

Report to the Third National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (UK)

By Chris Marsden
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Below is the opening report to the Socialist Equality Party (UK) Third National Congress, given October 28, 2012 by SEP National Chairman Chris Marsden.

Comrades, the task before this party congress is to lay down the strategic political axis of our work for the coming period: the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) as the revolutionary centre of opposition to imperialist war through the overthrow of capitalism.

The elaboration of perspective does not mean predicting precisely what will happen over the next months. That is impossible under any circumstances and particularly now, when world events are moving at such an accelerated pace. As we found while drafting the resolution, the more you try and do this, the more quickly what you have written becomes redundant.

Perspective, as was discussed at the recent congress of the SEP in the United States, means determining where we are in the unfolding revolutionary crisis of capitalism and ensuring that our practices as a party meet the requirements of that objective crisis.

We must reveal the central tendencies of development, what is essential in the political situation, and base ourselves on that rather than an impressionistic response to this or that event. Or, it must be stressed, on how the world situation is presently understood by the working class. Indeed, in David North's lecture in Frankfurt, he notes the "vast chasm between the advanced preparations for military conflict, which could involve the use of nuclear weapons, and public consciousness of the extent of the danger."

North stresses, "The great challenge that confronts Marxists is the political preparation of a vanguard of advanced workers that can direct the coming mass movement of the working class toward the conquest of political power," asking, "Of what does this preparation consist?"

He responds by drawing attention to Lenin's explanation in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* that "Marxism had discovered 'the objective logic' of the economic laws that determine the evolution of social being. Therefore, he wrote: 'The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt to it one's social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.'"

That was written just five years before the nationalist betrayal of the German Social Democracy and the Second International as World War I began.

Lenin, North states, responded by rallying the revolutionary internationalists in Europe and throughout the world and did so in a political and theoretical struggle against Kautsky, who sought to conceal the objective causes of the war. Lenin's theoretical work between 1914 and 1917 "uncovered the objective causes of the imperialist war and of the growth of opportunism within the Second International" so as to

"establish the possibility of aligning the consciousness and practice of the Russian and international working class with the objective processes that were leading to revolution. The correct alignment of objective reality and the social consciousness of the working class was realized in the conquest of power by the Russian working class in October 1917."

Now North states that the world has become more complicated than it was a century ago, but "the essential task remains the same: social thought must be aligned with reality."

More complicated things most certainly are. But we have stressed that the objective situation confronting the world's people—a worsening social and economic catastrophe and the rising threat of war—is a reminder of why the Russia Revolution occurred and why the perspective of Lenin and Trotsky, of world socialist revolution, must once again become the basis for the independent political mobilisation of the working class.

An extended period of intense political struggle

The two resolutions before you—"For a new socialist movement against militarism, austerity and war," and "Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party: The strategic lessons"—seek to appraise political developments within the UK from an understanding of their relationship to world events. Our aim is to ensure that the struggles we face in building the Socialist Equality Party are firmly grounded in an internationalist orientation and grounded in the struggle to develop the ICFI as a world movement. They are, moreover, an attempt to draw the strategic lessons of the key events in the two years that have elapsed since our last congress in 2014—of Brexit and the political convulsions in the Labour Party.

This was no small task. The party has gone through an extended period of intense political struggle, during which intensive reflection on events was, I know, sometimes the luxury and preserve of full-time cadre. And even so, this was the first time we had an extended opportunity to consider these strategic experiences in the round, from the standpoint of their interconnectedness and, I hope, their full historic significance. This congress provides us all with that opportunity.

My opening remarks and our initial discussion are focused on the first of our two resolutions. In line with the responsibility set out in the ICFI statement "Socialism and the Fight Against War—Build an International Movement of the Working Class and Youth Against Imperialism!" the *World Socialist Web Site* reports every day on Syria, NATO manoeuvres on the borders of Russia, the Asian pivot and resurgent militarism in Britain, Germany and throughout Europe. It is a catalogue of an impending catastrophe.

