

The coronavirus pandemic and the perspective of socialism

The International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site
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On Sunday, March 29, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party held an online forum, “The COVID-19 pandemic: Capitalism and the making of a social and economic catastrophe.” A large audience from throughout the world participated, leaving hundreds of comments on the livestream.

The forum provided the socialist response to the pandemic, in opposition to the negligence and criminal indifference of capitalist governments throughout the world. It answered the lies and evasions of the ruling class and its apologists in the media. It elaborated a perspective to mobilize the international working class to fight for emergency measures to meet urgent social needs as part of a fight against social inequality and capitalism.

The forum was chaired by WSWs writer Andre Damon and featured four speakers: Dr. Benjamin Mateus, a physician, expert on the coronavirus pandemic, and contributor to the WSWs; David North, chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board and national chairman of the SEP (US); Joseph Kishore, national secretary and presidential candidate for the SEP (US); and Johannes Stern, a leading member of the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* in Germany.

Dr. Mateus began the meeting by reviewing the global scope of the pandemic. The escalating numbers of infections and deaths “read like a wartime chronicle,” he said. “We are set to reach the one million threshold by the first week of April, by the second week of April we can potentially see ten million, and by the first part of May up to 100 million cases, which is astronomical.”

The political and historical significance of the pandemic was summed up by North in his introductory comments. “The pandemic,” he said, “has exposed in a

highly concentrated form the economic, social, political, cultural and even moral bankruptcy of a society based on capitalism.” He continued:

The pandemic is a trigger event. In this sense, it is comparable to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, which set into motion the chain of events that culminated in the outbreak of World War I five weeks later, in August 1914. The assassination did no more than determine the date of the war’s outbreak. But the war itself—that is, the explosion of the global contradictions of capitalist national rivalries and the economics of imperialism—was inevitable.

The pandemic bears the same relationship to the present crisis. No doubt, the pandemic, as a biological phenomenon, poses an immense challenge to society. But the possibility, even the inevitability of such a contagion, has been recognized for a long time. The historical character of this event arises out of the response to the pandemic, the manner in which it has so completely exposed the comprehensive failure of the existing society: the ignorance and inhumanity of its political leaders, the corruption and venality of its ruling class, the incompetence of its institutions, and the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of its phony media-created heroes and even phonier values.

Now the pandemic will at some point end. But even after the virulence of the pandemic recedes, when people emerge from isolation, there will be no going back to what existed before. The illusions that have persisted for so

long have been shattered, in the same way that they were shattered by World War I. What has occurred cannot be undone.

The lives that have been lost as the result of the gross absence of preparation, which is the result of the subordination of human need to private profit, will not be forgotten. The change in consciousness is already underway. People are cheering health care workers, not bankers. There is not going to be a return to the status quo ante. Millions of people all over the world, having passed through this uniquely global experience, will perceive and think about reality in a different way.

In brief, capitalism has once again become a dirty word. This crisis will intensify and accelerate a global political crisis. Socialism and socialism of a very serious kind—the socialism of Lenin and Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, not the nonsense of Bernie Sanders and other politically insignificant people—real socialism will again emerge as a mass movement, all over the world, and most explosively in the United States.

The speakers refuted the claim that the pandemic was unforeseeable. They noted that for decades, epidemiologists and scientists have warned of such an event, but nothing was done to prepare for it. They indicted the response of world governments, which has been dictated by the interests of the ruling class, not the needs of the population.

“In the United States,” Kishore said, “which has been the center of global ideological and political reaction, for forty years the ruling elite has subordinated everything to the endless accumulation of wealth... The response to the pandemic has been conditioned by the same considerations.”

Kishore noted that it was not just the Trump administration, but the entire political establishment, that was responsible. The response of the American state, he said, has been to pass, on a unanimously bipartisan basis, a bill that finances the unlimited handout of cash to Wall Street and the corporate and financial elite.

Stern explained that the conditions that prevail in the

United States are present in Europe and throughout the world. A catastrophe is unfolding in Italy, Spain and throughout the continent, while governments are riven by national conflicts and focused above all on advancing the interests of their own ruling elites.

“The capitalists want their state to intervene to defend them. To pour more and more resources into their bank accounts. The working class has to create its own state power; it has to fight to acquire political power and use a genuinely democratic workers state to organize society in a rational, scientific manner of society in the interest of humanity.”

In his concluding remarks, North noted the rapidly growing readership of the WSWS, particularly in the working class. He called for all those listening to make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

“This world must change. This isn’t the last crisis, and this isn’t the last existential threat. The reality is that the future is either socialism or the destruction of humanity and the destruction of this planet. The experience that we are now going through is a terrible, terrible warning. We must learn from it, and we must act on those lessons.”

We urge readers to watch the entire broadcast and share it as widely as possible.



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