

DECLARATION AND PLATFORM OF TENDENCY ONE IN THE SOCIALIST ACTION NATIONAL COMMITTEE

April 9, 2019

The following document was submitted by nine National Committee members and alternates in preparation for the April 2019 Socialist Action NC plenum. Tendency One later became the Permanent Revolution Faction. After the expulsion of PRF members in the Connecticut SA branch in October 2019, they and other former Socialist Action members formed Socialist Resurgence.

Also included is a resolution on Venezuela, which Tendency One supported as an amendment to the majority's Draft Political Resolution. The amendment was defeated at the plenum by a majority of the National Committee.

The undersigned National Committee comrades hereby announce the formation of Tendency One for the NC plenum of April 13, 2019. We believe that this procedure will enhance our ability to collaborate together on a platform that can firm up the Draft Political Resolution that is to be considered at the plenum.

By this means, we hope to be able to convince all members of the National Committee at the plenum to closely examine key questions of the world today in order to strengthen the program, political education, and activism of Socialist Action. We base our perspectives on the principles that the Trotskyist and Cannonist movement in the United States has adhered to since its founding, and on the movement-building strategies and tactics developed by the Socialist Workers Party in the past, and by Socialist Action in the more recent period.

Membership in the tendency is open to all National Committee comrades who agree with the platform points that are enumerated below. All decisions in the name of the tendency will be made by majority vote of the tendency members. However, this is not a faction or "party within the party," subject to centralist discipline; tendency members are free to speak and vote at the plenum according to how they see fit.

We are mindful that at the last two party Conventions, and on many occasions subsequently, some of the signers of this declaration have been accused of belonging to an undeclared tendency or faction within the party—generally labeled by our detractors as "The Minority" or "The Opposition." Once again, we state that these charges have been absolutely false!

But although the signers have not collaborated as a tendency in the past, we believe that experiences in Socialist Action in the months since the National Convention compel us to do so for this plenum. The urgency of this course became clear when the majority of the sitting Political Committee refused to open a leadership discussion of issues in regard to Venezuela, while also opposing an NC discussion concerning Modern Monetary Theory.

We wish to emphasize at the same time, however, that we deplore the factional atmosphere that has developed in our party and will continue to do everything in our power to debate the issues in a serious, respectful, and comradely manner.

The following points constitute the Tendency One platform:

Venezuela: We believe that the current situation—in which U.S. imperialism has directly intervened into the country's affairs, has given support to efforts to conduct a coup against the sitting government, and threatens outright military action against Venezuela—requires that Socialist Action give maximum attention to building an antiwar movement in the United States around the theme of "U.S. Hands Off!"

But Socialist Action's proper stress on antiwar activity only increases the *simultaneous* need for rigorous analysis about the situation inside Venezuela, in order to raise the educational level of our party, contacts, and readers of our paper on the issue. Just as we want our readers to understand why and how to defend Venezuela in the U.S. antiwar movement, it is just as important that they understand what working people and revolutionaries should do to defend Venezuela from inside that country.

We need to look at the capitalist government of Maduro with a critical eye, while trying to judge, from whatever sources might be available, what measures the working people of Venezuela could take in order to defeat the ongoing imperialist-backed coup attempt while securing their own economic and social wellbeing, and moving forward to a workers' government and socialist revolution.

A strong analysis of the situation inside Venezuela is essential for our party and press because we are building a *world party* of socialist revolution. Without an international program, we cannot build a revolutionary party in the modern epoch. And without working out what our program means in present international struggles, it is meaningless.

This is not only a question for relations with genuine revolutionaries in Venezuela, or for those in countries that have faced or will face similar situations, but also for our orientation in the U.S.

For these reasons, we are alarmed by the blatant dismissal by some PC members of the need in our party for discussion of the situation in Venezuela. We fear that their unwillingness to undertake a deep study and discussion of Venezuela reflects the unfortunate pattern of thinking that we have seen expressed in recent PC and NC debates on Iran and Nicaragua—which tends to downplay expressions of solidarity with the working-class fighters in those countries and to deny an approach to those workers (even if only propagandistically from afar) with a clear program of transitional demands leading toward the objective of workers' rule and socialist revolution.