It is worth recalling that the warnings we made of the danger of the situation now unfolding were condemned by Alex Steiner in September 2014 in the following terms:

"The SEP sees imperialism in 2014 as a return to 1914 and are convinced that history is repeating itself complete with a tense summer of international incidents reprising the tension of the summer of 1914. But imperialism, while it continues to plague the planet, is very different

today than it was 100 years ago. For one thing, the use of military power to back up economic interests, while certainly still in play, is embarked upon with much greater reluctance today, as witnessed by the obvious paralysis of the Obama Administration toward the events in Syria, Iraq and now Ukraine. ... Even the Republican hawks opposing Obama have not yet dared to advocate the use of American ground forces in Syria or the Ukraine. This could change of course, especially if the Republicans regain the White House, or for that matter a Democratic hawk like Hillary Clinton, but for now the SEP's outcry over the preparations of the US for a new World War strikes one as manufactured hysteria rather than rational analysis." [Steiner, A comment on the resolution of the SEP on the fight against war]

Steiner was and is a political charlatan. The "hawks" no longer limit themselves to advocating the use of no-fly zones or of ground forces in Syria, which are tactical questions fraught with complications. They talk openly of launching World War III. Our resolution notes in point three how, "At a Future of the Army panel in Washington, Army Chief of Staff General Mark A. Milley declared that war between nation states 'is almost guaranteed ... Our army and our nation must be ready.'"

The readiness of a major section of the political and military elite to actively contemplate not only war, but nuclear war, is both a stark expression of the maturity of the present crisis and a dangerous accelerant in preparing the way for a conflagration. We have in the resolution underscored this with reference to Theresa May's sickening boast that she will press the nuclear button. Moreover, as we state clearly, it is not a question of the subjective intentions of this or that political or even military figure: "The drive to war emerges as a result of the intractable crisis of capitalism as a world system. The fundamental contradiction between the globalisation of production and the capitalist nation state system, based on private ownership of the means of production and class exploitation, is fuelling social and political discontent, destabilising traditional mechanisms of rule, throwing bourgeois politics into a state of upheaval and flux, and preparing a global catastrophe. This danger is made all the more immediate by the deepening crisis of the capitalist profit system, which is the source of war."

There is a growing recognition of how close we now are to the precipice. This week, the media was filled with articles such as that in the *Daily Mirror* Tuesday: "Vladimir Putin sparks WWII fears with chilling threat to US: 'Stop criticising Russia or there will be problems.'"

Putin's reported remarks were an indication of the Kremlin's own conclusions as to where the world now stands and its possible response. He said, "Mrs. Clinton has chosen to take up a very aggressive stance against our country, against Russia ... It's not funny anymore. If somebody out there wants confrontation. This is not our choice but this means that there will be problems."

On Wednesday, NATO states met to pledge troops to an anti-Russia force in the Baltics. NATO head Jens Stoltenberg said that defence ministers from Canada, Germany, the UK and the US would "set out their plans for the battalions they will lead" and that other allies would "confirm their contributions." A larger force of 40,000 NATO soldiers is to be deployed in the event of "Russian aggression." Stoltenberg said of these developments, "This is concrete proof that NATO can and will deploy thousands of forces to support our Allies ... NATO has implemented the strongest or the biggest reinforcement of collected offence since the end of the Cold War."

"We expect a sustained challenge from the east, from Russia, by way of its military activities," added Douglas Lute, the US ambassador to NATO.

In an extraordinary turn of events, Donald Trump has baldly declared that Clinton's plan for Syria would "lead to World War Three," because of the potential for conflict with military forces from nuclear-armed Russia, as well as Iran.

One day earlier, the *Independent*'s Sean O'Grady wrote a substantial

comment asking: "Could Hillary Clinton start a world war? Sure as hell she could—and here's how."

His conclusion? "Like Donald Trump or not—and I like him no more than, well, Hillary Clinton—there is one thing he might be good for. Peace. A small matter, I know, when set against his serial (alleged) philandering and worse, but worth pondering for a moment. ... Something like the Cuba crisis could happen again under President Hilary Clinton; one can see her issuing unenforceable ultimatums on Putin because his proxies have grabbed some bit of territory in the Caucasus most of us haven't heard of. That is much, much less likely to occur under President Trump."

Now that is a truly desperate response—to place the fate of the world in the hands of Trump. Yet here we are, and on Clinton, the favoured candidate of Wall Street, the Pentagon and the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois "left" crowd, O'Grady is giving voice to conclusions that others within ruling circles will have drawn.

