

Letters oppose barring of SEP panel on the fight against fascism from Historical Materialism conference

19 February 2019

Socialism in Our Time, a public event organized by the journal Historical Materialism and produced in conjunction with Jacobin Magazine and the Socialism Conference, has rejected a proposed panel submitted by the Socialist Equality Party on “The fight against fascism and the lessons of history.” Jacobin Magazine is produced by supporters of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). The Socialism Conference is directed by the International Socialist Organization (ISO).

The SEP panel was to feature as its main speaker Christoph Vandreier, deputy national secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) in Germany.

The WSWS published a statement denouncing this action and calling on readers to send protests against the act of censorship to: socialisminourtime@gmail.com. [Forward a copy to: sep@socialistequality.com]

Below is a selection of letters received.

To the organizers of *Socialism in Our Time*,

I am writing to protest the decision to bar the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) panel from presentation at the upcoming conference. Without so much as an explanation to why the SEP panel was rejected, this is a blatant act of political censorship and a major disservice to the attendees of the conference.

The SEP of Germany has been leading the fight against right-wing professors in the country who are actively rewriting German history to whitewash the crimes of the Nazis, calling out the SEP and their meetings to have right-wing agitators disrupt and assault attendees, and are having their arguments repeated by fascist politicians in the German parliament without any significant opposition.

According to your own website, the purpose of the conference is that in order “to prepare for the fights ahead, we have to study the struggles that came before us.” Is the political fight being waged by the SEP not a major struggle in today’s political climate that should be studied from?

More could be said, but this example should be more than enough reason to accept leading socialists to speak to a socialist-minded audience on the danger of the far-right today. Considering no other political movement is taking up a fight such as the SEP’s, their rejection from the conference is clearly politically motivated and must be overturned.

Anthony del Olmo

I protest most strongly against the decision of the political groups DSA and ISO not to let Comrade Christoph Vandreier participate in the conference on historical materialism. He plays a crucial role in clarifying the question of why right-wing extremist and fascist movements are gaining influence in Germany again. The clarification of this question is extremely important in order to prevent the future return of the fascist past in Germany and the entire world. If you do not allow this clarification, it

convinces me that you do not want to be seriously interested in solving these issues, or seriously want to fight for socialism.

Hanne Levien

To the conference organizers and the editorial board of Historical Materialism,

The decision by organizers of the “Socialism in Our Time” conference to reject the panel on “The Fight Against Fascism and the Lessons of History” proposed by members of the Socialist Equality Party is disturbing. It is clearly an act of political censorship. There is no other way to make sense of it. The panel proposal clearly fits with the conference theme of History including ‘History of Social Struggles and Movements’. Surely, the resurgence of fascism and the lessons of its historical manifestations, are of crucial importance for any discussion of ‘socialism in our time’. Surely, the conference would benefit from the perspective of Christopher Vandreier, author of *Why are They Back?: Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy and the Return of Fascism in Europe*. His proposed presentation on “Back to the 1930s: Trotskyist Policy in the Fight Against War and Neo-Fascism,” drawing on the lessons of history for today’s struggles, is centrally relevant to the concerns of the conference. It is likewise hard to see any justification for the exclusion of veteran socialist activist Bill Van Auken’s presentation on Bolsonaro’s victory in Brazil or that of veteran Trotskyist organizer on the Trump administration and the rise of the far-right in the US. To prevent the conference attendees from gaining the benefit of the theoretical analysis and political experience of such significant socialist activists and intellectuals is a huge disservice to the socialist movement.

There is one way in which the panel proposal differed from the conference theme. That is the narrow nationalism of the conference description: “How can a new generation turn this moment... into a permanent feature of the North American social landscape?” The SEP panel proposal rightly situates North American events in their international context. This internationalist orientation is one that would considerably enrich and deepen the analytical content of your conference.

Historical Materialism is the sponsor of the conference, and the journal’s website states: “In our selection of materials, we do not favour any one tendency, tradition or variant.” It is impossible to square that with the exclusion of the SEP contributors.

I call on you to reverse the previous decision and to include the SEP Panel in the conference program.

I request a reply dealing with the concerns and questions that I have raised.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Thorpe

Professor

Department of Sociology

University of California, San Diego

I strongly condemn your action of politically censoring the SEP's panel without any proper explanation.

This blatantly exposes your political cowardice and fear of the principled Trotskyist movement in spite of you plagiarizing the title of "Marxism in Our Time," written by Trotsky.

Without references to objective history, we can't talk about present or future of our time, and hence your titles are hypocritical and you removing the SEP from a common platform is an act of cynicism.

Without class politics, all you can discuss is pseudo-left politics of race, gender, and sexuality.

So, I strongly urge you to reverse your decision or give a proper explanation for removing the panel from your conference.

Regards,

Sathish

India

To the organisers,

I am very angry at having found out that you have barred the Socialist Equality Party speakers from being able to put forward a Trotskyist (i.e. genuine socialist and Marxist revolutionary) perspective at this event.

Your decision is both a blatant act of political suppression and an undermining of the very title of your event as you have now removed the genuine socialists from your panel!