Accordingly, we are submitting an amendment on Venezuela to be inserted into the Draft Political Resolution for this plenum, with three appendices providing background information and explanation.

Russia: Six months after the Convention, Socialist Action's resolutions on Russia and China have still not been made public. While the Resolution on China was approved as a whole by the Convention, approval of the Russia document was made contingent on revision of its sections regarding Russia's role in Syria and Ukraine. The Convention mandated a discussion in the Political Committee in order to clarify those sections, but the discussion has not been carried out.

The DPR for this plenum, in its reference to inter-imperialist rivalry, characterizes both Russia and China as examples of some sort of "lesser" imperialism. Particularly troubling is the fact that in last summer's pre-convention discussion, Comrade Jeff similarly remarked that Russia was an example of "lesser" or "third-tier" imperialism and placed it on a par with the "imperialisms" of South Africa and Brazil (neo-colonial countries that our movement has never considered to be imperialist at all). At this point, the intended direction of Jeff's remarks on Russia has not been clarified. It should be noted, however, that our movement since Lenin's time has never called for rising to the defense of a weaker imperialist country against the hostile actions of a more powerful one. For guidance, it is helpful to look at the writings of Trotsky on the question of "little" Czechoslovakia, when it was swallowed by Germany in 1938-39 (see, for example, Trotsky's "A Fresh Lesson," October 1938).

Tendency One urges that a thorough discussion be undertaken in the leadership bodies of Socialist Action concerning the sections of the Russia resolution dealing with Syria and

Ukraine, and with later developments such as Russia's role in Venezuela. This should be carried out with an eye to producing the publication of the resolution on Russia in a rapid and timely manner.

Syria: The Draft DPR repeats word for word the bullet points in the Political Report approved at the Socialist Action National Convention and reprinted in *Socialist Action* newspaper and other communications. We believe that some of those points stated as “fact” are blatantly inaccurate, and that no evidence has come forward in the last six months to validate them.

However, since the DPR's main allegations on Syria were already debated barely six months ago at the Convention, we do not think that major discussion on the question of Syria is necessary at this plenum. The NC's time would be better spent discussing more pressing questions, such as on Venezuela. For this reason, we ask that the entire section on Syria be removed from the DPR.

The present radicalization in the U.S.: We take issue with the language in the DPR that characterizes the socialist left in the United States as being in “steady decline” during the past few years. That language should be removed from the DPR.

On the contrary, the socialist movement has seen impressive growth in the recent period, although most people who joined socialist groups have oriented to the reformist socialist democracy (the DSA). Nevertheless, a profusion of independent local socialist groups and “collectives” has come onto the scene—some of them being the result of a splintering and re-composition of several of the older socialist groups, such as Socialist Alternative, Workers World, and the ISO. Another phenomenon, with hundreds of adherents, includes those who have been attracted to “base-building” projects, such as the local groups who affiliated last November with the Marxist Center.

While we look *primarily* to attracting independent and new young activists to Socialist Action's program, we urge this plenum to simultaneously consider measures to enable us to appeal to people who are part of the ongoing re-composition of the left. It is not out of the realm of possibility in the future that entire local groupings, if not larger organizations, will seek to enter or merge with Socialist Action, if we undertake an effort to engage with them.

At our 2018 Convention, delegates approved the recommendation in the Organizational Report that Socialist Action should publicize the idea of building a *new* socialist organization together with other forces that might be interested in such a project. We think that the proposal to explore constructing a new party remains on the table, if only propagandistically, and that our 2020 presidential campaign could help put the idea forward.

We think that our election campaign will provide an ideal opportunity to appeal to the radicalizing youth who are both inside and outside the various socialist groups, networks, and collectives and engaged in building movements for political protest. For that purpose, it would be best for us to put forward a relatively young presidential candidate. Other means of meeting the radicalizing youth, and *entering into their debates*, include making use of social media, youth trailblazing tours to campuses, educational conferences, one-day Marxist schools, discussion groups, and forums—as well as continual activity and united-front work in areas that they are attracted to, such as the climate movement.

Modern Monetary Theory (MMT): We stand by the traditional Marxist explanations of value and the origin and economic nature of money, as opposed to the tenets of MMT, a theory that has achieved recent popularity within some circles of social democracy and the “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party.

