

War, the class struggle and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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We are publishing here the main resolution adopted by the Seventh National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), held from November 29 to December 2, 2024. The WSWs will be publishing the resolutions, reports and contributions to the Congress over the coming days.

1. The working class in Britain and internationally faces immense dangers. Not since the end of the Second World War has the threat of a Third been so great. World capitalism faces a deep historical crisis, to which the only answer of the ruling class is imperialist violence, social counterrevolution and dictatorship.

2. The war in Ukraine, which has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives on both sides, was provoked by the US and NATO imperialist powers through a policy of encroachment on Russia aimed at bringing about the collapse of the capitalist regime of President Vladimir Putin. This has reached the dangerous stage where Washington has agreed the use of long-range missiles against Russian territory, followed by Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government allowing the use of British Storm Shadow missiles. Putin responded by declaring the NATO powers were de facto at war with Russia and that Europe could be targeted for reprisals using nuclear-capable hypersonic missiles. London, Paris and Berlin are discussing sending troops to Ukraine on the pretext of policing a possible future "ceasefire", which Moscow called a plan to impose a "strategic defeat" that would be resisted by "any means".

3. NATO's war against Russia is only the bloodiest and most dangerous expression of a global eruption of war. The imperialist powers have all backed the fascist Israeli regime's mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians in Gaza and on the West Bank for over a year. This has mutated into a regional conflict targeting Iran which has already led to the bombing and invasion of Lebanon and the overthrow of the Assad regime and carve-up of Syria. A redivision of the world and its markets and essential resources between the major powers, led by the US, is underway, which ultimately targets China as America's strategic economic competitor, threatening a world war and the use of nuclear weapons.

4. Accompanying the drive to war is the shift towards dictatorial forms of rule and the cultivation of far-right forces to crush resistance in the working class. The preservation of democratic forms of rule is impossible. Amid conditions of extreme social inequality and mounting class tensions, the historically unprecedented transfer of wealth to the super-rich, the COVID pandemic that has claimed millions of lives, and the catastrophe of climate change, the capitalist ruling elites are lurching towards fascism and dictatorship globally. This finds its most advanced expression in the United States. America's ruling class responded to the global economic decline of the United States with an eruption of military violence to secure its world hegemony and a turn to unrestrained financial parasitism. This was coupled with a war waged against workers on behalf of the financial oligarchy that has left millions in economic desperation and paved the way for the fascist presidency of Donald Trump.

5. The key role in Trump's ascendancy has been played by the

Democratic Party and its allies in the AFL-CIO trade union bureaucracy. Trump instigated a coup in January 2021, aimed at overturning the presidential election result and the constitutional order, only to be handed the keys to the White House by the Democrats less than four years later. The Democrats responded to the January 6 coup with a systematic attempt to buttress the Republican Party, which it portrayed as a victim of Trump, while the trade unions suppressed and betrayed all opposition to the economic distress suffered by millions under Biden's presidency. Young people especially turned their backs on the Democratic Party because of its advocacy of war with Ukraine and support for Israel's genocide, allowing Trump to pose as a peacemaker. This was compounded by the Democrats' promotion of divisive identity politics, tailored to an upper middle class seeking only personal self-advancement and nakedly hostile to the suffering of working people which Trump claimed to represent. This is why the development of an American fascist movement could never be fought by supporting the Democrats as the "lesser evil", as advocated by Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the pseudo-left.

6. The US Socialist Equality Party stood Joseph Kishore as its presidential candidate, and Jerry White for vice president, to arm the working class with a revolutionary perspective. The SEP explained that fascism is not a mistaken policy choice of capitalist parties or individuals such as Trump. It is the product of the breakdown of bourgeois democracy under the weight of the contradictions of capitalism as the ruling class turns to open counterrevolution to repress working-class opposition to austerity and war. As the US SEP insisted, "the coming to power of a second Trump administration represents the violent realignment of the American political superstructure to correspond with the real social relations that exist in the United States. Donald Trump speaks not simply as one criminal individual but as the representative of a powerful capitalist oligarchy that has taken shape over the last three to four decades." This is an international phenomenon. Trump is only the latest far-right figure to come to power. Europe already has neo-fascist governments in Italy and the Netherlands. This process will be accelerated by the election of Trump, as shown by the collapse of Germany's coalition government and the threatened downfall of French President Macron's unelected government—with Marine Le Pen's National Rally ever more likely to come to power—in both cases over efforts to impose the savage austerity measures required by the war in Ukraine and the trade war against the US.

7. Along with the turn to war, the deepening social and political crisis at the heart of the imperialist order will act to destabilise the entire world. As the US Socialist Equality Party explained in its 2024 Congress resolution, "Throughout the 20th century, and especially in the aftermath of World War II, the United States functioned as the ultimate guarantor of the stability and survival of the world capitalist system. It is incapable of playing that role any longer." US imperialism is aggressively seeking to overcome its economic decline through worldwide military aggression and a turn to protectionism and trade war. For the oppressed peoples of

the world this means wars of colonial conquest. For Russia and China, it means escalating conflict. For the European powers, the illusion that they could sink their differences with the US and enjoy the role of junior partners in sharing the spoils of a new imperialist division of the world has been shattered.

