

# The pandemic and the political record of the SEP in the 2020 election

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*This report was delivered on November 1 to the final meeting of the Socialist Equality Party's 2020 election campaign, titled "On the eve of the Civil War Election."*

The presidential election of 2020 is being held in the midst of a global crisis, triggered by a pandemic, that can be compared only to the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and World War II in 1939.

As we meet, the worldwide death toll has reached, according to available official statistics, 1,196,000. The largest number of deaths is in the United States, where, as of yesterday, 236,072 lives have been lost. In Brazil, 159,884 people have died. The death toll in India is 122,111, in Mexico 91,743, in Britain 46,791, in Italy 38,618, in France 36,826, and in Germany 10,494. These official figures underestimate the total number of deaths.

The COVID-19 virus is now spreading uncontrollably. During the past two weeks, deaths have increased over the previous two-week period by 24.5 percent in Spain, 129 percent in Poland, 135 percent in Britain, 200 percent in France, 323.7 percent in Italy and 2,286 percent in Germany.

In the United States, where the spread of the virus has never been brought under control, the pandemic is surging in virtually every state. The interaction of the Trump administration's deliberate efforts to spread the virus, the broader policy of reopening the schools, forcing workers to stay on the job despite unsafe conditions, prioritizing profit over lives, and the staggering decline in the cultural level of the population produced by 40 years of reactionary social policies has resulted in the ongoing catastrophe.

Whatever the outcome of the election on Tuesday, the death toll will continue to rise at a horrifying rate in the weeks and months ahead. In his most recent statement, Anthony Fauci bluntly said that the United States is hurtling toward disaster: "We're in for a whole lot of hurt. It's not a good situation. All the stars are aligned in the wrong place as you go into the fall and winter season, with people congregating at home indoors. You could not possibly be positioned more poorly."

If anything has become clear during the last eight to nine months, it is that it is entirely inadequate to conceive of the pandemic in purely medical terms. It is, above all, a political crisis. Of course, there is a virus which is killing people. But the response to the pandemic—the failure, or, more accurately, the refusal to implement policies that would save lives—has been determined by the financial interests of the capitalist class. Any discussion of policies required to fight the virus that excludes an examination of the socioeconomic interests that blocked an effective response to the pandemic is worthless.

Moreover, the failure to contain the pandemic is not merely the product of the bad policies of a few ignorant or even criminal political leaders. The fact that the pandemic is raging across the globe, that the death toll is rising rapidly in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, and that the greatest number of deaths is being recorded in the richest and most powerful capitalist-imperialist country, the United States, indicts the entire world capitalist system.

The claims that the impact of the pandemic could not be foreseen are transparent lies. Scientists have been issuing detailed warnings for years. But like every other major social and societal problem, the response of governments has been determined by the financial interests of the ruling elites.

A great historical crisis—and the pandemic is of that magnitude—reveals and puts to the test the perspectives and programs of all parties. The toll in human lives that I have already cited constitutes a devastating exposure of the program and policies of all capitalist governments and ruling class parties.

But as this is the last public event of the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign, it is a fitting time to review the response of our party to this historic crisis. How has the SEP measured up?

The first public event of the SEP's presidential election campaign was held in Ann Arbor, Michigan on February 24—just over eight months ago. On that date, the total global death toll was 2,699. There were, on that date, no recorded deaths in the United States. But the Socialist Equality Party was already warning of the danger posed by the outbreak of the pandemic. In introducing Comrade Joseph Kishore as the presidential candidate of the SEP, and speaking on behalf of the party, I stated:

National problems are, in essence, world problems, requiring coordinated global solutions. The imperialist powers are engaged in a frenzied military buildup in pursuit of their criminal geopolitical objectives. China and Russia are also building up their military forces.

But as the national states prepare to fight over markets and pieces of territory, the coronavirus takes no notice of borders and spreads across the globe. The virus, traveling without a passport and without bothering to apply for a visa, is utterly indifferent to the nationality, ethnicity, racial background or religion of its potential victims.

On March 6, the Socialist Equality Party issued a statement, "What must be done to fight the coronavirus pandemic." On that date, the total number of COVID-19 deaths worldwide was 3,493. In the US there were 15 recorded deaths. The WSWS stated:

The coronavirus pandemic continues to spread through dozens of countries around the world in what is among the worst outbreaks of infectious disease in a century, threatening the lives of millions of people.

Refuting the White House's criminally dishonest dismissal of the disease's severity, the number of cases in the United States continues to rise rapidly. The response at every level of

government has been negligent and incompetent, exposing a total lack of planning and preparation in the world's richest capitalist country...

