younger generation above all.

36. Against the efforts of the opportunists to maintain the subordination of workers to the unions by promoting the syndicalist conception that they can somehow be reinvigorated through militant “rank and file-ism,” the Socialist Equality Party fights for workers to take back control by establishing rank-and-file committees politically and organizationally independent of the union apparatuses in every workplace, union or non-union. This does not mean that the SEP abstains from working inside the unions, to the extent that such activity is required to gain access to and assist the workers jointly oppressed by their employers and the caste of union functionaries. But the SEP conducts such work on the basis of a revolutionary perspective, encouraging at every point the formation of new organizations of class struggle that are democratically controlled by the workers themselves and reject the unions’ nationalist and pro-capitalist program. To this end, the SEP fights for the construction of a network of rank-and-file committees across all major industries and public

services and for these committees to mobilize workers across all regional, linguistic and national divisions in a global industrial and political movement of the working class organized through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). As the ICFI explained in the 2021 statement announcing the creation of the IWA-RFC, “The IWA-RFC will work to develop the framework for new forms of independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces on an international scale. The working class is ready to fight. But it is shackled by reactionary bureaucratic organizations that suppress every expression of resistance.” The rank-and-file committees for which the SEP fights are more than defense organizations and centres of rebellion against the bureaucratic apparatuses. They will be built as embryonic organs of workers’ democracy and workers’ power. Through these structures, the working class will begin to constitute itself as the new ruling class, the prerequisite for it to transform social, economic and political life.

Oppose Quebec *Indépendantiste* Nationalism and the Canadian Federal State

37. The SEP opposes the Parti Québécois-led sovereignty movement and the call for Quebec’s secession from the federal state. There is nothing progressive or legitimate in the separatist agenda. It articulates, under the banner “Maître chez nous” (Masters in our own house), the selfish class interests of sections of the Quebec bourgeoisie and upper-middle class. They calculate that an independent state would allow them to strengthen their class domination by facilitating the pursuit of economic nationalist policies more tailored to their specific interests and the forging of closer ties with Wall Street and Washington. They also advance separation as a means to force through a wholesale reorganization of the state apparatus and the public services it provides so as to make Quebec capitalism more globally competitive. The working class has absolutely no interest in supporting the establishment of a third imperialist state in North America that would be a member of NATO, NORAD and a US-led continental economic bloc. On the contrary, the erection of a new state, with its own border controls and standing army, would constitute a further obstacle to the unification of the working class. Moreover, Quebec’s secession would inevitably trigger an intensified struggle between the rival factions of the ruling class in Quebec and a truncated Canada, which they would all invariably seek to wage by inciting linguistic, ethnic and regional divisions, pitting workers in fratricidal conflict against each other. Since its founding in 2006, the principal political function of Québec Solidaire (QS), the party of the Québec pseudo-left, has been to seek to revive *indépendantiste* nationalism, from which masses of working people had become alienated after decades of PQ-imposed austerity and anti-worker laws. By providing the sovereignty movement with a progressive coloration and advancing apologies for the chauvinist politics of the PQ and the national-autonomist CAQ, QS has aided and abetted the emergence of a virulently right-wing and racist Quebec nationalism based on ethnic and religious exclusivism, and anti-immigrant xenophobia.

38. The SEP’s opposition to Quebec independence in no way implies support for the Canadian federal state, through which the bourgeoisie has exercised its class rule for over 150 years, or its territorial integrity. Our opposition to separatism stems from the need for workers to reject all forms of nationalism—Canadian or Québécois, pro-Quebec independence or pro-Canadian unity—and unite in the struggle for workers’ power based on the program of internationalist socialism. The chronic crisis of Canada’s federal state is rooted in the crisis of the capitalist nation-state

system. The development of an ever-more tightly unified continental economy has given rise to powerful regionally-based factions of the bourgeoisie with different and opposed interests. The SEP fights to unite the working class in opposition to all these factions and Canadian imperialism as a whole and for it to take advantage of the crisis and weakness of the Canadian bourgeoisie to hasten its overthrow and thereby strike a blow for the world working class. We are implacably opposed to calls for enhanced powers for the “West,” and Alberta First and Alberta separatist politics—which have always been the preserve of the right and far right, and used to stoke reaction.