The ICFI's analysis of the last 25 years

The ICFI alone predicted events as they have unfolded over the past quarter century and could do so because it correctly appraised what took place in 1991. As it states in the introduction to *A Quarter Century of War*:

First, and most important, the 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. Second, the ICFI anticipated that the breakdown of the established post-war equilibrium would lead rapidly to a resurgence of imperialist militarism ...

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 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, with the aim of establishing the hegemony of the United States ...

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 neo-colonial 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. [David North, Introduction, *A Quarter Century of War*]

The Brexit crisis

In our resolution, we stress that Brexit is an existential crisis for the British bourgeoisie. But crucially, we cite, in part, the fundamental appraisal we made in our referendum statement:

The post-1945 project of European unification was an attempt by the ruling elites to resolve the fundamental contradiction that had twice in the 20th century plunged the continent into war—between the integrated character of European and global production and the division of the continent into antagonistic nation states. Economic integration came to be considered as essential to enable Europe to compete effectively in the global marketplace against the United States, with the ultimate aim of an accompanying move towards political union. At the same time, US imperialism promoted the integration of capitalist Europe as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and the threat of socialist revolution by a militant and radicalized European working class. But unity within the framework of capitalism could never mean anything other than the domination of the most powerful nations and corporations over the continent and its peoples. Rather than national and social antagonisms being alleviated, they have taken on malignant forms.

The EU is breaking apart and cannot be revived. It is only through the

creation of the United Socialist States of Europe, established as an integral component of a world federation of socialist states, that the vast productive forces of the continent can be utilised for the benefit of all. ["For an active boycott of the Brexit referendum!" 29 February 2016]

As to the crisis provoked by Brexit for Britain's ruling elite, frankly it is hard to know where to start. For everyone but the speculators in the City of London and the bigger FTSE companies who trade overseas and in dollars and euros, Brexit looks set to become an economic nightmare.

Here are the immediate "winners":

- Companies in the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250 that mostly get their earnings abroad. The mid-cap 250 index is, says the *Financial Times*, "enjoying sterling's pain," since it is populated by commodities companies.

- HSBC shares have surged by around 27 percent. It is the UK's second biggest company and earns about three quarters of its profits in Asia. Burberry, which generates about 85 percent of its sales abroad has seen its share prices go up 24 percent.

- Mexican gold and silver miner Fresnillo's shares have risen 46 percent. Swiss mining trader Glencore is up 39 percent. British miner Anglo American has also gained 39 percent.

This is not a vote of confidence in the UK economy, but the opposite. The less tied to its fortunes, the better you do.

As to the losers:

- Shares in the more UK-focused banks Lloyds and Royal Bank of Scotland have dropped 24 percent and 29 percent, respectively.

- Easyjet is down more than 34 percent, British Airways owner IAG is down 23 percent.

- Construction companies Taylor Wimpey, Barratt Developments and Persimmon are down 20 percent, 14 percent and 13 percent, respectively.

- All companies importing anything, including raw materials, imported parts and equipment—all of whose prices are already up 7.2 percent in September.

- Finally, and most importantly, British workers, who have seen their wages and pensions devalued and prices beginning to rise, boosting inflation to 2.2 percent on average next year. This is on top of falls of between 10 and 20 percent in real incomes.

What is posed for working people is a deeper descent into austerity. Manufacturing activity has posted its strongest reading since June 2014, thanks to an exchange rate-driven fillip in exports. But this will not last. Brexit is a policy decision that is benefitting some of the most parasitic sectors—and little wonder. The top 10 donors to the Tory Party are all hedge fund managers, including the Tories' biggest donor at over £6 million, Michael Farmer, who said that Brexit would be "a bright new beginning," and number two, Sir Michael Hintze, who heavily funded the leave campaign and gave over £3 million to the Tories.

Number four, Chris Rokos, is head of Brevan Howard, which raised \$3.5 billion earlier this year and made 3 percent in just the day after Brexit, June 24, speculating on the dramatic movement in share prices—that is, I assume, £105 million.

These are the financial supporters of the pro-Brexit line of the Tory Party, alongside sections of manufacturing and the retail sector that is dependent on low wages and market deregulation, such as Wetherspoons.

However, the fact remains that most of the big City firms and institutions such as Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Lloyd's of London and the City of London Corporation were opposed to Brexit and will become more vocal in their opposition in the period ahead. HSBC strategist David Bloom said of the fall in the value of sterling, "The currency is now the de facto official opposition to the government's policies."

