

Opening report to the Seventh Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (UK)

Chris Marsden
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Comrades, this Congress is tasked with determining the political perspective on which the Socialist Equality Party will fight to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class over the next period.

Congress will also select a leadership enjoying the confidence of the party cadre to put this struggle into practice. And, moreover, within the general framework set by the Congress resolution, analyse and determine our response to the challenges we will face in a rapidly maturing revolutionary crisis for British and world imperialism.

But first, I want to pay the SEP's respects to our late comrade Wolfgang Weber.

The character of any party, its political essence, is determined by its programme, articulating the interest of definite social forces, and the historical struggle waged in furtherance of that programme. In the case of the revolutionary party, that history of political struggle and the clarity of its perspective is of supreme importance.

But the revolutionary party is also its cadre, the individuals who, attracted to this perspective and history, step forward and assume the enormous responsibilities of fighting for the socialist liberation of humanity.

Such individuals come from disparate backgrounds, with different strengths and/or weaknesses, levels of education, and all the rest. But despite the necessary heterogeneous elements of a party whose membership represents a social force, the international working class, which is itself a complex and layered entity, 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.

Wolfgang was such a man and dedicated his entire adult life and considerable intellect to the cause of socialism.

Many of us here will have personal memories of Wolfgang, some will not. Mine are of a warm and generous man; quiet, restrained even, but possessed of a hard political core. There was never a meeting or party gathering at which Wolfgang spoke that you did not learn something important. And you would always be struck by the seriousness with which he conducted himself, and his deeply held conviction that everything depended on the education of party members—so they could wage the necessary fight against Stalinism, social democracy, Pabloism and all the political agencies of imperialism.

I won't say more because comrades will have read the wonderful biographical tribute to Wolfgang by comrades Uli and Christoph. I will simply ask for a minute's silence for a valued and universally respected comrade.

The spiralling danger of a Third World War and Starmer's right-wing government

As can be seen from the agenda, Tom Scripps will follow this opening report by moving the draft resolution. However, I want to register my support here for the entire thrust of the draft resolution before making some remarks indicating issues that must be strengthened in the present draft.

Indeed, the first of these is made necessary simply by dint of developments that took place after it was distributed—the dramatic escalation of the war in Ukraine by US President Joe Biden, with the full support of Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government. But this can be accomplished with relative ease precisely because the axis of the draft resolution is its outlining of a socialist struggle against war.

Naturally, especially given the time of drafting, in the initial sections we focused more on the political earthquake in the United States and the impact Trump's election will have on British, European and world politics. This mostly stands, although it must be said that it appears differences over war in Ukraine are more amenable to some form of agreement than the Democrats and European powers initially thought. And the issue is being posed more as what must the Europeans do to both secure an agreement with Trump and assume their responsibility to lead the war effort against Russia.

But we must now make abundantly clear that allowing Ukraine to target Russia with NATO-supplied missiles has taken the danger of world war to a new pitch of intensity, and that even before Trump takes office escalation not negotiation is the order of the day. And Russia's countermeasures are already being taken amid discussions of European troops being sent to Ukraine and the circumstances in which NATO's Article 5 on mutual defence may be triggered.

We can base these changes on the analysis already developed on the *World Socialist Web Site*, including several articles produced on the British response by ourselves.

As we explained in "Stop Starmer's escalating war against Russia! Build a socialist anti-war movement", by agreeing to Ukraine firing Storm Shadow cruise missiles into Russian territory, Starmer has made a de facto declaration of war without so much as a debate in parliament because British imperialism depends on its military-political alliance with the US and will seek to maintain this now and going forward.

I quoted Foreign Secretary David Lammy on this in an earlier article, who said, "What I do know about Donald Trump is that he doesn't like losers and he doesn't want to lose; he wants to get the right deal for the American people. And he knows that the right deal for the American people is peace in Europe and that means a sustainable peace—not Russia achieving its aims and coming back for more in the years ahead."

Starmer can act as he does because parliament is populated by MPs who function as a single party of war. And in doing so he has placed the British people under direct threat of Russian retaliation—with Putin insisting that there are currently no ways of counteracting its new missile that can reach anywhere in Europe. Amid a massive attack on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, he has now warned he will respond with "all the means of

destruction at Russia's disposal" if Ukraine receives nuclear weapons from the US.

Yet all talk is still of escalation and not backing down from a war that is being lost—either in the name of a just peace or more simply not letting Putin win.