39. The SEP opposes all language-based privileges and restrictions, and all forms of ethno-linguistic chauvinism. We uphold the rights of French-language minorities outside Quebec to public services and education in their mother tongue—rights Canadian capitalism long denied and that are under threat as the ruling class writhes up all forms of reaction, Anglo-chauvinism included. Likewise, the SEP opposes Quebec’s chauvinist language laws—from Bill 101 to Bill 96—which seek to boost the francophone petty bourgeoisie, incite animosity among French-speaking, English-speaking, and immigrant workers, and promote the reactionary lie that Québécois workers share common interests with the Quebec capitalist elite. The working class has no interest in the promotion of one language over another, nor in the rival nationalisms—Québécois or Canadian—through which the bourgeoisie maintains its political and ideological domination.

For the United Socialist States of North America

40. Over the past four decades, workers in Canada, Mexico and the United States have, due to the consequences of the globalization of production, become objectively unified to an unprecedented degree in unified production and distribution networks. The unification of the entire continent into a single unit of economic planning is posed as an objective historical necessity. Yet it is at this very point that the national rivalries between, and regional divisions within, the continent’s two imperialist powers have reached an unprecedented pitch of intensity. The unravelling of Canada-US relations is part of the intensifying inter-imperialist struggle for the redivision of the world. Even as they jostle among themselves, the Canadian and American ruling classes are intent on transforming the continent into a base for economic and ultimately military conflicts with rival powers for global hegemony. The only progressive way out is the independent revolutionary struggle of the working class, which must unite across national borders in a mass revolutionary movement for the socialist transformation of society by making its objective class unity a conscious political strategy. In so doing, the unified power of the Canadian, American and Mexican working class will put an end to the global scourge of American and Canadian imperialism. The establishment of the United Socialist States of North America will mark a critical step in the fight, led by the ICFI around the world, for the program of world socialist revolution.

41. The claim made by the labour bureaucracy and other national chauvinists that the answer to the loss of jobs within Canada is to be found in protectionism—with workers and bosses joining hands in “Team Canada” to support increased tariffs and a national industrial policy—is false. As a practical matter, there can be no return, in the age of globalization, to economic nationalism. As in the 1930s, trade and investment conflicts, absent the revolutionary intervention of the working class, will prove to be the antechamber of world war. At the same time, the invocation of “free trade” by Ottawa and the transnational monopolies is as fraudulent as all their other tributes to “freedom.” The SEP advocates

neither protectionism nor “free trade,” which are simply different strategies to augment the wealth and power of capital. We fight for social ownership of the means of production, the elimination of national borders and the creation of a planned, rationally-integrated global economy.

For the Rights of the First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples

42. The forging of the fighting unity of the working class across Canada is unthinkable without a determined struggle to realize the democratic and social rights of the indigenous peoples—First Nations, Inuit and Metis. Measured by numerous social indices—life expectancy, poverty, education and literacy, incarceration rates and access to basic social services and infrastructure—the social position of indigenous Canadians is equivalent to that of the world’s most impoverished peoples. This is a damning indictment of Canadian capitalism and its state, whose roots lie in the violent dispossession and genocide that accompanied the introduction of capitalist property relations across the continent over the course of three centuries. The Canadian ruling class’s “nation to nation reconciliation” policy is a sham, aimed at reconciling the impoverished, neglected and abused indigenous population to Canadian capitalism. The “historic” treaties and the reservation system, with which it is legally entwined, are instruments of capitalist political and economic subjugation, no less than the Indian Act. The aims of the “modern” treaty-process and “reconciliation” are essentially no different: to open up traditional indigenous lands for enhanced capitalist exploitation, especially resource projects, and to cultivate a petty-bourgeois indigenous layer who can be used to suppress social opposition, including among the rapidly growing working-class indigenous population in major urban areas. The SEP rejects the characterization of Canada, much-promoted by the pseudo-left and indigenous nationalists, as a “white-settler colonial state.” It serves to deflect responsibility for the ongoing oppression of the indigenous people away from capitalism and the predatory Canadian ruling class and onto working people and to divide the working class. It is invariably tied to calls for “decolonization” based on “self-determination,” that is for nothing more than a reorganization of the institutions, structures and internal borders of the Canadian capitalist state for the benefit of the indigenous petty bourgeoisie. The only means of resolving the deplorable situation confronting indigenous workers and youth is through the mobilisation of the entire working class, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, to end the socio-economic order that has produced it.