Grant Lewis, head of research at Daiwa Capital Markets Europe, has stated, "Even over a longer time period, sterling now sits among a sorry band of currencies in terms of performance—since the start of the year only the currencies of Angola, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Venezuela, Mozambique

and Suriname have fallen by more."

Anthony Browne, head of the British Bankers' Association, has warned that Britain's biggest banks, including Goldman Sachs, are preparing to relocate out of the UK in the first few months of 2017 in the event of a hard Brexit involving the UK leaving both the single market and the customs union. The implications for London are clear, but it should also be noted that banks based in the UK are currently lending £1.1 trillion to the EU, and, in Browne's words, are "keeping the continent afloat financially."

Already, the swing against Brexit is so sharp that Allister Heath wrote in the *Telegraph* on October 19: "Why it's time for a new campaign for Brexit."

"The Battle for Brexit must begin—again—now," he demands. Interestingly, as an indication of the broader concerns of the Tory right, his appeal began with the declaration, "There is no such thing as permanent victory in politics. History never ends: triumphs are fleeting; majorities can turn into minorities; and orthodoxies are inevitably built on foundations of sand. Communism was supposed to be discredited forever after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, yet many young people in Britain and America now call themselves socialists."

We are in the midst of an unfolding political crisis of rule for British imperialism that heralds major social convulsions. For the past months we have been focused on one key strategic element of that crisis—the attempted coup in the Labour Party. But post-Brexit, it is difficult to envision the present political order surviving unscathed.

The Tory government is deeply split, has an unstable and small majority, and is becoming a political liability for British imperialism due to its being beholden to the "hard Brexit" clique in its leadership.

I have mentioned Goldman Sachs repeatedly because it was in their august presence that, prior to the referendum, Theresa "Brexit means Brexit" May declared her support for Remain, explaining: "I think the economic arguments are clear. I think being part of a 500-million trading bloc is significant for us. I think, as I was saying to you a little earlier, that one of the issues is that a lot of people will invest here in the UK because it is the UK in Europe.

"If we were not in Europe, I think there would be firms and companies who would be looking to say, do they need to develop a mainland Europe presence rather than a UK presence? So I think there are definite benefits for us in economic terms. ... There are definitely things we can do as members of the European Union that I think keep us more safe."

This is what a politician losing all credibility sounds like.

A survey in the *Independent* last week found that a hypothetical "Stop Brexit" party could win 25.9 percent of the vote if an election were held tomorrow, pushing Labour into third place with 18.9 percent. This is not simply noting public opinion but an attempt to shape it—to popularise and legitimise a desired outcome. It was followed by a direct appeal from no less than Tony Blair for a new movement of "the 48 percent," in which he declared, "We are the insurgents now!"

You could not make this stuff up. It underscores our appraisal of the motives behind the attempted coup against Corbyn—though how he responds is an open question. Even he is now challenging the Tories on their lack of a plan for Brexit and getting more sympathetic coverage for having done so.

The Brexit referendum has done nothing to mend the divisions over strategic orientation within the British bourgeoisie. Rather, as we state in our resolution, "Opposition to Brexit continues to enjoy the support of powerful sections of Britain's ruling class, as well as the US. A minority position within the Tories, the desire to ameliorate or if possible overturn the referendum result unites the majority of the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party (SNP), Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) and the Greens."

A new anti-working class political realignment

We must carefully explain the motivating factors for what is a political realignment aimed at rescuing British imperialism and suppressing any independent political intervention by the working class through the promotion of nationalism and class collaboration.

Our resolution indicts the advocates of Left Leave over their responsibility for the carnival of reaction—Connolly’s memorable warning regarding partition—that has followed Brexit in both Britain and Europe. But we must also be clear that the advocates of Remain, such as the Pabloites of Thornett’s Socialist Resistance, will now be called on to play a deeply reactionary role in any political realignment around a pro-EU position.

It is not for us to predict whether or not “Brexit means Brexit.” What is certain is that the forces now being mobilised replicate and reinforce the basic political alignment on bourgeois, anti-working class lines we appraised during the referendum campaign and which underscore the significance of the position we took on an active boycott.

The resolution also makes clear that political success for a pro-EU faction would do nothing to lessen the dangers posed to the working class by nationalist reaction and militarism. As we state, “There can be no turning back the clock to a supposed ‘golden age’ of European unity.” Deep conflicts are emerging between the European powers over austerity, and who pays for it, over the military direction of the continent, migration and a host of other issues.