8. The European bourgeoisies are responding to Trump's "America First" agenda of war and trade war with a counter-offensive, with every government discussing hikes in military spending on the pretext of being able to independently counter the "Russian threat". The likelihood of massive US tariffs and other protectionist measures has prompted intense planning for retaliatory trade war measures. The global struggle for market share has already led to a wave of job losses and closures in automotive and other key industries. But the demands of trade war and increased military spending, and the danger of a worldwide economic catastrophe, will mean a frontal assault on the working class of a scale not seen since the 1930s.

Mobilise the working class against fascism and war

9. The warning must be made: It is not only America that confronts the danger of fascism. But neither Trump nor his European counterparts can impose dictatorship without mass opposition. The US and Europe in 2024 are not Weimar Germany, where Hitler came to power in January 1933 following huge defeats of the working class and with the backing of a mass fascist base. Explosive class battles lie ahead. The same conditions giving rise to war and fuelling the growth of the far-right provide the basis for the systematic mobilisation of the working class in a political struggle against world capitalism and its national governments based on a perspective of socialist internationalism.

10. The turn to imperialist war and authoritarianism is driven by the irresolvable contradictions of the capitalist system between the global economy and the nation-state system and between socialised production and the private appropriation of profit. But globalisation has also vastly strengthened the social power of the international working class, both numerically and because production that takes place across all national borders has objectively united workers in every country who now face common exploiters and whose fate is inextricably entwined. This class, the most powerful social force on the planet, is being driven into struggle against capital. Social and political discontent is rising as every area of social life is subordinated to war and the profit mania of the rich. This has already found initial expression in repeated waves of strikes, such as those in Britain, France, Greece, Italy and in the worldwide protests against the genocide in Gaza.

11. The ever-more savage attacks on social and democratic rights by ruling elites will further energise the class struggle and produce the impulse for social revolution. But if workers are to succeed, they must free themselves from the influence of the nominally "left" forces that have presided over the series of sellouts, betrayals and defeats that has strengthened the nationalist right. The elemental eruption of opposition must be armed with a worked-out, anti-capitalist and internationalist perspective. No matter how determined workers are to confront the attacks they face in Britain or any other country, however outraged at imperialism's crimes, these struggles must be politically directed and guided by an understanding that fascism and war can only be stopped by the development of an independent movement of the working class against the source of political reaction and oligarchy: the capitalist system.

12. The future of humanity depends on the building of the revolutionary leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the

world party of socialist revolution, and its British section, the Socialist Equality Party. Only in this way can the political consciousness of the advanced workers, the younger generation above all, be raised to the level required for a revolution to end capitalist exploitation and imperialist war. For the fight for socialism to be advanced, workers' struggles must be rooted in the internationalist strategy elaborated in the theory of permanent revolution, formulated by Leon Trotsky in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution in Russia and developed in the course of the struggle initiated in 1923-24 against the Stalinist bureaucracy and its nationalist repudiation of Marxist internationalism. Trotsky insisted 1) that in all countries the struggle for and defence of democracy could not be separated from the fight to establish workers' power and the implementation of socialist policies; and 2) the struggle for socialism could only be conducted based on an international strategy directed toward the global mobilisation of the working class against the world capitalist system.

13. The fight against fascism, genocide and war must be waged as an offensive by the working class against British imperialism, in alliance with their international class brothers and sisters, above all in the imperialist centres of the US and Europe. We propose as the principles for a socialist anti-war movement:

- * The struggle against war must be based on the international working class, the great revolutionary force in society. The union bureaucracies and the Labour Party have worked feverishly to pre-empt any independent expression of working-class interests and struggle. This must be challenged by a rank-and-file rebellion of workers, directly linking opposition to the unprecedented attack on their living standards to the fight against war.

- * The ruling class cannot wage war abroad without waging a war on the democratic and social rights of the working class at home. This is why opposition to war is being criminalized everywhere. In Ukraine, Trotskyist youth leader Bogdan Syrotiuk was arrested because he fought to unify workers in Russia and Ukraine against the war. This underscores that the fight against war is inseparable from the fight to defend the social and democratic rights of the working class.

- * The fight against war is a fight against capitalism and for socialism. There can be no serious struggle against war and the attack on democratic rights without a struggle to put an end to the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- * This struggle must be conducted in complete independence from all bourgeois parties, in the UK above all the Labour Party which has supported imperialist violence throughout its more than a century of existence.

- * The fight against war and the threat of fascism can only succeed as an international struggle. As the International Committee stated in 2016, "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. This will make possible the rational, planned development of global resources and, on this basis, the eradication of poverty and the raising of human culture to new heights."

For the United Socialist States of Europe

14. The socialist movement fought for by the SEP in the UK must have at its centre the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe. The European Union (EU) of the banks and corporations is an alliance of blood-soaked war criminals, ruthless billionaires and their functionaries,

intent on dragging the continent deeper into a disastrous global conflict, destroying the jobs, wages and social entitlements of millions to pay for trade and military war while shredding democratic rights like asylum and the free movement of people. Against this, European workers, above all Russian and Ukrainian workers, must unite in a common struggle against war and the capitalist class. Ending the national divisions which have twice ripped the continent and its peoples apart, at the cost of tens of millions of lives, and which threaten to do so again, requires the progressive unification of European society which is only possible through the overthrow of capitalism. The Socialist Equality Party and our European sister parties, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste in France, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei in Germany, and the Sosyalist E'tilik Grubu in Turkey, together with all our co-thinkers in the ICFI, provide the necessary programme and leadership for the realisation of a sustained and coordinated offensive of the European working class.