For the Defence of Immigrants, Refugees and “Temporary Foreign Workers”

43. The SEP condemns and opposes the entire reactionary framework of “border protection” and the immigration restrictions that are upheld by the entire capitalist establishment. They and their political hirelings incite xenophobia, witch-hunting asylum seekers and fomenting anti-immigrant chauvinism to divert attention from their own responsibility for the failures of capitalism, split the working class and justify the build-up of the state’s repressive apparatus. Successive Canadian governments have deepened Canada’s collaboration with the fascistic Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the US to enforce a “Fortress North America” policy. Refugees and immigrants to Canada are routinely denied fundamental democratic rights. Those classified as “Temporary Foreign Workers” are subject to conditions that the UN has condemned as a

“breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery.” The SEP rejects the classification of any human being as “illegal.” It upholds the unconditional right of workers of every country to live and work wherever they choose, with full legal, democratic and citizenship rights.

Class Unity Versus Identity Politics

44. The unification of the working class also requires the systematic exposure of the reactionary character of all forms of “identity” politics—based on the elevation of national, ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, gender and sexual distinctions above class position. This shift from class to identity, which the pseudo-left championed and continued to promote once it had become a fixture of official bourgeois politics, seeks to prevent an understanding of the real causes, rooted in the capitalist system, of the hardships that confront all working people. The SEP opposes the Canadian state’s “multiculturalism” policy, which is the officially sanctioned and promoted form of identity politics in Canada. Adopted in 1971 as part of a concerted ideological campaign to fashion a “progressive” Canadian nationalism to control an increasingly restive working class, multiculturalism is nothing but a rebranded national ideology, reflecting the shifting needs of the bourgeoisie. Multiculturalism seeks to undermine the development of class consciousness in the working class by promoting cultural “identity” across class lines. It is associated with the tribalist conception that Canada is comprised of discrete communities as defined by race, religion and ethnicity who should be allotted a “proportionate” share of senior government and managerial jobs. The SEP fights for full equality for all people and defends unequivocally their democratic rights. All forms of discrimination based on national, ethnic, racial, or religious heritage, or on gender or sexual orientation must be abolished. The SEP rejects all calls for “affirmative action,” which—in opposition to the fight for social equality—aim to ensure an “equitable” distribution of the spoils of capitalist exploitation on the basis of racial, gender or ethnic quotas. The SEP advances this essential democratic component of its program within the context of the fight for socialism, based on the political unification of all sections of the working class in Canada and throughout the world.

Democratic Centralism

45. The revolutionary struggle of the working class requires organization, and organization is impossible without discipline. But the discipline required for revolutionary struggle cannot be imposed bureaucratically from above. It must develop on the basis of agreement, freely arrived at, on principles and program. This conviction finds expression in the organizational structure of the Socialist Equality Party, which is based on the principles of democratic centralism. In the formulation of policy and the appropriate tactics, the fullest democracy must prevail within the party. No restraints, other than those indicated by the party’s constitution, are placed on internal discussion of the SEP’s policies and activities. Leaders are democratically elected by the membership and are subject to criticism and control. But if the formulation of policy requires the broadest discussion, and open and honest criticism, its implementation demands the strictest discipline. The decisions arrived at democratically within the party are binding on all members. Those who object to this essential element of centralism in the implementation of decisions, who see in the demand for discipline a

violation of their personal freedom, are not revolutionary socialists but anarchistic individualists, who fail to understand the implications and demands of the class struggle.