We likewise stand by the understanding of Marxists, proven by historic record, that the capitalist class will increasingly find no way out of its crises aside from offensives against workers, new wars, and other great crimes. As these crises sharpen, workers will eventually have to choose between revolution and barbarism. We reject the notion advanced by Keynesian ideas and MMT that crises can be resolved through smarter government policy substituting for class struggle. Ultimately, the struggle for power between the classes will be decisive.

Earlier this year, some NC members alerted the National Committee about an article espousing Modern Monetary Theory by a Socialist Action comrade [a member of the Majority grouping in the Political Committee] which appeared in the on-line journal *CounterPunch*. We oppose the comrade's request that his article be reprinted in *Socialist Action* newspaper.

After NC members asked for a discussion on the MMT to take place in the National Committee, the discussion was instead shunted to the Political Committee—where it has still not taken place three months later. Tendency One supports the request for a discussion on the MMT in the National Committee, and we ask that the documents and reports on the MMT that have been sent to the PC so far be forwarded to all NC members.

Elections to the Political Committee: We believe that the PC should reflect the actual national leadership of Socialist Action—those comrades who play a major role as activists, writers, and contributors to the program and policies of our party. Other, although subordinate, considerations would include representation in the PC by oppressed sectors, such as women or people of color, by youth, and by trade unionists.

However, in a measure that is highly unusual for our party, the grouping in the party who won a very narrow victory on the question of Syria at the last convention stacked the Political Committee, as well as the National Committee, with comrades who are not in the actual leadership of the party, in order to give their grouping an automatic *two-thirds* majority on any question that might arise.

With this in mind, we think that the recent proposal passed by the majority of the PC that the National Committee plenum go on record as re-approving the sitting Political Committee is a poor one and should be defeated. The signers of this declaration wish to begin to return the Political Committee to functioning as a real self-acting and highly motivated committee of party leaders. Accordingly, we intend to submit the names of candidates for the PC elections at the appropriate time.

ADDENDUM: Counter-Amendment to the Draft Political Resolution on Venezuela

April 9, 2019

Building opposition to the U.S.-backed effort to execute a coup in Venezuela is a priority for revolutionary socialists in the United States. Revolutionary socialists must unequivocally defend Venezuela's right of self-determination and educate the broad public about the stakes in this effort for all working people.

The U.S. has been emboldened by the 2013-2018 economic crisis in Venezuela and the growing opposition within the country to the PSUV, all in the context of the global capitalist economic crisis, the collapse of the reformist so-called Pink Tide projects in Brazil and Argentina, and the rise of the Latin American electoral right in the figures of Bolsonaro and Macri. The U.S. ruling class must also take into consideration growing economic competition from China in the region, Russian bailouts of PDVSA in return for equity, and foreign policy initiatives on the part of Maduro and Ortega that align with Russia.

All of these factors have raised the stakes for Washington in Latin America. A March 19 meeting in Rome between the U.S. and Russia, in which they aimed to find a common resolution for Venezuela, suggests that the threats to Venezuelan sovereignty come from more than one pole of world imperialism.

Blessed with new allies in both the OAS and ALBA and belligerent governments in Brazil and Columbia eager to mop up any remaining traces of the reformist wave that gave hope to the working classes, the U.S. seems determined to push past the recent and dramatic failures of Juan Guaido's efforts at the border and inside the country to rally the masses and sweep his wing of the Venezuelan ruling class into power. While prominent think tanks like *Foreign Policy* publish opinion pieces explaining that any U.S. military intervention into Venezuela would be unlikely to succeed in any reasonable amount of time, Washington continues war by sanctions and semi-covert machinations. Moreover, a direct U.S. military intervention, or one carried out in conjunction with troops from other countries, cannot be ruled out.

In early April, the U.S. raised the stakes for revolutionaries worldwide when it vowed to sanction oil and other petroleum products that Venezuela sells at low cost to revolutionary Cuba. Strangling the Cuban energy supply seems to now be on the agenda. A confrontation between the U.S. and sanctioned Venezuelan tankers at sea seems to be a real possibility.

