

Socialist Equality Party (UK) holds its Seventh National Congress

Thomas Scripps
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the United Kingdom held its Seventh National Congress from November 29 to December 2, 2024.

The Congress unanimously passed two resolutions, “War, the class struggle and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party” and “Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!”, after extensive and engaged discussion involving party members from the most longstanding, in their 80s and 90s with decades of experience in the socialist movement, to the newest recruits in their early 20s. All spoke with the benefit of the last two years of intense political activity and theoretical education.

Large delegations from the international Trotskyist movement of which the SEP is a section—the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)—participated throughout, giving valuable contributions. Greetings were delivered on behalf of the sections of the ICFI in the US, Canada, France, Germany, Sri Lanka and Australia, and sympathising groups in Brazil, Turkey and New Zealand.

Chris Marsden was re-elected the party’s National Secretary, Thomas Scripps the party’s Assistant National Secretary, and Robert Stevens the National Editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Marsden opened the Congress with a tribute and minute’s silence for Wolfgang Weber, who died on November 16 at the age of 75. Wolfgang, a leading figure in the SEP in Germany, and its forerunner the League of Socialist Workers, spent more than half a century as an active participant in the Trotskyist movement.

“Our cadre are united in their detestation of human suffering, hatred of oppression, a burning desire to change the world for the better, a readiness to fight for this at whatever personal cost, and an understanding that the party is the only mechanism for the realisation of these aims,” said Marsden. “Wolfgang was such a man and dedicated his entire adult life and considerable intellect to the cause of socialism.”

His example of principled revolutionary struggle based on the lessons of history was a living part of the Congress, referenced by delegates from the SEP in the UK and internationally.

Marsden’s opening report addressed the looming danger of a Third World War, the rise of the far-right, the implications of the election of Donald Trump as US president for world politics, and the reactionary offensive planned by the right-wing, warmongering Labour government.

“We must make this clear,” he summarised, “We are in uncharted territory and none of the old methods of struggle will suffice. Everything depends upon the working class understanding this. This begins and ends with the education of our cadre and the fully rounded assimilation of our analysis and its confirmation.”

He cited the remarks made by chairperson of the WSW David North in a recent webinar:

There are many, many reasons to believe that we are now coming to the climactic stage of what Trotsky called the Death Agony of Capitalism. Either the capitalist system is ended finally, or it will destroy human civilization. That’s the way political questions are posed today. And so the central question now is the development of this world movement, the revival of a genuine socialist movement in the working class. And when we say that Trotskyism is the Marxism of the 21st century, what we mean is that Trotskyism, the Trotskyist movement, is the embodiment, or embedded in the Trotskyist movement are all the historical lessons of the past century.

In his introduction to the main resolution, Scripps noted

that in the two years since the last congress “the working class and young people have been driven by their socio-economic situation, and their response to international developments, up against the limits of their own present political organisation and understanding.”

He continued, “It is undoubtedly the case that the working class, in Britain and internationally, is being brought into ever sharper opposition with the increasingly brutal reality of contemporary capitalism. But that context only poses the questions that have to be answered by the revolutionary party.”

These opening reports will be made available. The main resolution has been published today and is available to read here.

Particular focus was placed at the Congress on the work to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and to defend the heritage of Trotskyism and introduce its essential political perspective to the workers and young people being radicalised by the spiralling crisis of capitalism.

Tony Robson, a member of the SEP’s national committee, explained of the SEP’s work to help build rank-and-file committees: “The issue is how we bring forward the constituency within the working class that is looking for a means a fight. The fight to build a rank-and-file committee as a centre of opposition to the bureaucracy means clarifying workers that they do not face a trade union struggle.

“We formulate demands which workers recognise must be fought for as non-negotiable. These are imbued with a perspective which connects the defensive struggles on jobs and conditions with the issue of workers control and a socialist reorganisation of society.”

Many delegates spoke on the recent attacks on the Trotskyist movement authored by John Kelly (*The Twilight of World Trotskyism*) and Aidan Beatty (*The Party is Always Right*), which the resolution identifies as the latest in a series of efforts “to cut students and young people off from the revolutionary traditions they must become familiar with.” SEP members gave powerful articulation to those traditions, vindicating the renewed focus which the ICFI placed upon the study of its own history with its 2023 US Summer School lecture series.

The most powerful contribution came from Barbara Slaughter, who was an active member of the Socialist Labour League and the Workers Revolutionary Party—the predecessors of the SEP. She explained how “during the 1950s and 60s, when the Trotskyist movement was decimated by the counter revolutionary tendency of

Pabloite revisionism, Gerry Healy [the leader of the Socialist Labour League] fought against all the odds for the continuity of the Fourth International.

“When, in 1963, the Socialist Workers Party [in America, led by James P. Cannon] joined the Pabloites in the United Secretariat, the Socialist Labour League stood alone on the world stage, embodying in its struggle all the lessons of the history of the revolutionary movement going back to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and beyond.”

The Socialist Equality Parties internationally have been fighting for the freedom of our Ukrainian comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk since his imprisonment by the regime of Volodymyr Zelensky for the crime of fighting to unify Ukrainian and Russian workers in a socialist struggle against the NATO-Russia war. Delegates to the Congress pledged to redouble those efforts in passing the resolution “Free Bogdan Syrotiuk!”

Scripps explained, “Bogdan is a target of the far-right dictatorship that daily descends to new levels of authoritarianism and cruelty to enforce the demands of the Ukrainian oligarchy, and above all the imperialist ruling class. But of course, he’s much more than that. He stands not only for a general opposition to the war but a socialist programme to bring about its end.” He represents the “revival of the genuine traditions of international Marxism, the traditions of Trotskyism, within the former republics of the Soviet Union.”

In concluding, Marsden observed, “The political chasm between ourselves and the pseudo-left, made clear in our draft resolution and contributions from comrades here and especially internationally is becoming ever more apparent. And here we are looking at the objective basis for the realignment of the working class on the axis of revolutionary Marxism, of socialist internationalism—in short of the political triumph of genuine Trotskyism.”

We encourage our readers to study the published resolutions, and the reports delivered and take the decision to join the SEP.



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