Poland is being praised for spending at least €2.5 billion on its border defence system, including building a sky shield system akin to Israel's "Iron Dome", and for spending 4.7 percent of its GDP on the military; and Germany for its *Zeitenwende* ("turning point") of an immediate €100 billion investment to address gaps in munitions and equipment.

So what does this mean for the rest of Europe, with Britain only spending 2.3 percent of GDP, amid complaints that the Royal Navy cannot deploy an aircraft carrier group without relying on US and allied ships and aircraft; the army is unable to field a full division of 15,000 soldiers from its 70,000-strong force and lacking ammunition to fight for more than a month; and the Royal Air Force only has about two dozen combat-ready Typhoons? The demand is already for 3 and 3.5 percent of GDP for defence, requiring attacks on the working class of a scale never seen in anyone's lifetime.

Massive social inequality and the deeply unpopular policies of war were the objective basis for the victory of Trump. And these changes are already destabilising Europe. We note the fall of the German government and, with the looming no confidence vote in France, over a savage austerity budget, Europe's two major powers are in deep political crisis just as their programme of welfare destruction and mass job cuts in auto, steel and other essential industries to meet the demands of trade and military war is being rolled out.

The second change is to bring together the depiction of the Starmer government to make clear just how right-wing it is and just how vital it also is for the working class to wage a struggle against it and build our party.

This, too, is already a thread running through the entire present draft. But this change in presentation will make clearer still the central role we assign to this issue—which distinguishes us from the Corbynites and the entire gamut of the pseudo-left.

Opposing Labour as a party of war is the fundamental axis on which the working class must base itself. But war necessitates social reaction all along the line. And we can make this clear with a carefully framed depiction of the assault on democratic rights accompanying Labour's support for Israel's genocide and its spearheading of NATO's anti-Russian aggression, coupled with its assault on the welfare state in the cause of ending the "bulging benefits bill blighting our society", its privatisation of the National Health Service and the sickening turn to anti-migrant measures that saw Starmer raving yesterday, giving succour to every far-right thug from Farage to Tommy Robinson, about the Tories running a deliberate "open borders experiment".

We must make this clear—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.

The redivision of the world and the anti-war record of the International Committee of the Fourth International

The draft ends by insisting, "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," which "will witness a vast growth of the

ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution." This is a necessary shorthand in such a resolution, but I want to make some remarks here that I hope will help guide discussion over the next days and, in this context, introduce the final issue that must be politically strengthened in the resolution.

How did we arrive at the definition of the fifth stage and what is its relationship to the historical perspective of our movement? Ultimately, we are addressing a fundamental transformation in social and therefore political relations rooted in the present stage of the crisis of world imperialism—a crisis driven by the impact of globalisation on the fundamental contradictions within capitalism we identify in point 10 of the draft:

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 globalization has also vastly strengthened 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.

Let me go more deeply into this issue.

In his preface to *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990–2016*, published July 2016, David North began by explaining, "The International Committee does not possess a crystal ball. But its work is informed by a Marxist understanding of the contradictions of American and world imperialism. Moreover, the Marxist method of analysis examines events not as a sequence of isolated episodes, but as moments in the unfolding of a broader historical process."

Regarding this historical process in which the present crisis of world imperialism is characterised above all by the eruption of wars of conquest, he identified as a starting point: "[T]he International Committee interpreted the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989–90, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, as an existential crisis of the entire global nation-state system, as it emerged from the ashes of World War II."

And secondly, "[T]he ICFI anticipated that the breakdown of the established postwar equilibrium would lead rapidly to a resurgence of imperialist militarism."

He noted that as far back as August 1990, the ICFI wrote of the Bush administration's first war against Iraq:

It marks the beginning of a new imperialist redivision of the world. The end of the postwar era means the end of the postcolonial era. As it proclaims the "failure of socialism," the imperialist bourgeoisie, in deeds if not yet in words, proclaims the failure of independence. The deepening crisis confronting all the major imperialist powers compels them to secure control over strategic resources and markets. Former colonies, which had achieved a degree of political independence, must be resubjugated. In its brutal assault against Iraq, imperialism is giving notice that it intends to restore the type of unrestrained domination of the backward countries that existed prior to World War II.

North noted the great historical irony of the emergence of the United States as the dominant imperialist power, amid the catastrophe of World

War I, coinciding with the outbreak of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the successful overthrow of capitalism in October by the Bolsheviks. That is, “Just as the United States was striving to establish its position as the arbiter of the world’s destiny, it faced a challenge, in the form of the Bolshevik Revolution, not only to the authority of American imperialism, but also to the economic, political, and even moral legitimacy of the entire capitalist world order.”