Class Consciousness, Culture and the *World Socialist Web Site*

46. The fight for socialism demands an enormous growth in the political, intellectual and cultural stature of the workers’ movement, in Canada and internationally. In contrast to the practitioners of pragmatic and opportunist politics, the Socialist Equality Party is convinced that only a movement working at the highest theoretical level will prove capable of attracting the working class to its banner, preparing it for the struggle against capitalism, and, beyond that, the construction of a socialist society. While the bourgeois politicians seek to drag the working class down to their own intellectually debased level, the Socialist Equality Party strives to raise the working class up to the level required by its historic tasks. Not only politics but also science, history, philosophy, literature, movies, music, the fine arts and all areas of culture fall within the domain of socialist education. The Socialist Equality Party’s most important instrument for the development of socialist consciousness within the working class is the *World Socialist Web Site* (wsws.org). With its daily analysis of world political and economic developments, exposure of the social realities of capitalism, coverage of workers’ struggles, commentary on vital questions of culture, discussion of historical and philosophical themes, and examination of critical issues of revolutionary strategy, tactics and practice, the WSWS plays a decisive role in forging the contemporary world Marxist movement. Exploiting the revolutionary developments in technology that have produced augmented intelligence, the ICFI launched Socialism AI in December 2025 to place the WSWS archive and the entire arsenal of Marxism and the history of the socialist movement at the disposal of the millions of workers, students and young people being radicalized by the global capitalist crisis. As the ICFI declared at its launch, “The decisive significance of Socialism AI lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the objective movement of the working class and the subjective level of socialist consciousness.”

Revolutionary Strategy and Transitional Demands

47. The strategic aim of the Socialist Equality Party is to educate and prepare the working class for the revolutionary struggle against capitalism, the establishment of workers’ power and the creation of a socialist society. Our aim is not the reform of capitalism, but its overthrow. The attainment of this goal, however, requires the most careful and detailed attention to the conditions of life of the broad mass of workers and the formulation of demands that address their needs. The SEP recognizes the necessity of establishing, in practice, a link between the perspective of socialist revolution and the concrete struggles in which the working class is engaged. In this effort, the work of the SEP is guided by the approach advocated by Leon Trotsky in *The Transitional Program*. “It is necessary,” he wrote, “to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find a bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today’s conditions and today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.”

48. Such demands include universal employment, automatic adjustment

of wages in line with inflation, reduction of working hours with no loss of pay, unrestricted access to quality medical care and education, decent housing and the cancellation of home repossessions and evictions. They also include democratization of the workplace, unrestricted inspection by the public of the financial records of corporations and financial institutions, establishment of restraints on executive salaries, imposition of a genuinely progressive income tax and significant restrictions on the transfer of massive personal wealth via inheritance. The SEP will advance other critical transitional demands such as the placing of large corporations vital to the national and global economy under public ownership and democratic workers' control, the dismantling of the army and the transfer of authority to popular militias with elected officers controlled by the working class and other policies of a democratic and socially beneficial character.

49. Transitional demands will play an important role in the political mobilization of the working class to the extent that they form part of a broader struggle to develop socialist consciousness. The Transitional Program is not an à la carte menu, from which demands are arbitrarily selected, without the appropriate political context or reference to broader political goals. If the Transitional Program is to serve as a bridge to socialism, the destination cannot be kept a secret from the working class.

The Working Class and the Socialist Revolution

50. The work of the SEP is imbued with an unwavering confidence, grounded in advanced scientific theory and rich historical experience, in the revolutionary role and destiny of the working class. But the victory of the socialist revolution depends upon the conscious struggles of workers. The emancipation of the working class is, in the final analysis, the task of the working class itself. As Engels put it so well, "Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul." When the workers of Canada make the decision, beneath the blows of crisis-stricken capitalism, that they "must be in on it," nothing will prevent them from taking their rightful place in the world socialist revolution.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)