In the aftermath of Brexit, George Soros famously warned:

“The catastrophic scenario that many feared has materialised, making the disintegration of the EU practically irreversible. The consequences for the real economy will be comparable to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 but the implications for Europe could be far worse. Tensions among member states have reached breaking point, not only over refugees but also as a result of exceptional strains between creditor and debtor countries within the eurozone.”

Have the efforts of Germany and France to reunite the continent on the basis of moves towards an EU army—liberally mixed with threats to punish the UK—disproved such an apocalyptic scenario? Hardly. There is very little on which the EU 27 can agree.

The last EU summit ended without agreement on the war in Syria, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada, or Britain’s exit from the EU. Economically, Europe is tearing itself apart and that must ultimately find political expression.

With the Italian banking system on the verge of collapse and a constitutional referendum scheduled for December 4, the EU is presently demanding that Italy explain why it is breaking its deficit targets, as the banking crisis there rapidly morphs into a crisis of state finance. It has now sent letters to seven state capitals complaining about their budgets.

The question is posed point blank as to how much longer Spain, Greece, Portugal, Ireland and now Italy can fulfil the demands of the EU without economic collapse and the total destabilisation of their societies and an eruption of class struggle that would see many governments fall. Italy’s finance minister, Pier Carlo Padoan, himself warned that Europe must “bend” or it would be the beginning of the end for the bloc.

We have a particular responsibility to oppose the UK’s efforts to ingratiate itself with Washington and stake its claim to a leading role in Europe on the basis of military braggadocio. This is directed above all against Germany and centres on opposing the formation of an EU army. There has even been the threat made by unnamed military top brass that they would not participate in EU missions under the banner of an EU army and would rather quit.

The fight for the United Socialist States of Europe

We must work with our European comrades to concretise the perspective of the United Socialist States of Europe (USSE)—by which I

mean to develop the most comprehensive picture of the political situation facing the European working class. This is one of the most important undertakings we must make in the aftermath of this congress.

Among the issues to be addressed are: the drive to war against Russia and the inter-state and inter-imperialist conflicts this is creating; US/European relations; the impact of Brexit on Franco-German relations; Italy’s economic crisis and the state of the European economy; the political crisis in Spain and the implications of the coup in the PSOE; the lessons of Syriza, the Left Bloc in Portugal and Podemos; their role in facilitating the growth of right-wing and far-right parties such as the National Front in France and the general crisis of rule facing regimes of all stripes.

We have tried in our resolution to make more explicit the link between the programme of the USSE and the struggle against imperialist war. This will be central to the work of all our European sections in the next months.

And when I speak of European sections, I want to take this opportunity to welcome on behalf of the entire section the formation of the French Section of the ICFI. There will be further discussion on this issue, but let me state here that the re-establishing of Trotskyism and the reconnection of the French working class with the Fourth International is a tremendous accomplishment—a victory over Pabloism and the OCI and a decisive conquest of the movement since the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party. It will change the relationship of the ICFI to the entire European working class—beginning, I am sure, with the joint work we will now undertake in the weeks leading up to the congress of the PSG.

The final issue I want to address is the theoretical and political struggle against the pseudo-left. Later in our proceedings, comrade Julie Hyland will speak to the headlong rush of most of them back into the Labour Party, on the basis of their uncritical embrace of Corbyn. And we have written extensively on their role in the Brexit campaign. Both are markers of their integration into bourgeois politics. But, as we state in the resolution, “... the most degenerate expression of the integration of the pseudo-left into the mechanisms of capitalist rule is their support for militarism and war.”

The perspective of the Stop the War Coalition

As comrades know, the last few weeks have seen a major political campaign waged against Corbyn over his continued relations with the Stop the War Coalition. This is in line with the essential thrust since day one of the coup in the Labour Party: that he cannot be leader or prime minister because he does not agree with Trident, is not sufficiently committed to NATO, and has stated a desire for a negotiated settlement with Russia over Ukraine and in Syria. The *Guardian*’s Jonathan Freedland is typical when he writes:

Despite what Stop the War says, “opposing the West” won’t bring any of that horror to an end. For it is Russia that is up to its neck in the blood of Aleppo ... Still, we mustn’t get hysterical. Perhaps we ought instead to be even-handed, as suggested by a spokesman for the Labour leader this week, when he expressed his worry that all this focus on Russia “diverts attention” from the atrocities committed by the other outside powers, such as the US—and that it would be just as sensible to protest outside the US embassy as outside Russia’s.