The struggle against austerity and war is the struggle against Starmer's Labour government

15. Opposing Labour as a party of war is the fundamental axis on which the working class must base its struggles. By agreeing to Ukraine firing Storm Shadow cruise missiles into Russian territory, Starmer has made a de facto declaration of war and has placed the British people under direct threat of Russian retaliation. Labour makes constant fawning appeals to Trump and the Republicans to avoid an all-out trade war with Europe and continue the Democrats' support for war in Ukraine, maintaining Britain's role as chief provocateur—promising in return that it will push the EU powers to contribute more to the imperialist war effort. This is vital so that British imperialism can project its own global predatory ambitions.

16. War necessitates social reaction all along the line. The Starmer Labour government expresses a global shift in the forms of class rule. It governs in the direct interests of the financial oligarchy. Starmer's government was forged in a six-year campaign of mass purges against the party's membership under the codename "Operation Icepick", with thousands of former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's supporters branded as antisemites and expelled or driven out of the party—purges enabled through Corbyn's own cowardice and complicity. Coming to power as the "party of NATO", of Zionism and the defence of Israeli genocide, Labour is the most right-wing government in post-war British history. Its defence of genocide and war is combined with authoritarianism domestically, and its boast of being "the most pro-business government this country has ever seen." This translates into an agenda of brutal spending cuts and tax rises falling on workers' wages, to the tune of £22 billion already, that will devastate the lives of millions; attacks on National Health Service and other public sector workers as opponents of "efficiency"; and ending the "bulging benefits bill blighting our society". Labour is ramping up repressive measures targeting anti-Gaza genocide protests by extending the witch-hunt of opponents of Zionism begun during Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party to academics, student activists and independent journalists. The government's anti-migrant offensive saw Starmer rave about the Tories having run a deliberate "open borders experiment". This not only gives succour to every far-right figure from Nigel Farage to Tommy Robinson; Labour's agenda is in fact just as right-wing as Farage's Reform UK on immigration and to Farage's right when it comes to spearheading NATO aggression against Russia. The working class is on a collision course with the Starmer Labour government.

The political struggle waged by the Socialist Equality Party

17. The working class is in uncharted territory and none of the old methods of struggle will suffice. Everything depends on freeing workers from the stranglehold of the trade union leaderships and a Labour Party that still exercise a malign influence on a working class disconnected from Marxism and its own traditions of class struggle. Reforging those connections means a political and organisational break with Labour and the union bureaucracy, fought for against the combined efforts of the pseudo-left groups to oppose such a break. Essential lessons must be learned from the explosive conflicts of the past two years, during which the SEP intervened to arm the working class with a revolutionary perspective grounded in the historically derived programme of Trotskyism.

18. After decades in which the class struggle was suppressed by the trade unions, amid the highest inflation rates in a generation, coming after a decade of austerity and a pandemic in which many were cynically lauded as key workers, a surge of industrial action took place—part of an eruption of strike activity in Europe and internationally. Between June 2022 and January 2024, over five million days were lost to strikes in the UK, expressing the pent-up anger towards a hated Conservative government that had presided over years of savage austerity. Hatred of the Tories was compounded by the economically disastrous exit from the EU, their ferocious assault on asylum seekers, their dragging the UK into wars in Libya and Syria and continuing occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's policy of letting the COVID pandemic rip through society that led to mass murder. The deep social anger fuelled a strike wave encompassing workers in some of the most critical sections of society, including transport, healthcare, education, refuse collection, post and telecommunications, distribution and warehousing and which could have been the start of a major fightback by the British working class against the super-rich oligarchy. There was broad sympathy with the call for a general strike.

The trade union bureaucracy's betrayal of the strike wave

19. The SEP intervened to combat the role of the trade union bureaucracy as an industrial police force for the corporations and the state. We insisted that the working class must establish rank-and-file committees to organise workers independently of and against the trade union bureaucracy and open a new road for the class struggle, centred on unifying British workers with their class brothers and sisters internationally in opposition to the pro-capitalist economic nationalism of the bureaucracy. This fight could not be waged purely at the level of industrial militancy. The systematic preparation of a general strike would have as its aim the bringing down of the Conservative government and the fight to build an alternative socialist leadership to the Labour Party. Above all, the SEP insisted that the central issue facing the working class was the mobilisation of its collective strength against war, combining the systematic mobilisation of a general strike with the demand for a general election to bring down the Tory government, reeling from the forced resignation in July 2022 of Johnson over the "Partygate" scandal.

20. "The case for a general election: Expose the Tory-Labour conspiracy to drag Britain into World War III", published July 17, 2022, opposed efforts by Mick Lynch and other "left" trade union bureaucrats to safeguard an orderly transition to a Labour government by opposing a struggle to bring down the Tories and urging workers to wait for their chance to vote for Starmer. The statement argued:

We advance this call to bring into the open the issues that underlie the present crisis: 1) The relentless escalation of the war against Russia, even to the point of risking a nuclear war; 2) The criminal refusal to stop the endless transmission of the Sars-CoV-2 virus and allow mass infection and death; and 3) The ruthless assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class...

The SEP's demand for a general election does not imply a shred of support for Labour, or for a non-existent parliamentary solution. In the event of an election, we will not call for a Labour vote. We will warn workers that Labour is their enemy and must be opposed just as decisively as the Tories.

