

Thousands view online meeting of UK SEP outlining a socialist perspective on the pandemic

Our reporter
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At least 2,000 people have viewed the Socialist Equality Party (UK) Facebook meeting on the coronavirus pandemic, held last Sunday. This cannot factor in the dozens of shares of the Zoom video stream.

Around 500 viewers took part in the event, but this included several “watch parties.” Participants from Britain were joined by others tuning in from Australia, Sri Lanka, Germany, France, Canada and the US, underscoring the international interest in the meeting.

In opening, WSWS writer Tom Scripps pointed to the “truly unprecedented events” associated with the pandemic, with over 160,000 killed globally and 15,000 deaths in Britain at that time.

Socialist Equality Party (UK) National Secretary Chris Marsden said the official figures of deaths and the numbers sick with the virus were a massive underestimation. He noted that the most remarkable feature of the world situation “is that there is absolutely no collaboration between any of the major states in dealing with this global pandemic.” Every capitalist government was pursuing a “beggar thy neighbour” policy, with one state undercutting another in the desperate search for personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators.

Governments had funnelled trillions into the pockets of “their” corporations and banks, “as they all prepare for trade and military war.”

When it comes to the working class, the situation with coronavirus is life-threatening, and their very livelihoods are on the line “in a way that has not been seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.” When the pandemic finishes, there would be no return to the conditions existing before, but rather “a massive drive to hike up the exploitation of the working class...” many workers would not be called back into the workforce. There would be “a

massive campaign by the capitalist powers to secure market share ... a very vicious trade war in which all sorts of tensions will emerge. And the demand everywhere will be for the working class to pay for it by accepting national sacrifices, cutting their wages, jobs, and conditions.”

Turning to the situation in Britain and the role of Boris Johnson’s Conservative government, Marsden said “the situation is horrific.” The death rate is extraordinary. “At least a million people have applied for welfare benefits because they can’t get by. There are workers forced to manage on 80 percent of their wage, but they are the fortunate ones, as many on zero-hours contracts are receiving nothing.” There were reports of 1.5 million people only having one meal a day because they could not afford to eat.

“How did we get here?” Marsden asked. The publicly declared “strategy” of the British government was for “herd immunity” and despite mounting public outrage and opposition within the scientific community, the government maintained this position for weeks. This was allowed even after “Exercise Cygnus” in 2016, a war-gaming exercise for a coronavirus-type pandemic. “From that point on, their working hypothesis was that the National Health Service (NHS) would collapse, they wouldn’t have enough PPE or intensive care beds and ventilators, and that people would die. According to the *Telegraph*, it was assumed it would kill up to 750,000 people. ... Boris Johnson has committed high crimes and misdemeanours against the British working class and the working class all over the world.”

Scripps said the same policy was still operating, now in the guise of the “back-to-work” campaign.

Marsden stressed that this was an international phenomenon, epitomised by Donald Trump in the US, “as we point out, capitalism means death and the working

class in a struggle against this is for life. “

Scripps said some in political circles in Britain were reaching the conclusion that to implement the back-to-work policy what was necessary was a government of national unity. And that the new leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, was the man for the job.

Marsden said the *Daily Mail* had written that there was effectively a grand coalition emerging in Britain, of senior figures in the Tory party, business, and with the most prominent role being played by Starmer. He had met with Conservative politicians such as Ian Duncan Smith and David Davis, regarded as the most bellicose in the get back-to-work strategy.

None of this is meeting a shred of opposition from the Labour left. Previous party leader Jeremy Corbyn had now pledged his loyalty to Starmer, even as it had been revealed there had been a systematic campaign to purge him and tens of thousands of Labour Party members on trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism. What Corbyn has done is fashion a vehicle, led by Sir Keir Starmer, that is now getting ready to take its place alongside the Tories, in political, social, and economic warfare against the British working class.

“None of this would have unfolded in the way that it has, outside the role of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy and their lackeys in the pseudo-left groups. It was laid down by their suppression of the class struggle,” Marsden said. The claim was made by the pseudo-left that under Corbyn, the Labour Party could be transformed into a vehicle for fighting militarism, austerity, and war. “The net result is Boris Johnson, his criminal policy and the deaths of thousands of working people.”

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis.

Scripps drew attention to questions that had been posted referring to the developing campaign against China. It was perhaps one of the greatest abominations, Marsden said, that the coronavirus pandemic was being used to step up trade and military war. “At the very time when the common fate of humanity, the fact that we all rely on each other, is burning itself into the consciousness of broad social layers, you have political criminals like Trump and the Johnson government, who are now saying that it is time to step up an international campaign targeting China.”

Another viewer raised the draconian powers that many governments had taken in dealing with the pandemic and asked if this posed a danger in the future as they could be used to prevent demonstrations and strikes. Marsden agreed that these dangers were very real. However, we base ourselves on an historical understanding of the role of the working class within capitalist society, which, “given political leadership becomes the most powerful social force. ... The fundamental problem identified by Leon Trotsky confronting the working class, and thereby humanity, was the crisis of revolutionary leadership; it is a crisis of perspective in the working class.”

He added that “all the indications are that as this crisis develops, a growing audience develops for the programme and perspective associated with the Trotskyist movement and defended by the International Committee of the Fourth International and embodied in the *World Socialist Web Site*, the Socialist Equality Parties and our cadre.”

A viewer asked about the demands being advanced by the Socialist Equality Party. Marsden explained that all our demands had one overarching aim, which is to develop the independent political activity and initiative of the working class. “We don’t do that by ignoring the present state of social relations; we live under capitalism. We don’t limit ourselves to local initiatives, which are necessary under certain circumstances. We say there is an absolute conflict between the interests of the broad mass of the population and the existing social and political system.”

The money and resources are available to combat COVID-19, safeguard jobs, develop and extend health provisions, care for the elderly and pensions. But these resources are “all monopolised by the ruling class. Our demands direct the attention of the working class to challenging and changing that situation. ... Our demands lead inexorably to the conclusion that the working class must take state power and implement a socialist system, in which it is an independent social and political factor.

“This all centres on the task of building a new leadership in the working class; a revolutionary party of the international working class.”



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