Nor is it good enough simply to call for ‘the strongest possible push for negotiations and a diplomatic solution,’ as Stop the War do. What do they think John Kerry and his fellow foreign ministers have been doing round the clock for months, if not years?

But significantly, Freedland also makes clear that the Stop the War Coalition is not yet considered to be a lost cause. He adds, “And here is where Stop the War can be useful. They insist they can only influence Western nations, that a protest outside the Russian embassy wouldn’t make a ‘blind bit of difference.’ But how can they be so sure?”

Useful in the past and potentially useful in the future—provided that the social forces it constitutes can be placed on message.

What is behind all this? What does the STWC position express and why is it being castigated in one breath and cultivated in the next—with no less than Boris Johnson urging an STWC picket of the Russian Embassy and this demand then being adopted by a significant section of the pseudo-left?

We must clarify workers and young people that the STWC does not offer an alternative to war. In the first instance, their alliance with Corbyn shows that we are dealing with tactical differences within the sphere of bourgeois politics.

Corbyn's position on Syria, or on Russia, is framed as his loyal advice on how British imperialism can best advance its global interests—stressing not relying too heavily on the US, working with the UN, etc. In this, he represents the last dregs of the Bennite left and a political fellow traveller of the Communist Party. Most important of all, he loyally heads a pro-NATO, pro-war party.

The latest exposure of the bankruptcy of Corbyn's protestations are the comments of his latest appointee as shadow defence secretary, Nia Griffith, who has called on Britain to unilaterally impose additional sanctions on Russia, which she described as "certainly a very major strategic threat to us." Labour would go into the 2020 election backing the renewal of Trident, she added. "Jeremy is very much in favour of democracy in our party. He understands the situation we are in."

As with Freedland, a layer of Corbyn's supporters are now urging him to join in the demands for anti-Russian measures over Syria. They declare in a letter signed thus far by over 200 people, many in Momentum, "we are concerned by your silence—thus far—on the ongoing slaughter of civilians by Russian and Assad-regime forces in Syria ... in the face of the horrors being perpetrated across Syria, with impunity, and above all by Russian and Assad-regime forces, we believe socialists and anti-war activists cannot simply look on in silence."

Signatories include the official endorsement of the Alliance for Workers Liberty and the RS21 split from the SWP.

The STWC "coalition" is a much-reduced political creature. In 2003, it was able to come to the head of a demonstration of over one million in London and was backed by many Labour MPs and even Charles Kennedy of the Liberal Democrats. But the intervening years have seen the majority of the anti-Iraq war pseudo-left and liberal milieu transformed into a howling pro-war mob—first in Libya, then Ukraine and now in Syria.

The STWC is today essentially reduced to an alliance of Counterfire, the split from the SWP, and the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain.

The SWP's own position has for some time essentially been indistinguishable from that of Achcar. Indeed, it was Alex Callinicos who in Libya took the slogan of the pro-interventionist Euston manifesto crowd—railing against "knee-jerk anti-imperialism"—and gave it a leftist gloss. In Syria, the SWP do not formally support direct Western intervention—officially taking a plague on both your houses position. What they do is sow the same lethal complacency as Steiner. The latest pronouncement on Syria from Callinicos states:

As long as Barack Obama remains US president, there is very little likelihood of serious Western military intervention in the Syrian war.

Obama has made his extreme reluctance to return to the Middle East quagmire so clear it has weakened secretary of state John Kerry's bargaining hand with Russia.

Hillary Clinton, who now looks set to succeed him, will almost certainly pursue a more belligerent global policy.

But both the US and Russia will still operate according to the same strategic calculus that governed the Cold War. In other words, they will try to avoid a direct clash that unleashes a nuclear war that would end civilisation.

Callinicos clearly does not want to be "that type of Marxist" who sounds the tocsin on the danger of war any more than he wanted to proclaim a crisis of capitalism in 2008.