We will use the general election to make the case for strikes, mass protests and the organisation of a general strike to stop the war, force the adoption of a zero-COVID policy, and build support for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

21. The SEP's warning that without workers seizing control of their fate from the bureaucracy the resurgence of the class struggle would be betrayed proved correct. The result is that the average worker was paid practically the same in real terms at the end of 2023 than in 2010, with the bottom 40 percent earning less—as much as 17 percent less for the poorest tenth. More than one in three children and a quarter of adults are living in poverty as deprivation levels rise to the highest in the 21st century. This means 16 million people, including over 5 million children, with the cost-of-living crisis plunging 2 million more people into severe hardship since 2019. The consequences can be seen in record rates of long-term sickness, NHS waiting lists, school and hospital maintenance backlogs, the 3 million people dependent on foodbanks, and rising numbers reporting a struggle to heat their homes, keep the lights on and feed their families. The suppression of class struggle has also allowed an unparalleled enrichment of the oligarchy. There are now 165 billionaires in the UK and the average wealth of its top 10 wealthiest people is £21 billion, a near 50 percent increase over five years. And the combined wealth of the 350 wealthiest people and families is £795 billion, which is more than the annual GDP of Poland. The net worth of the 20 richest people has more than doubled in the last decade.

War, genocide and the election of the Starmer Labour government

22. The suppression of workers' struggles was essential in facilitating not only the continued accumulation of vast wealth at the apex of society, but the striving of the financial oligarchy to secure Britain's imperialist interests through political and military alliance with Washington. This is made all the more important by Brexit's undermining of London's economic and political usefulness to the US as its voice in Europe and counterweight to Germany and France. Britain faithfully backed every escalatory move in Ukraine under the Johnson premiership and his forced resignation unleashed a leadership contest dominated by former military figures and won by the rabid warmonger Liz Truss. But she too was swiftly deposed under pressure from the global markets for having announced unfunded tax cuts, and her replacement, Rishi Sunak, was unable to stem the growth of social and political opposition to austerity and war. Both Britain's ruling elite and Washington therefore viewed the Tory party as incapable of leading British imperialism into an escalating geopolitical firestorm, especially when faced with the eruption of mass opposition to Israel's Gaza genocide.

23. It was only once the strike wave was suppressed that the ruling class

could finally move to replace the deeply divided Tories, led by no less than five reviled prime ministers since 2016, without risking an intervention by the working class. Sunak was forced to call a snap general election for July 4 despite facing certain defeat, insisting that the central issue facing Britain was the need to combat "an axis of authoritarian states like Russia, Iran, North Korea and China." Starmer waged Labour's "country first, party second" election campaign after declaring his determination to wage war against Russia and to challenge China. His political credentials recommending him to the bourgeoisie were embodied in his endorsing Israel's "right to self-defence" and denouncing anti-Zionist protesters as extremists. He declared prior to the election, "The post-war era is over... This Labour Party is totally committed to the security of our nation. To our armed forces. And, importantly, to our nuclear deterrent."

The SEP's general election campaign

24. The Socialist Equality Party stood Thomas Scripps against Starmer in Holborn and St Pancras and Darren Paxton in Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire, on a manifesto declaring, "No to Gaza genocide and NATO war against Russia! Fight for a socialist alternative to Starmer's Labour Party! Build a socialist anti-war movement!" It called for the mass opposition to Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza to be made "the spearhead of a political struggle against the broader war aims of the UK, the United States and the other NATO imperialist powers" and for the building of a new anti-war movement through "an irrevocable break with the Labour Party." We rejected the lie that a vote for Labour was a vote for a "lesser evil" than the Tories, defining them as "a single party of war":

Starmer's pitch to the ruling class is that he can rely on his allies in the trade union bureaucracy to police and betray the working class and impose the dictates of the major corporations and banks. He can cite as proof the role played by the union bureaucracy in sabotaging the 2022-23 strike wave that at one point encompassed two million workers.

25. The SEP opposed calls by the Stop the War Coalition and the pseudo-left groups to limit opposition to Labour to a vote for a dozen anti-genocide protest candidates led by Jeremy Corbyn, alongside votes for Labour everywhere else. This would end, we warned, "with the formation of a government that will continue backing Israel and waging NATO's wars.". Our campaign focused on two political issues central to the political mobilisation of the working class for socialism: the political failure of the anti-Gaza genocide protests and of the broader anti-war movement, and the dead end represented by Corbynism and the call for a Labour Party Mark II.

Lessons of the Gaza protest and anti-war movement

26. Mass protests against the Gaza genocide have mobilised millions, sustained over an entire year and involving occupations on campuses expressing the radicalisation of a generation of young people. But the protests have failed to bring about an end to the genocide and the attack

on democratic rights. They have been dominated by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Stop the War Coalition, an amalgam of pseudo-left tendencies that advance a perspective articulating the interests of a layer of the petty-bourgeoisie frightened by the threat of war, but hostile to an independent struggle against that threat by the working class. First, they have limited the protests to attempts to pressure the British ruling class and governments who are the principal enablers of the genocide to call for a ceasefire. Second, they have separated the genocide in Gaza from the war in Ukraine and the history of decades of wars by British imperialism, above all in alliance with the US. This has undermined an understanding that the root cause of the Gaza genocide lies not in the choice of individual governments or politicians but in the objective crisis of world capitalism and an imperialist redivision of the world. Not just in Britain but in all countries, appeals to the ruling class and its institutions, including the United Nations and its bodies, have resulted in nothing but futile criticisms ignored by Israel and its imperialist backers.