Despite Stalinism’s betrayal of global revolutionary struggles and anti-imperialist movements, the very existence of a regime that arose out of a socialist revolution had politically radicalizing impacts throughout the world, including the Chinese revolution in 1949, which all acted as a break on US imperialism’s predatory global ambitions: “The existence of the Soviet Union and an anticapitalist regime in China deprived the United States of the possibility of unrestricted access to and exploitation of the human labour, raw materials, and potential markets of a large portion of the globe, especially the Eurasian land mass.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, combined with the restoration of capitalism in China following the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989, was therefore a key turning point. It was seen by the American ruling class as an opportunity to repudiate the compromises of the post-World War II era, and to carry out a restructuring of global geopolitics to secure the unrestrained hegemony of the United States in an unprecedented “unipolar moment”.

But, as North insisted, “Even at the height of its power, such an immense project was well beyond the capacities of the United States”. In reality:

The belligerent response of the United States to the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union reflected the weakness, not the strength, of American capitalism. The overwhelming support within the ruling elite for a highly aggressive foreign policy arose from the delusion that the United States could reverse the protracted erosion of its global economic position through the deployment of its immense military power.

David then goes through the confirmation of this estimation provided by the disasters of the first Gulf War, the wars unleashed by the break-up of Yugoslavia, the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 that began the “War on Terror,” Iraq in 2003 and Libya and the proxy war in Syria. He summarises:

“The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China.”

In 2016, North concluded:

Not since the end of World War II has there existed so great a danger of world war. The danger is heightened by the fact that the level of popular awareness of the threat remains very limited.

The progressive development of a globally integrated world economy is incompatible with capitalism and the nation-state system. If war is to be stopped and a global catastrophe averted, a new and powerful mass international movement, based on a

socialist program, and strategically guided by the principles of revolutionary class struggle, must be built.”

The publication of North’s May Day speeches in *Sounding the Alarm* illuminates this analysis and its development in the decade between 2014 and 2024, with an article published in April 2014 warning:

“Those who believe that war with China and Russia is an impossibility—that the major imperialist powers would not risk war with nuclear powers—are deluding themselves. The history of the twentieth century, with its two devastating world wars and its innumerable and very bloody localized conflicts, has provided sufficient evidence of the risks the imperialist ruling classes are prepared to take. Indeed, they are prepared to risk the fate of all humanity and the planet itself. One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I and seventy-five years after the start of World War II, the struggle against the danger of a third imperialist cataclysm confronts the international working class.”

And as Tom Mackaman summarises in the introduction to the volume: “The central theme of North’s speeches is that the struggle against militarism and war is and must be revolutionary, i.e., that only through the overthrow of capitalism by the working class in a world socialist revolution can the drive toward catastrophe be stopped. There is no other way.”

The decade of socialist revolution

On this crucial issue, the necessary revolutionary response to the threat of war, I want to summarise the analysis contained in the 2020 New Year statement, “The decade of socialist revolution begins.”

David and Joe Kishore pose the question, “What, in fact, were the principal characteristics of the last ten years?” And the most important of these characteristics are identified as:

The institutionalization of unending military conflict and the growing threat of nuclear world war

The movement toward a Third World War, which would threaten mankind with extinction, cannot be halted by humanitarian appeals. War arises out of the anarchy of capitalism and the obsolescence of the nation-state system. Therefore, it can be stopped only through the global struggle of the working class for socialism.

...

The breakdown of democracy

The extreme aggravation of class tensions and the dynamic of imperialism are the real sources of the universal breakdown of democratic forms of rule...

The preparations for war, involving massive expenditures and requiring the accumulation of unprecedented levels of debt, snuff the air out of democracy. In the final analysis, the costs of war must be imposed upon the working people of the world. The burdens will encounter resistance by a population already incensed by decades of sacrifice. The response of the ruling elites will be the intensification of their efforts to suppress every form of

popular dissent.

...

The aftermath of the 2008 crash and the crisis of capitalism

Underlying all other aspects of the social and political situation is the malignant growth of extreme social inequality—the inevitable and intended consequence of all the measures adopted by the ruling class following the economic and financial crisis of 2008.

...

The growth of the international working class and the global class struggle.

The objective conditions for socialist revolution emerge out of the global crisis... the dominant and most revolutionary feature of the class struggle is its international character, rooted in the global character of modern-day capitalism. Moreover, the movement of the working class is a movement of the younger generation and, therefore, a movement that will shape the future.