What then of the remnants of STWC? We explain in the resolution:

The Stop the War Coalition does not represent an alternative to the militarist politics of the pseudo-left. An alliance of Counterfire (a break-off from the SWP) with the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), it is driven by an anti-American rather than an anti-imperialist perspective. Its convenor, Lindsey German, has declared, "We've said for some years that one of our aims as a movement should be to break Britain from following the US in every step of its foreign policy." In 2003, the STWC subordinated the mass protests against the invasion of Iraq to appeals to the United Nations and France and Germany to oppose Washington. Today, the CPB distinguishes itself in being openly pro-Assad and in portraying Russia as a bulwark against both US imperialism and ISIS-inspired terrorism.

I am stressing at some length the unprincipled and bankrupt politics of the STWC because the right-wing attacks on it, like the attacks on Corbyn, can be the source of dangerous political confusion. It encourages an uncritical sentiment for solidarity among forces that we must win to our perspective.

The CPB is represented in its leadership by Andrew Murray, a leading Unite union official, and by Vice-President Kamal Majid, one of the founders of the Stalin Society. Murray too is a vicious opponent of Trotskyism and a Stalin apologist. His last major literary endeavour was a review of Trotsky's biography of Stalin in the October 17 *Morning Star*, in which he declared:

In fact, Stalin was both greater and more terrible than Trotsky knew. He is long since indicted with vast crimes, but they no longer seriously include that of being the grey mediocrity presented in this book... Trotsky's murder on Stalin's orders, one of those crimes, prevented him living to see the confounding of all his anticipations regarding the imminent collapse of Stalin's regime, the rickety "Thermidorian reaction" which Trotsky imagined it to be.

The USSR won the war and Stalin emerged stronger than ever, with socialism spreading to half of Europe and much of Asia, perhaps the most significant of the many circumstances which left Trotskyism without Trotsky stillborn as a major political movement.

Counterfire makes a positive principle of its readiness to work with such political reactionaries—and of allowing their pro-Putin/pro-Assad line full rein. It explains its own split from the SWP as one over a conflict between those who believed the United Front (i.e., unprincipled political alliances) was a *tactic* and those who understood it to be a *strategy* under conditions where the working class was a "sleeping giant" that showed no sign of waking "from its slumbers."

This, they wrote, meant "continuous, long-term work with others to the right of the SWP (indeed perhaps even somewhat hostile to it) ..."

We state clearly in points 27 and 28:

The SEP rejects the designation by the pseudo-left groups of Russia and China as imperialist states. This false characterisation, torn out of all historical context, is a key means through which they seek to legitimise US and European aggression aimed at subordinating these regions to their direct control. However, this implies no support for the right-wing capitalist regimes in Moscow and Beijing. ... Both their diplomatic manoeuvres and military interventions are aimed at securing an accommodation with imperialism that safeguards their own ability to continue the brutal exploitation of the working class that is the defining feature of these societies. The admirers of Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, their armed forces and nuclear arsenals only disorient the working class, prevent its independent mobilisation and prepare the way for a catastrophic war.

The tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

Comrades, the past period has been one of intense political struggle. As a party, we have turned energetically into the working class—in the general election, the Brexit referendum, over the coup directed against Corbyn—and before that in the European elections and in the Scottish referendum. But this work has taken the form of an extended polemic against the pseudo-left groups.

We have written dozens upon dozens of articles, statements and lectures clarifying our essential differences with our political opponents because we know that only in this way can the working class be freed from the influence of hostile social forces and the party cut a path to leadership. We must deepen this work, confident that the political tide is with us and that the pseudo-left is being discredited by its own actions in the eyes of millions.

I hope that from my report, and on the basis of the resolutions before you, comrades understand that we are on the eve of major social, economic and political convulsions that will provide us with fertile ground for building the ICFI. And I am confident that we have a membership that also understands that the spontaneous eruption of the class struggle does not allow us to somehow bypass the complex theoretical and political tasks associated with the construction of the revolutionary party of the working class. Rather, it better enables workers and young people to understand the full significance of our differences with the pseudo-left and to accept the necessity of our perspective.

As we will discuss this weekend, we must seize the opportunity offered to us to deepen our political offensive for Trotskyism as the centenary of 1917 approaches. The ICFI is the sole political tendency on the face of the planet that sets as its aim the revolutionary mobilisation of the working class against war and for socialism. This is the essential thrust of the congress resolution, “For a new socialist movement against militarism, austerity and war.” I recommend it for discussion, amendment and ratification.

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