27. Just as bankrupt are the advocates of a military victory for Russia or the development of a multipolar alliance of states led by China as a counterweight to US imperialism, such as George Galloway's Workers Party or Bund Sarah Wagenknecht in Germany. This perspective is bound up with appeals for a political alliance of "left and right", directed to those such as the fascist followers of Trump like Steve Bannon, against wars that do not serve the exclusive interests of their own national imperialism. There is nothing remotely anti-imperialist about the "Special Military Operation" launched by President Vladimir Putin in the interests of the Russian capitalist oligarchs who rose to power through the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the privatisation and plundering of the state assets nationalised through the 1917 October Revolution. Based on a "Great Russian" nationalist perspective, for years the Putin government acted on the belief that US imperialism would allow the Russian bourgeoisie a stake in the global economy and the right to exploit vast natural resources unmolested. Instead Russia faced the constant eastward expansion of NATO towards its borders, including the seizing of political control of Ukraine through the 2014 Maidan coup, now exercised through the fascist-backed Zelensky regime. Putin's invasion of Ukraine was a disastrously miscalculated attempt to pressure Washington to back down and recognise the national interests of Russian capitalism.

28. To extend any support for Putin's great Russian chauvinism is a political betrayal of the Russian, Ukrainian and international working class and a political gift to the apologists for NATO. A socialist opposition to NATO's war demands a struggle to unify Russian and Ukrainian workers against both Putin and Zelensky. To claim that China will peacefully supplant the US is to sow similar disorientation and passivity. The task at hand is to systematically mobilise the working class against the developing global war on a perspective of world socialist revolution, not to place bets on who will win it. If the working class does not advance its own socialist solution to the crisis, the ruling class solution of imperialist aggression and dictatorship will be imposed upon it.

No to Corbynism and the call for a Labour Party Mark II

29. During the general election and in its aftermath, the formation of a new party led by Corbyn has been advanced as a means of combating the genocide, war and austerity agenda of the Starmer government. This is a road to political defeat. Those who advance Corbyn's leadership against Starmer's party must avoid reference to his record of abject failure to fight the Blairites. The SEP waged a determined struggle against sowing illusions in Corbynism during the general election, explaining that

Starmer only became Labour leader because Corbyn faced down demands from workers and youth to drive out the Blairites and capitulated on all fundamental issues. This includes NATO membership, nuclear weapons, and the lie of "left antisemitism". In a polemic against Corbyn supporter Andrew Feinstein, the SEP insisted that the failure of Corbynism to provide a viable opposition to the rightward evolution of the Labour Party was not the result merely of poor leadership:

The development of transnational production and the global integration of finance and manufacturing has dramatically undermined the viability of the old trade unions and Stalinist and social democratic parties that were embedded in the nation state system, to which they all responded by junking their former reformist programmes.

30. Corbyn played the same role of policing opposition to Labour during the general election as he had in his time as Labour leader, standing as an independent in Islington North only after he was booted out of the party and running a highly circumscribed, localist campaign. Starmer's election victory was made possible by Corbyn ensuring that no mass party took shape to Labour's left, ending with a government securing only a 33.8 percent share of the national vote—a record low for an elected government—after haemorrhaging support in urban working-class conurbations and among the young and Muslim populations. A WSWS perspective "Build the socialist opposition to Starmer's right-wing government!" summarised:

Once again, Corbyn sat on the potential for a mass movement against the Labour Party. Touncing Labour's Praful Nargund, winning 50 percent more votes, he could have spearheaded a national movement against its candidates among workers and young people who instead voted anti-Tory and reluctantly for Starmer, looked to a disparate array of independents and Greens, or refused to vote.

It was, is and always will be, Corbyn's choice not to do so because the alpha and omega of his politics is to prevent any clash between the working class and his beloved Labour Party—an organisation with more than a century's history of betrayal of workers' struggles and aspirations. He maintains a personal following for this position by relying on the pragmatism of electoral politics and cynicism towards the possibility of overthrowing capitalism.

Such debilitating conceptions must be broken with. They play far more of a role in keeping the Starmers of the world in power than any of their own non-existent strengths.

31. Replying to a September 15 report of backroom discussions on possible plans to launch a new party under Corbyn's leadership, the SEP explained that this would be "an unprincipled amalgam of various bankrupt Labourite and pseudo-left groups, which only weeks ago were all campaigning for a Labour victory and based on a minimal programme of reforms that has yet to be agreed. And it will be led by someone so wedded to the Labour Party that he still hesitates to completely break from it after being witch-hunted for years as an antisemite, then expelled from its ranks." The SEP noted how:

The working class has, moreover, already had bitter experiences

with the type of supposedly alternative “broad left” party Corbyn’s pseudo-left supporters advocate: not the failed projects they cite in the UK such as Respect and Left Unity, but formations that succeeded in forming governments—Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Championed by the same social forces and built by Stalinist and pseudo-left tendencies, their betrayals in imposing austerity on the working class and waging war on behalf of NATO imperialism ended in disaster and collapse...

