

Strong response to Nick Beams' IYSSE (Australia) online lecture on coronavirus pandemic

Oscar Grenfell
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Last Tuesday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia held the first in a series of online lectures by leading WSWs writer Nick Beams, under the title: “Capitalism’s war on society: Why you need to fight for socialism.”

The first lecture focused on the deepening global economic and health crisis stemming from the rapidly expanding pandemic.

The second will outline the contemporary relevance of the 1917 Russian Revolution. It will review the significance of the first seizure of power by the working class, under conditions in which masses of ordinary people are once again being confronted with the necessity to reorganise social and economic life in their own interests. The criminally-negligent response of capitalist governments to the coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated that socialism is the only way for workers to defend their livelihoods and their very lives.

To participate in next Tuesday’s lecture download the GoToMeeting app and then on the day of the meeting click [here](#) before 7 p.m., Australian Eastern Daylight Savings time. Alternatively, you can call +61 2 8355 1050 on your phone, before entering access code 670-326-765.

Last Tuesday’s lecture was attended by at least 115 workers, students and young people. The number was likely far higher, as there were multiple people taking part on many of the connections. The participants included students from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide and international listeners, including a contingent from New Zealand.

Beams, who has played a leading role in the world Trotskyist movement for more than 40 years, began by noting: “Like all major crises, the coronavirus

pandemic has laid bare the real relations and mechanisms that underpin society.” It had, he said, “established that the capitalist system, its economy, and the entire social and political order arising from it, is incompatible with the development of human life.”

Beams explained that warnings from medical experts of the need to prepare for a global pandemic had been ignored by capitalist governments for years. Instead, they had carried out cuts to public healthcare systems, in line with a program of austerity dictated by a financial oligarchy that has grown richer than any in history.

The refusal of governments to take the necessary measures to address the pandemic, Beams stated, was inextricably tied to the enormous growth of social inequality over the past several decades. Since the 2008 economic crisis, governments had bailed out the banks and financial institutions responsible, while escalating their assault on the social and democratic rights of the working class.

Governments were turning to even starker class-war measures in response to the pandemic, embarking upon unprecedented bailouts and stimulus packages for the corporations, while providing only a pittance to the millions of workers who have been laid-off overnight. Sections of the ruling elite were openly discussing the “benefits” of a disease that disproportionately kills the elderly, who are viewed by the financial elite as a drain on their potential profits.

The crisis, Beams noted, was intensifying the political radicalisation of the working class, which has been revealed in the upsurge of the class struggle over the past two years. “Capitalism has once again become a dirty word,” he said, while support for socialism is

growing.

Beams explained that the unfolding crisis has discredited the “free market” ideology of the last 40 years. Governments and pundits who had proclaimed the unfettered operations of the market as the solution to all ills were insisting on massive state intervention. It was clear, Beams said, that the crisis necessitated government deployment of resources and planning. The issue was which state would intervene and in whose class interests.

In this situation, Beams outlined the importance of “transitional demands” advanced by the revolutionary party, “That is, demands which address today’s needs and the consciousness of wide layers of society but which led unalterably to the conquest of political power by the working class.”

These included calls for immediate measures to address the health crisis, including mass testing and free and immediate healthcare for all, along with the massive diversion of the wealth of the corporate elite to address the deepening social crisis.

These demands, Beams said, were “grounded on two fundamental principles: that human need must predominate over profit; and that the necessary measures are under the democratic control of the working class, the whole of society.” They raised, inexorably, the necessity for the working class to take political power. The speaker concluded by calling on all listeners to take up this perspective and to join the Socialist Equality Party.

The report prompted a series of questions and comments.

Some raised the necessity for the immediate closure of schools and non-essential businesses—a measure necessary to stem the spread of the virus that governments had rejected for fear of its impact on corporate profits.

One education worker commented: “The teacher’s union has been silent on this whole issue. They email us every few days saying that they are in ‘constant communication with the department.’ It’s an absolute farce, people are angry, parents and teachers alike.”

Others expressed their appreciation for the talk, with Hillary from Perth, the Western Australian state capital, writing: “My quarantine friends are sitting around listening and having a good clap and nod. This is great.”

Some pointed to the immense impact on ordinary people. An entertainment industry worker from Sydney commented: “I’ve been devastated losing my job from this crisis, is there any way possible after this.”

There were also a number of questions on the perspective outlined by Beams, including whether the working class was a revolutionary force and what would be done in a socialist society to prevent the development of similar pandemics.

In reply, Beams stressed that the development of the crisis had refuted the postmodernist nostrums promoted by the academy and innumerable pseudo-left tendencies. Class, not various forms of individual identity, had been revealed as the fundamental division in modern society.

The working class, by virtue of its international character and its relationship to the productive forces, was the only social force capable of taking society forward. The very life situation of workers is propelling them into major social and political struggles and transforming their political consciousness on a mass scale.

Beams explained that the decisive issue was program, perspective and leadership. He called on those in attendance to take up the fight for a socialist and revolutionary perspective and invited all listeners to take part in the next lecture, where these issues would be discussed at greater length.



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