As Marxists, the speakers from the International Committee of the Fourth International would have objectively laid the basis for a fight against fascism—one based in the international working class. In doing so, the ICFI would have to demarcate itself (real socialist revolutionary politics) from the pseudo-left. Thus, the ICFI would expose the DSA, ISO and every other pseudo-left organisation for their nationalist, pro-union, pro-capitalist and fundamentally anti-working class politics through the denunciation of "popular frontism", "the party of the 99%", identity politics, and formulations such as Chantal Mouffe's "people", which are all aimed at removing from the equation the independent revolutionary role of the international working class.

What you did not consider is that this political censorship is in itself an exposure of the politics of the pseudo-left. The ICFI will turn this negative into a positive to clarify the difference between genuine socialist politics and that of the pseudo-left.

Yours,

Eric

Melbourne, Australia

Dear organisers,

I was taken aback by your decision to exclude the SEP Panel from participating in the Socialism in Our Time conference. Moreover, excluding the panel with the throwaway line that "...The fight against fascism and the lessons of history was not selected for presentation at this year's Socialism in Our Time Conference."

The planned presentation would have dealt with the most crucial and pressing political (and existential) issues facing not only the working class, but society as a whole. By excluding the panel of the SEP, you deny participants and the fractured working class movement, currently surging leftward in the US and worldwide, of the tools to deal with challenges it desperately needs.

It is unconradely, to say the least, to be so flippant about the proposal of the SEP Panel. Moreover, it is politically shortsighted and plainly anti-working class in political orientation to censor an important voice like the SEP's at a conference professing to deal with socialism in our time.

I condemn your actions in the strongest terms possible and move that

you rescind it and invite the SEP Panel to present their perspectives at the Socialism in our Time Conference.

Yours,

Steven P Lamienie

Let this email serve as my official protest of your unjustified decision to exclude SEP's panel from your upcoming "Socialism In Our Time" conference.

The main speaker proposed for the SEP panel, Christoph Vandreier, is an important voice in the ongoing fight against fascism. The other proposed speakers also bring valuable perspectives.

A conference aspiring to address themes such as "Capitalism in Crisis" cannot be taken seriously if it excludes these important voices.

Please reconsider your decision.

Respectfully,

Dierk Groeneman

The political climate of today, unequivocally, is an international phenomena. In this global unrest, the exponentially hostile growth amongst the working class toward opposition to deteriorating working conditions and the suppression of democratic rights, has sparked a class-consciousness not only limited to the national arena, but the international one as well.

Education is a human right, a democratic right. To reject the Socialist Equality Party's (SEP) panel is not only an attack of intentionally leaving all other adherents and attendants bereft of history, science, and the principle-constant of the International Committee of the Fourth International, but is akin to censorship, for no reason was given as to why the SEP was rejected.

The malleable nature of the Democratic Socialists of America and of the International Socialist Organization have made it clear that there is no seat for truth, nor fact, nor revolution.

Suppression of the SEP's voice to challenge these matters can only be seen as censorship. I demand a reason as to why. I demand the truth for why the Socialist Equality Party is suppressed from so many platforms to hold free speech and education as pillars to a more enlightened world.

Sincerely,

Cordell Allen

Could you provide an explanation for why the SEP panel was refused a platform at your "Socialism in Our Time" event? As you may know, the panel submitted would have included a representative from the German SGP, a Trotskyist organisation that over the past year has been subject to increasing right-wing attacks and media denunciations. In line with these smears against the SGP, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), a German state intelligence agency, has recently added the SGP to its official list of "left-wing extremist" organizations.

Specifically, was your decision to exclude the SEP taken in line with requests from any similar intelligence agencies in the USA that the ISO has been in contact with while supporting the regime-change operations in Libya and Syria?

Michael Burke

To the organizers of the *Socialism in Our Time* conference:

As a lifelong socialist, I was surprised to learn that you have rejected a submission from the Socialist Equality Party in the US to field an international panel at your conference, on the subject "The fight against fascism and the lessons of history." The panel would have had as its main speaker a leading German Trotskyist who, together with his party, the SGP, has played a prominent role in the struggle against the resurgence of fascism in Europe.

While you have every right to disagree with the politics of the SEP and

its sister parties in the ICFI, I must ask why you are denying attendees at your conference the right to hear an alternative point of view. Surely this flies in the face of your stated aim to “welcome contributions that address History of Social Struggles and Movements; History of the Labor Movement; History of Organizations and Parties; Legacies of Particular Thinkers and Activists.” Does this not include the history, legacy and struggles of Trotskyism?

It goes without saying that speakers from the ICFI sections would stress the need to build an international working class movement to oppose fascism and war, call for the formation of rank-and-file workers’ committees in opposition to the trade unions, and strongly oppose identity politics. They would also, no doubt, speak against illusions in the Bernie Sanders of the world, as well as the building of “broad left” parties and coalitions—positions with which you would almost certainly disagree. However, I must ask: Do you have no confidence in your ability, and that of your approved panelists, to counter those arguments? I tend to think that is the case.

If I am mistaken, please explain to me exactly why you have rejected the SEP’s submission. I await your reply.

Yours sincerely,
Damien Remwick

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>