The essential motivation of those involved in the “new party” discussions is to police the inevitable confrontation developing between the Starmer government and the working class, to prevent a social explosion and confine workers to a parliamentary struggle for the election of a few candidates of protest.

The far-right danger and how to fight it

32. The anti-immigrant riots that erupted in Britain on July 30, culminating in fascist gangs setting fire to asylum-seeker hotels on August 4, came just two three weeks after the July 4 general election Labour fought promising that it would “stop the boats” carrying migrants across the Channel. The election also saw the anti-migrant Reform UK winning 14 percent of the vote—coming second in 98 constituencies, of which 89 saw it placed second to Labour in the party’s strongholds. Both developments were the product of the toxic atmosphere of nationalism and xenophobia created over decades by successive Labour and Conservative governments and the social despair engendered by endless austerity that the far-right exploits. The August 4 statement “Britain’s far-right riots: The class issues” explained:

Developments in Britain reflect global processes. In the United States there is the prospect of a fascistic presidency led by Donald Trump. In France, Marine Le Pen’s National Rally has emerged as a major political force, while in Germany the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is gaining support. Far-right governments rule in Italy, Hungary and Finland.

Such movements, cultivated for decades, are the outcome of the naked turn by the ruling class to militarism, war and austerity.

33. Opposing the far-right therefore entails not only the necessary defence of immigrants and Muslims from violence instigated by fascist thugs such as Tommy Robinson and egged on by Farage. Above all, it means a fight against the Starmer Labour government, its allies in the trade union bureaucracy and their agenda of austerity and war. “Mass protests erupt against UK’s far-right: The way forward”, published August 8, addressed the political perspective advanced by the Labour Party’s pseudo-left apologists grouped around Stand Up To Racism (SUTR). SUTR’s calls for a “United Front” of all “democratic forces” against fascism, led by the Labour “left” and the trade unions prevents any action being taken against root causes of the far-right’s growth:

Precluded by such an alliance is any fight to unify all workers, British and immigrant, in a struggle against the capitalist profit system, which is the root cause of nationalism and xenophobia.

Nor can there be any call for a political accounting with Starmer’s Labour government, or a warning that its introduction of repressive measures only strengthens the state apparatus on

which it must ultimately rely to police rising discontent in the working class.

The struggle against the COVID pandemic

34. The Socialist Equality Party continues to educate workers on the dangers posed by COVID-19, and to oppose the socially criminal “let-it-rip” policies pursued by the ruling class and its governments. Johnson was despised by millions for his obscene outburst in the autumn of 2020, “No more fucking lockdowns! Let the bodies pile high in their thousands.” But Johnson’s policy has been adopted by Labour, the Liberal Democrats and all the major parties. The ruling elite has declared the pandemic over, ditching every public health measure in place. This was facilitated by the trade unions allowing workers to be driven into unsafe workplaces, and Labour’s alliance with the Tories over the “back to work” policy and the premature reopening of schools. For the ruling class, what “living with the virus” really means is that nothing can be allowed to interfere with the profit making of the corporations, whatever the cost to the health and lives of the population.

35. As a result, official deaths from COVID-19 in the UK are around 15,000 a year and the overall total is approaching a quarter of a million. The latest wave is being fuelled by the XEC variant, leading to a spike in hospitalisations. And no one knows when a yet more easily transmissible or deadly mutation will emerge—nothing is in place to combat such a development. Additional to deaths is the terrible impact of Long COVID. Up to 2 million people are estimated to be suffering from the condition in the UK, leading to fatigue, shortness of breath, and long-term cognitive impairment. Estimates suggest that approximately 10 percent of all individuals who contract COVID-19 experience Long COVID and prevalence, like death, is closely linked to impoverishment and lower levels of vaccination.

The breakdown of the Earth’s climate and ecology

36. The pandemic is just one expression of the fact that a sustainable and healthy relationship between humanity and the natural world is incompatible with the market system, the profit motive and the relentless accumulation of capital. The enormous environmental footprint of these activities—from carbon pollution to land use—is massively increasing the rate of development of zoonotic diseases, the territorial spread of existing pathogens, and the severity and geographical reach of extreme weather like floods, storms, droughts and heatwaves, with devastating effects for human health and food production. The UK government, like all the imperialist governments, has no intention of taking the steps necessary to avert this catastrophe, including planned economy, the rapid dismantling of fossil fuelled infrastructure and production and their replacement by public services and amenities simultaneously more sustainable, accessible and democratic. Flagship British fossil fuel companies like BP and Shell, which have reaped record dividends in recent years from the fallout of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, have abandoned even the pretence of action on climate change. The imperialist ruling class’s real climate plan is to make the poorest around the world, especially in the oppressed countries of Africa, South America, South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, suffer the consequences of the financial and industrial oligarchy’s rampant overuse of the earth’s resources worth untold trillions. “Green capitalism” is an impossible fraud. The only social force

that can resolve the global climate and environmental catastrophe created by capitalism is the international working class.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and the independent political mobilisation of the working class

37. The International Committee of the Fourth International initiated the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in 2021 to establish the framework for new forms of independent, democratic and militant organizations of workers on an international scale. Corresponding to the global character of the working class, it represents the means through which workers internationally can share information and organise a united struggle against the transnational corporations. The necessary struggle by the rank-and-file against the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies takes on yet greater significance under a Labour government. Central to Starmer's pitch to the ruling class was his pledge to form a new Industrial Strategy Council and deliver "a real partnership between Government, business and unions", urging corporate heads to recognise that the confrontational approach of the outgoing Tory government, such as legislation heavily restricting strikes in key industries was counterproductive—as proved by the fact that it was ultimately the trade union leaders that suppressed industrial action and not the mobilisation of the state.