The statement lists among the key features of the class struggle in the modern epoch the massive numerical growth of the proletariat—not only in Asia and Africa where huge mega cities have sprung up—but also the proletarianization in the imperialist centres of vast layers of those who would have previously considered themselves middle class, and the huge influx of migrant labour into the US and Europe.

And finally, the document cites how modern communications technology and transnational production have connected workers together in a manner unprecedented in world history, allowing workers and youth to coordinate their strikes and protests across nations and national borders.

The final point that is stressed is “The role of revolutionary leadership”. The growth of the working class and the emergence of class struggle on an international scale is impacting on how workers see the world, including an appreciation of the commonality of their problems, especially the massive growth of social inequality.

The statement insists that these fundamental shifts create the objective basis for socialist revolution, but only the objective basis: “However, the spontaneous struggles of workers and their instinctive striving for socialism are, by themselves, inadequate. The transformation of the class struggle into a conscious movement for socialism is a question of political leadership.”

In this context the statement reviews how all the alternatives to Marxism, concocted by the representatives of the affluent middle class, have been systematically discredited, including the new forms of “left populism” promoted in Europe, including Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, and Corbynism, which it says “peddled the illusion of a revival of the Labour Party as an instrument of anti-capitalist struggle,” but which “proved in the end to be synonymous with political cowardice and prostration before the ruling class.”

In addition, “The trade unions, which have long served as mechanisms for the suppression of the class struggle, have been exposed as agents of the corporations and the state.”

This section ends by emphasising:

A vast political and social differentiation has taken place between the working class and an international tendency of politics, the pseudo-left, which is based on sections of the affluent upper middle class who purvey the politics of racial, gender and sexual identity. The politics of the upper middle class seeks access to and a redistribution of some of the wealth sloshing about within the top 1 percent. They wallow in their obsessive fixation on the individual, as a means of leveraging ‘identity’ into positions of power and privilege, while ignoring the social interests of the vast

majority.

The statement concludes by outlining “The tasks of the International Committee of the Fourth International”:

The masses, accumulating experience in the course of struggle, are undergoing a profound change in their social and political orientation. It is in the context of this revolutionary process that the fight for socialist consciousness will develop.

The new decade of social revolution brings with it a new stage in the history of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The practice of the revolutionary movement is decisive. The resolution of the Socialist Equality Party (US) National Congress in 2018 explained:

“An evaluation of the objective situation and realistic appraisal of political possibilities, which excludes the impact of the intervention of the revolutionary party, is utterly alien to Marxism. The Marxist revolutionary party does not merely comment on events, it participates in the events that it analyzes, and, through its leadership in the struggle for workers’ power and socialism, strives to change the world”.

...

The turn must now be to the working class, to the active intervention in every manifestation of the opposition of workers and youth to inequality, war and dictatorship. There must be tireless work to raise the political level, to create a cadre in the factories and in the schools, to explain the lessons of history and the nature of capitalism. There will be no shortage of people determined to fight for socialism.

But this determination must be armed with a strategy that unifies the struggles of the working class in a worldwide movement for socialism.

Marxism versus objectivism

Comrades, one question that came up in the branch discussions on the draft resolution was that the term objectivism is not specifically defined. I must say that the entire draft is animated by the struggle against objectivism in the spirit outlined here, but this can certainly be made more explicit.

To further this discussion, I draw attention to the points made by comrade North against Alex Steiner in *Marxism, History and Socialist Consciousness*, under the heading “What is objectivism?” North notes that Steiner accuses the ICFI of a descent onto objectivism and pragmatism and a turn away from dialectics. In response, North outlines the Marxist method of analysis employed by the ICFI:

The real issue is that you do not agree with the International Committee’s insistence that the fight for socialism requires the development within the working class of both a profound knowledge of history—particularly that of the socialist movement itself—and as precise and concrete an understanding as possible (by means of ever-more exact conceptual approximations) of the objective movement of the world capitalist system in all its complex, contradictory and inter-connected forms. What you refer to falsely as “objectivism” is the Marxist striving to reflect

accurately in subjective thought the law-governed movement of the objective world of which social man is a part, and to make this knowledge and understanding the basis of revolutionary practice...