The impact of U.S. sanctions on the Venezuelan people has been criminal and murderous. The misery produced by U.S. sanctions comes on top of a series of economic attacks on the working class and poor by the government in Caracas that propelled thousands of workers and community activists into the streets in 2018. Inflation born of the unwillingness of the Maduro regime to float the currency and upset the windfall gains of the *bolibourgeoisie* via currency manipulation and the black market has left much of the population with a minimum wage of \$6 a month, or 5% of the needed basic basket of goods.

Government programs to provide food subsidies to the poor are organized on a clientelist basis that rewards loyalty to the PSUV and punishes working-class political independence and dissent. The government has encouraged disinvestment in the basic infrastructure of the electrical and water systems and new non-extractive production in favor of expenditures to attract new imperialist investment in extraction in the Orinoco Arc and exacting payment on the debt. The use of the police and PSUV-affiliated paramilitaries against worksite and community protests for wages and basic services have weakened the ability of the working classes to prepare to fight an imperialist invasion.

As oil prices dropped and the ability of the regime to maintain social benefits originally dispensed under Chavez contracted, the Maduro regime has increasingly relied on the military as its base of support. The loyalty of the top officers (Venezuela has over 3000 generals and admirals) has been purchased by giving them ownership of companies and access to the millions of dollars sloshing through the channels of corruption. The ability of Maduro to retain the support of these officers diminishes with each new round of sanctions and economic dislocation wrought by U.S. imperialism.

It is unclear whether China will financially aid Maduro in this effort since it has been making overtures to Guaido. Russia has not been in a position to extend high levels of assistance, and its flexibility regarding the outcome in Venezuela is indicated by its willingness to meet with the U.S. It is indisputable that as the pressure upon the Maduro government grows, the likelihood of military defections to Guaido will grow.

Maduro himself is a bourgeois politician operating in defense of the *bolibourgeoisie*, whose existence as a class is firmly tied to new imperialist investment in oil, mining, and speculation. With Maduro as their tool, the *bolibourgeoisie* has dramatically increased foreign investment in Venezuela, and protecting these investments will ultimately trump efforts to maintain the country's right of self-determination.

This is a fundamental truth about the behavior of national bourgeoisies in semi-colonial countries that is explained in Trotsky's thesis of Permanent Revolution. The surest guarantee that the Venezuelan working classes have to be able to defend themselves from the imperialists and the rightist forces that the presidents of Brazil and Colombia, Jair Bolsonaro and Ivan Duque, wish to unleash into Venezuela is the independent organization of Venezuela's workers themselves. Through this struggle in defense of their own interests, which necessarily includes defeating the draconian austerity and anti-worker program of Guaido, Venezuelan workers could advance in their preparation to become a force that can seize power in their own name.

With this understanding, we are guided by the experience of Chile, when sections of the working class failed, despite heroic efforts, to overcome the obstacles that social democracy, the Stalinists, and the trade-union bureaucracy threw up against their self-organization. This enabled the military, with the connivance of the United States, to ally with the right wing in a coup, which led to the immediate imprisonment of 40,000 militants and the eventual beheading of the workers' movement by the arrest of 130,000.

The last year has seen a period of struggle and the testing of perspectives among the Venezuelan revolutionary left. A section of the leadership of Marea Socialista, a Trotskyist "critical Chavista" current that was pushed out of the PSUV and banned from running candidates for office by the Maduro regime, disgraced itself by meeting with Guaido in the hope of averting civil war.

However, other groups struggled more honorably on many fronts to create an independent workers' fightback against the economic "reform" program of Maduro. The attempt by several Trotskyist tendencies to lead a broad independent workers' front, which included non-Chavista unions, against the attacks on wages and working conditions is worth our study. In the end, the left was defeated and the front was won over by union bureaucrats to the Guaido cause. Nevertheless, consideration of the debates within the Left Front on how to maintain working-class independence while effectively confronting the coup can contribute to our understanding of the capacities of the revolutionary socialist left in Latin America and can be highly useful to revolutionaries in the northern hemisphere trying to grapple with the reality of the struggle and rebuild a revolutionary international.

Socialist Action, through its honest study and analysis of the situation inside Venezuela, including coverage of the activity and debates within the workers' movement and other popular organizations in the country, can play a pivotal role in the construction of broader united-front activities in the U.S. antiwar movement, enabling it to attract radicalizing Latin American youth eager to facilitate revolutionary change on the continent. The increased threat to Cuba should also open new opportunities for united-front activities.