38. The January 6 WSWS Editorial Board statement "The working class, the fight against capitalist barbarism, and the building of the World Party of Socialist Revolution" makes a political warning:

There remains an immense gap between the advanced level of the objective crisis and the subjective comprehension of this crisis and its political implications in the consciousness of the working class. This gap finds expression, first and foremost, in the continued domination of the workers' struggles by the reactionary pro-imperialist trade union bureaucracies and their allies in the social democratic, ex-Stalinist and various forms of petty-bourgeois pseudo-left organizations.

In country after country, the struggles of workers were strangled by the pro-corporate and nationalist trade union apparatus, and mass protests have been smothered and shut down by various left and pseudo-left organizations that function as part of the political establishment.

39. The statement roots these betrayals in the objective role of the entire trade union bureaucracy—a conservative clique headed by general secretaries comfortably in the upper middle class, opposed to class confrontation and hostile to the interests of the workers they claim to represent—and the corporatist degeneration of the trade unions as analysed by Trotsky in his *The Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*, in which he posited as a "common feature in the development, or more correctly the degeneration, of modern trade union organizations in the entire world... their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power." Decades later the corporatist degeneration identified by Trotsky has assumed such monstrous proportions that the organizations presently described as "trade unions" bear, in practice, no relationship whatsoever to the historic meaning of the term. The task of the sections of the International Committee, the statement concluded, "is to assist the working class in the preparation of a full-scale insurrection of the rank and

file against the trade union bureaucracies, to develop new forms of militant rank and file organization in factories and workplaces to which all decision-making power will be transferred."

40. The work of the SEP in Britain in establishing the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) shows the immense potential for the independent industrial and political mobilisation of the working class. Amid Britain's strike wave, a key section of workers began a rebellion against the Communication Workers Union (CWU) bureaucracy and turned to the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* for leadership. Hundreds of workers sent reports, denouncing the CWU bureaucracy and calling for rejection of its pro-company deal with Royal Mail negotiated at arbitration body ACAS through the intervention of Labour's Lord Falconer. The PWRFC became a focal point of opposition to the CWU's betrayal, issuing statements by postal workers and timely exposures on all the central issues in the dispute and charting a road of struggle.

41. The work of the IWA-RFC, in opposing the onslaught on jobs, wages and conditions, demands a turn to political struggle by the working class. Driving the attacks in the workplace is a ruling-class agenda of trade and military war coupled with moves towards ever more authoritarian forms of rule. This can only be combatted by mobilising workers in the anti-war movement and in defence of democratic rights, including those of migrant workers and students.

The defence of Trotskyism and the fight to build a revolutionary leadership

42. A process of mass radicalisation is underway, especially among students and young people, centred on opposition to the Gaza genocide but extending far beyond it. But this must become a politically conscious movement for socialism. The central task of the Socialist Equality Party is therefore to reconnect the broad socialist, anti-imperialist sentiment of workers and young people with the political and theoretical heritage of Trotskyism, represented since 1953 by the International Committee of the Fourth International. The SEP must revive the Marxist conception of class as essential to any understanding of the world and the fight to change it, especially on the campuses through building the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). This takes place in opposition to the anti-Marxist nostrums of postmodernism, a form of subjective idealism, whose central purpose is to deny the revolutionary role of the working class, and identity politics, which asserts that race, gender and sexuality, as opposed to class, are the primary divisions in society. The promotion of such ideologies divides the working class while justifying the advancement of privileged layers within the framework of the profit-system and its institutions.

43. Writing on the founding of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), predecessor to the SEP in the UK, in 1959, the editorial board of its paper *The Newsletter* explained:

Marxism is not merely a theory, but a theory of human action, and first and foremost of class struggle. To be a Marxist is therefore not merely to study, but to study in order to be better equipped to fight and work on behalf of the working class.

An article in the SLL's theoretical journal *Labour Review*, published earlier that year in answer to the first writings of the "New Left", argued:

There is not a scrap of Marxism in any approach to class which does not have class conflict at its core.

...

Marxists... bear the task of helping the working class to a clearer consciousness of its position and the actions necessitated by that position. At its highest point, this means playing a part in the greatest task of this historical period: the establishment of the political independence of the working class. Such is the important function of theory, and of the political and organizational instruments based on theory.

44. Establishing the political independence of the working class can only be achieved by clarifying the critical experiences of the twentieth and first decades of the twenty-first century. This means above all an understanding of Stalinism and its counterrevolutionary betrayals of revolutionary struggles across the world, culminating in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the struggle of the Trotskyist movement to preserve the internationalist theoretical heritage of the Marxist movement. Aware that the crisis of capitalism is pushing young people to explore this history, the ideologues of the ruling class and its Stalinist and pseudo-left adjuncts have sought to pre-emptively discredit Trotskyism in their eyes. The ICFI waged a crushing defence of Trotsky against the biographical slanders of Robert Service, Ian Thatcher and Geoffrey Swain. Now new attacks have been launched by British academic John Kelly, formerly of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and Irish academic Aidan Beatty, who is aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America. They focus their fire on the ICFI's fight, as the contemporary Trotskyist movement, to mobilise the international working class for world socialist revolution.