Your usage of the word “objectivism” is incorrect and reflects a basic disagreement with materialism. For Marxists, objectivism denotes a one-sided and abstract approach to the study of social phenomena that excludes all consideration of the activity of the conscious forces—that is, social classes and related political tendencies—that are critical elements in the objective process itself. As Lenin explained in his classic explanation of the difference between Marxism and objectivism:

“The objectivist speaks of the necessity of a given historical process; the materialist gives an exact picture of the given social-economic formation and of the antagonistic relations to which it gives rise. When demonstrating the necessity for a given series of facts, the objectivist always runs the risk of becoming an apologist for these facts: the materialist discloses the class contradictions and in so doing defines his standpoint. The objectivist speaks of ‘insurmountable historical tendencies’; the materialist speaks of the class which ‘directs’ the given economic system, giving rise to such and such forms of counteraction by other classes... materialism includes partisanship, so to speak, and enjoins the direct and open adoption of the standpoint of a definite social group in any assessment of events. [*Collected Works*, Volume 1 (Moscow, 1972), pp. 400-01, emphasis in the original]”

As I [DN] explained last summer, “Marxism, as a method of analysis and materialist world outlook, has uncovered laws that govern socio-economic and political processes. Knowledge of these laws discloses trends and tendencies upon which substantial historical ‘predictions’ can be based, and which allow the possibility of intervening consciously in a manner that may produce an outcome favorable to the working class.”

That, comrades, is what we must do and what the draft resolution does.

On this issue, I also want to address myself to the online meeting interviewing David on *Sounding the Alarm* and *The Logic of Zionism*. David is asked about the suicide of Aaron Bushnell and the deep political pessimism that led the likes of Chris Hedges to celebrate it.

David replied:

We thought it was necessary to counter this pessimistic response, this highly individualistic response with a perspective. We don’t want young people to emulate this sort of tragic and essentially hopeless response to political events. The world today is producing endless causes for legitimate outrage, moral outrage. If you are not angry and if you aren’t repulsed by the crimes being committed by governments, which are being committed by the leaders of capitalist parties, by the debased level of culture, the glorification of every form of backwardness and violence, well, you’re not going to make your way to socialism.

Socialism isn’t just a purely intellectual response. It has a profound and legitimate and necessary moral and ethical foundation, though the Marxists explain the moral and the ethical within a materialist framework. We’re angry over these events, and we know that young people particularly feel the strong sense of outrage.

David said that his generation felt the same outrage over the crimes of US imperialism, but “We were fortunate to encounter a political

perspective which enabled us to focus and direct that outrage politically and effectively”.

He continues, and I think this is essential to our approach to the present political situation:

It’s easy to be a pessimist. After all, so many terrible things are happening. It’s easy to say, well, terrible things are happening, and nothing but terrible things will continue to happen. I think a more thoughtful and indeed scientific approach to reality is one which sees within any series of events, even the most terrible, the potential for a counter reaction.

Revolutionary optimism isn’t a sort of Panglossian happiness—Oh, everything will work out well. No, we’re very aware that things can work out terribly. But revolutionary optimism identifies within any given objective situation the conflicting social forces. And one poses the question, does there exist within this existing situation a potential for a socialist transformation? And it does not exist because socialism is a better and more moral idea, but because socialism arises as a possibility out of the development of the existing contradictions of the capitalist mode of production and the presence within world society of a revolutionary force...

That the working class was oppressed was recognized by advanced thinkers even before Marx. But what was original in Marxism was, first of all, of course, the ability to explain the economic dynamics of that oppression. And also to demonstrate that the working class was not only an oppressed class: it was a revolutionary class. Marx himself said that his principal achievement in the realm of political thought was to demonstrate that the outcome of this oppression would be the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Now that insight is of such immense importance that, yes, there’s a tremendous amount of confusion that prevails among workers. How could there not be? Look at all the lies they’re told. Look at the nature of our media, the backwardness of its cultural life, when one has often the impression that nothing frightens the bourgeoisie more than the fear that somewhere, someplace, people are thinking.

What we need to focus attention on is always to pose the question: “Does there in all of this exist a social force that can change the situation?” And that is the working class. Whatever the present level of confusion, the working class can be won to an international socialist perspective, and that possibility is lodged in the actual unfolding struggles of the working class.

We live in a period of, and we’re witnessing, a growth of social struggle. The working class is going to make plenty of experiences with Trump and his crew. We are continuously engaged in the struggle of workers. The *World Socialist Web Site* is directed toward the struggles of the working class, not just in the United States, but on a world scale. We’ve developed the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-file Committees whose aim is to transfer power out of the hands of the reactionary bureaucracies to the shop floor and to create forms of struggle which will be effective.

