

Socialist Equality Party (UK) holds First National Congress

By Julie Hyland
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The Socialist Equality Party (UK) held its First National Congress in Manchester, on November 17-19, 2012. The congress unanimously adopted four resolutions: “The Political Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party,” “The Socialist Equality Party and the Struggle Against Imperialist War,” “Defend Julian Assange and WikiLeaks,” and “Build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.”

Delegates attended from across the country. Also present were delegates from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, France and Germany. The SEP had sought a visa for a delegate to attend the congress from the Sri Lankan SEP, but the visa and passport did not arrive in time. This is the second time the authorities have effectively prevented the participation of Sri Lankan comrades in a British congress and the SEP in Britain is protesting most strongly.

The congress elected a new National Committee, the leading body of the party. The incoming National Committee re-elected Chris Marsden as national secretary and Julie Hyland as assistant national secretary.

In his opening remarks, Marsden placed the First National Congress of the SEP in the UK in the context of the congresses that had been held over the last year in Australia, Germany and the United States. These congresses had been critical in developing and sharpening the political line of the International Committee of the Fourth International and orienting its sections to the central theoretical, political and practical tasks posed by the crisis of global capitalism.

Marsden urged support for the first resolution, which explained that the bourgeoisie in every part of the world is seeking to extricate itself from the systemic breakdown of the profit system through a social counterrevolution aimed at a radical restructuring of economic and class relations. This was most clearly manifested in Greece, where conditions not seen since the Nazi occupation are re-emerging. But these conditions are by no means confined to Greece or the so-called PIGS countries, including Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Spain.

Rather, as the resolution explains, “these countries set the

benchmark for a brutal transformation in conditions of life for working people that is being effected throughout Europe, the realisation of which can only be achieved through police-military violence and authoritarian forms of rule.”

It was this new reality that had to determine the orientation of workers and youth in Britain, Marsden stressed. Central to this is an examination of two of the most critical experiences made by the working class over the last period, in Egypt and Greece, and, in particular, the role of the pseudo-left organizations such as the Revolutionary Socialists and SYRIZA in subordinating the working class to the bourgeoisie—either in the form of support for the Muslim Brotherhood or the defence of the European Union.

It is on this basis that the resolution states bluntly, “The pseudo-left tendencies are neither left nor socialist, but constitute a tendency within bourgeois politics.”

The dangers involved were highlighted in Greece, Marsden said. “Under conditions in which popular opposition has been confined to strikes and protests, and the ‘left’ is associated with support for the EU and maintaining social order, the fascists can pose as the opponents of the bankers, Brussels and the Greek political establishment... Outside of the independent political mobilisation of working people, there will be a similar growth of the far right throughout Europe, as is already the case in Hungary, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and France.”

There will be an enormous development of the class struggle in the next period, Marsden stressed, but everything depends upon the work of the SEP—the only tendency that advances a socialist perspective for the working class based on the fight for international workers’ unity and the formation of workers’ governments—to recruit broad layers of workers and youth in advance of the class battles to come.

The resolution on the SEP and the fight against imperialist war was introduced by Jordan Shilton, who explained that the congress was taking place as the Israeli government, backed by Washington, was conducting a bloody bombardment of Gaza. This was of a piece with the US-led campaign to destabilize Syria and depose the Assad regime

as part of the advanced preparations for war against Iran.

The resolution explains that the long-term strategy of re-establishing imperialist control of the Middle East has been dramatically stepped up in response to the initial stirrings of a revolutionary movement of the working class in the region, leading to the overthrow in the spring of 2011 of Washington's client regimes headed by Ben Ali and Mubarak in Tunisia and Egypt.

Whereas the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq had been conducted under the banner of the "war on terror," in Libya and Syria the imperialist powers were not only allying themselves with autocratic Islamist regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar from which Al Qaeda sprang, "but are colluding with militias linked directly to it."

Opposition to these criminal conspiracies finds no political outlet, Shilton said. Responsibility for this rests with pseudo-left organizations such as the British Socialist Workers Party. Condemning "knee-jerk anti-imperialism," they lined up behind the intervention against Libya and are doing the same in Syria. The task of developing a mass anti-war movement is the responsibility of the ICFI and its sections, to be carried out on the basis of a fight to mobilize the working class on the programme of world socialist revolution.

The resolution "Defend Julian Assange and WikiLeaks" was moved by Paul Mitchell, who explained that this must be the spearhead of a broader campaign in defence of democratic rights. He gave a detailed presentation on WikiLeaks' efforts to expose US war crimes in Iraq and elsewhere and the resulting campaign to frame Assange on trumped-up charges of rape, with the ultimate aim of extraditing him to America to face espionage charges.

The US, Britain and Sweden were being aided in this campaign by the so-called liberals and pseudo-lefts who slander anyone who defends Assange as a "rape denier" and who support his extradition to Sweden.

The resolution states: "The campaign against Assange has provided a devastating indictment of identity politics based on gender, race and sexual preference. Long held up as a progressive alternative to the supposedly crude class-based politics of socialism, events have demonstrated the essentially right-wing character of the fixation on lifestyle politics. It has provided the chief mechanism through which a privileged and self-satisfied middle class layer has been integrated into the structures of official bourgeois politics."

The final resolution adopted by the congress, introduced by Zach Reed, elaborates a programme for building the student and youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party. Providing an overview of the common situation facing young people across the globe, the resolution reviews the various forms in which young people have sought to oppose

these conditions.

The resolution stresses that the work of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality is based on the fight to unite youth and the best elements among the students with the working class, the principal revolutionary force in society. This involves a consistent struggle for revolutionary Marxism against the promotion of post-modernism and neo-anarchism, especially, but not exclusively, on the campuses, and the bankrupt politics of petty-bourgeois protest.

The congress voted to change the name of the organization from the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) to the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). With this change, delegates stressed the need to broaden the appeal of the IYSSE to all sections of youth.

Delegates concluded the congress with a commitment to make a determined turn to the working class to build the Socialist Equality Party based on the four resolutions discussed and adopted unanimously.

Concluding the meeting, Marsden said, "We are aware we have big tasks ahead of us. We are confident that we can carry out those tasks because we have the cadre, the programme, the history. We are going to turn out to the working class and the youth in the most forceful way that we can, confident that this will reap a response within ever broader layers of the population in Britain, in Europe and internationally."

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