45. Kelly, in his *The Twilight of World Trotskyism*, declares: "The Trotskyist-led revolutionary scenario, never enacted anywhere despite almost a century of effort, amounts to a tragic and wasteful misdirection of political energy and resources away from serious radical politics." He claims that the "weakness and failings of world Trotskyism" come back to its programmatic insistence that "Reforms are no longer possible: the choice is socialism or barbarism," which he calls "simplistic and groundless" and "conceptually naïve and empirically flawed." This is said under conditions of economic breakdown, soaring inequality, escalating war, the threat of planetary destruction, the victory of Trump and the global rise of the far-right. And it is the advocates of "serious radical politics" who Kelly praises, Corbyn, Sanders and their associates, that bare political responsibility for this situation.

46. This shared political mission is made clear by Beatty's concluding his *The Party is Always Right: The Untold Story of Gerry Healy and British Trotskyism* with an attack on the ICFI and *World Socialist Web Site* Chairman David North. North described Beatty's slanderous biography as "a crude diatribe against Trotskyism and its historic efforts to construct a revolutionary party rooted in Marxist theory and based on the working class." He explained, "Under conditions of an intensifying global crisis and a radicalization of the working class and students, the ruling elites—sensitive to emerging threats to their rule—fear the revival of interest in Marxism and the perspective of world socialist revolution."

47. The SEP and the IYSSE will take up the struggle against Beatty, Kelly and all attempts to cut students and young people off from the revolutionary traditions they must become familiar with. This political offensive must spearhead a broader effort to encourage a flourishing of Marxist culture and debate among young people. Together with Mehring Books, the *World Socialist Web Site* stands at the centre of this work, providing a daily Marxist analysis of world events, bringing the historical lessons and theoretical conquests of the socialist movement to bear on the class struggle, giving a voice to the international working class and taking up a sustained polemic against the pseudo-left. The pseudo-left

organisations are organically hostile to the interests of the working class. Tracing their origins to groups that broke from Trotskyism in the post-World War II period, capitulating to Stalinism, bourgeois-nationalism and social-democracy, they serve as the last line of defence of capitalism focusing their every effort on subordinating workers and youth to the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and opposing revolution in favour of pressuring the ruling class to carry out social reforms and a peaceful foreign policy. The pseudo-left speaks for an affluent layer of the middle class whose aim is to advance its own privileges in academia, the top echelons of the public sector and the trade union bureaucracy in return for their policing of the class struggle.

Not objectivism but revolutionary struggle

48. The revolutionary party is the decisive element in resolving the present crisis. The situation facing humanity is grave, but a powerful social force exists that can offer a way forward—the international working class. The revolutionary party is the mechanism through which the working class can act. Indeed, without understanding the transformative impact of the struggle for socialism by the revolutionary party, the situation would appear hopeless. The SEP and the ICFI not only analyses the deepening crisis of world imperialism in all its complex, contradictory and inter-connected forms, but intervenes to change the balance of forces in favour of the working class. Marxists strive to understand the world not as a form of objectivist contemplation, but to make this knowledge the basis of the revolutionary practice of the party and of the working class. For this reason, the growth of the party means not only a numerical accumulation of members, but the training and development of cadres capable of understanding and therefore withstanding the pressures generated by a period of crisis and of providing leadership to the working class as it is forced into struggle. "The growth of the mass movement of the working class imposes ever greater demands on members of the party," David North explained in his introduction to the 2023 SEP Summer School. "Meeting these challenges requires greater attention to the education of the party membership. The most important element of this education is raising the cadres' knowledge and understanding of the history of the Trotskyist movement."

49. The history represented by the ICFI is the concentrated record of the fight for socialist internationalism, extending over more than a century to the 1923 founding of the Left Opposition by Leon Trotsky to initiate the struggle against the emerging Stalinist bureaucracy's betrayal of the 1917 October Revolution. It encompasses all of the subsequent strategic experiences of the working class, including the lessons of the major revolutionary upheavals, defeats and betrayals of the 20th century. Through the protracted fight against Pabloism and other national-opportunist tendencies that sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into the camp of Stalinism and other hostile political forces—and the defeat of this pressure within its ranks through the 1985–86 split with the renegades of the Workers Revolutionary Party—the ICFI has defended the genuine socialist and internationalist perspective of Trotskyism. This is the only basis on which the working class can advance its interests against war, fascism, dictatorship, economic and ecological catastrophe.

50. The work of the SEP proceeds based on a recognition of what the ICFI has defined as the Fifth Phase in the history of the Trotskyist movement. David North explained:

This is the stage that will witness a vast growth of the ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution. The objective processes of

economic globalization, identified by the International Committee more than 30 years ago, have undergone a further colossal development. Combined with the emergence of new technologies that have revolutionized communications, these processes have internationalized the class struggle to a degree that would have been hard to imagine even 25 years ago. The revolutionary struggle of the working class will develop as an interconnected and unified world movement. The International Committee of the Fourth International will be built as the conscious political leadership of this objective socioeconomic process. It will counterpose to the capitalist politics of imperialist war the class-based strategy of world socialist revolution. This is the essential historical task of the new stage in the history of the Fourth International.



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