That is a perspective and the possibility for its success lies not just in our individual determination as socialists, though that is a substantial factor, but in the fact that the socialist perspective corresponds to objective reality.

And finally, from that presentation, a warning:

Optimism, which I've spoken in support of, is not intended to suggest that we have forever to accomplish this. 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. 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.

The fight for Trotskyism

That is our approach. And this is why I want to close by emphasising the importance of another section of the draft resolution which we make clear is vital in winning the working class, the younger generation in particular, to the party and its revolutionary perspective.

The draft resolution notes that assimilating the history of the Trotskyist movement is the precondition for rebuilding a mass socialist movement in the working class and raises in this context the attack waged on the history of the Trotskyist movement by John Kelly and Aidan Beatty.

We explain, "They focus their fire on the ICFI's fight, as the contemporary Trotskyist movement, to mobilise the international working class for world socialist revolution". Their intention is to defend the capitalist order by walling students and young people off from the revolutionary traditions they must become familiar with. In Beatty's case this is done by trying to bury the ICFI under a mountain of slanders—centred on the portrayal of Gerry Healy as a liar and a thug and claiming that both these crimes and his subsequent abuses were all facilitated by the undemocratic essence of Trotskyism as a form of extreme Bolshevism.

This direct attack on the ICFI is a development on from the earlier and related attack on Trotsky himself by Ian Thatcher, Geoffrey Swain and Robert Service. We described their works as a "preemptive attack" on Trotskyism, in that instance directly at the person of Trotsky himself. Now we have another form of pre-emptive biography—I use the term loosely—targeting Healy as the long-time leader of the International Committee of the Fourth International and then ending with a sustained attack on David North, the Socialist Equality Party and the contemporary ICFI.

Though points are made about "Trotskyist groups" in general, we are now identified as the evil that must be exorcised. And this is a task that earns Beatty the support of not just the explicit anti-Trotskyists of his Democratic Socialists of America but of Steiner, Gerry Downing, and assorted scoundrels whose political vocation is waging war on the ICFI in the service of the labour and trade union bureaucracy.

We say in the draft that the struggle to arm the working class and youth with a revolutionary perspective "must include a particular focus on Healy and the British Trotskyist's defence of a revolutionary internationalist perspective in the crucial period following World War II. Drawing the lessons from the years in which Healy led the fight for Trotskyism is essential in the political arming of the working class, just as is a comprehensive understanding of the struggle waged by the ICFI against the subsequent political degeneration of Healy and the Workers Revolutionary Party out of which the SEP in Britain emerged."

This is correct, but we have to say more clearly still that the political

work of the SEP will centre on the defence of our history from this attack and clarifying why the attack is driven by the recognition by the academic and the political bagmen of imperialism of the danger that the ICFI is supremely well placed to secure our leadership of the working class. The resolution makes clear that we have and will continue to polemicise against all our opponents, but this is a special and overriding responsibility that we will meet.

I want to here commend Comrade Tom Scripps on his excellent contribution to this struggle in the form of today's "Slander vs. biography: Aidan Beatty's falsification of Gerry Healy's family and childhood in a decade of rebellion and civil war". As was stressed in the intervention by comrades David, Tom Mackaman and Joe Kishore, we will not let a single lie about our movement go unchallenged and we have not finished with Mr Beatty.

In closing this introduction, I want to make one additional point.

The changes we will make to the draft will necessarily impact on the sections presenting the lessons of the past two years of political struggle by the SEP in Britain and its lessons. Yes, they are too long at the moment, but essential nevertheless. These are events that have helped shape the thinking of millions of workers and youth and understanding them is vital for the political development of a revolutionary cadre in Britain. And without going into detail, these passages make two things clear.

Firstly, the SEP never made a wrong call. Our record is exemplary. We identified the key political problems facing workers and proposed the necessary solutions. We conducted our work as a sustained polemic with the Corbynites and the pseudo-left, targeting the necessary revolt against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

And secondly, and this is something harder to put down on paper. But I began with it and I will end with it. This intensive struggle was waged indefatigably by our cadre—the human resources of the socialist revolution. Every member here can take pride in what we have accomplished, not to pat ourselves on the back but to understand that we have placed ourselves in a very strong position to challenge for political leadership. We have big tasks before us, but we possess powerful political resources that belie our present size and will make this party the focus of the necessary political realignment of the working class on the axis of socialist internationalism.



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