The indifference of the Trump administration to the health of the population is not better, and perhaps worse, than the attitude of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt to the slaves. The media has spent more time bemoaning the fall in share values than the loss of human life...

This social catastrophe must be prevented. All sections of the working class, youth and students must demand that governments take emergency action to stop the spread of the virus and provide the necessary care for all those who are infected by the disease. This requires a massive reallocation of social resources.

The principle that must guide the response is that the needs of society overrule the interests of profit. Capitalist calculations of share values and profits must not be allowed to limit, undermine or prevent the combatting of the disease.

On March 13, the worldwide COVID-19 death toll stood at 5,493. In the US, 48 deaths had been reported. The WSWS posted an article titled "Capitalism is at war with society." It stated:

The outbreak of the pandemic and its consequences can only be understood within the context of the development of global capitalism over the past four decades. These four decades have revealed all the socially reactionary characteristics of a system based on private ownership of the means of production, in which all considerations of social need are subordinated to the drive for profit and vast personal wealth. The motto of the capitalist oligarchy is: "If the accumulation of our billions requires the death of millions, so be it."

On March 17, the worldwide COVID-19 death toll had risen to 8,046. In the United States, 121 people had died. The National Committee of the Socialist Equality Party issued "A program of action for the working class." This statement provided a detailed analysis of the global refusal of capitalist governments to take the actions necessary to stop the spread of the virus. The National Committee declared:

To the extent that private property gets in the way of emergency measures, it must be swept aside. All industries that are being bailed out by the government must instead be converted into public utilities under the democratic control of the working class, redirected toward the production of critical necessities.

If a war had broken out, economic life would be restructured by the ruling elites to produce the instruments of death. Now it is a matter of producing the instruments of life.

Two irreconcilable interests of two classes stand opposed to each other. For the capitalists, it is a question of securing their profit interests and ensuring that their property and wealth remain untouched. No measures are to be taken that impinge on their interests. The working class is concerned with the interests of the broad mass of humanity, proceeding not from private profit but from social need.

We raise these demands in order to mobilize workers, raise their class consciousness, develop their understanding of the need for international class solidarity and increase their political self-confidence. We place no confidence in any capitalist government

to combat the pandemic, and we fully expect them to resist these demands. What can or cannot be achieved will be determined in struggle.

During the final week of March, the US Congress voted virtually unanimously to pour trillions of dollars into Wall Street and raise plunging share values in a rescue operation that vastly exceeded the bailout of 2008-09. Once the provisions of the bailout had been agreed upon and the CARES Act passed, the government and the two capitalist parties abandoned efforts to stop the spread of the virus. The policy of "herd immunity"—encouraging the infection of large sections of the population—went into effect. The signal for this homicidal course was provided by the lead columnist of the *New York Times*, Thomas Friedman, who enthusiastically touted the inhuman policies instituted by the Swedish government.

Since the end of March, 230,000 American lives have been lost to COVID-19. The total global loss of life since the end of March is over one million.

Throughout the election campaign, the policies of the Socialist Equality Party have been based on a Marxist analysis of the global capitalist crisis, the conflicting interests of the major social classes, and the logic of the international crisis. Our election program has been consistent with the principles that guide the fight for the political independence of the working class, the struggle for workers' power, and the building of a socialist society in the United States and internationally. The SEP does not have a special program for elections, determined by short-term pragmatic and wildly impressionist calculations of so-called electoral reality. The SEP remains a revolutionary socialist party in an election year.

This essential point must be emphasized when it is being proclaimed from all sides that Trump and Biden are engaged in a titanic existential conflict, in which the forces of good and evil stand starkly opposed. Never has the conflict between two factions of the American oligarchy been portrayed in such monumental terms. One might almost forget that countless banks in the United States and overseas have been financing Trump's semi-criminal business schemes for almost a half-century, and long before he ascended to the White House; and that Joseph Biden, the decades-long senator from the great corporate tax haven of Delaware, was the author of countless socially regressive and oppressive laws.

The *New York Times*—which only last month responded to Trump's well-deserved COVID-19 infection with an editorial urging his speedy recovery—presumes to lecture socialists on why they must support Biden "without apology or embarrassment—and even with some excitement."

The Socialist Equality Party rejects with contempt these cynical appeals for class collaboration, for the abandonment of an independent class standpoint.

It is not that the Socialist Equality Party underestimates the danger represented by Trump. Quite the opposite: the SEP has continuously warned that Trump is seeking to build a fascistic movement. But we also have explained that Trump is not merely a crazed and vicious gangster, but the product of the crisis and contradictions of capitalism.

The fight against Trump and the emergence of American fascism cannot be developed as long as the working class is politically tied to the Democratic Party.

The SEP has a policy not only for November 3, but for all the days that follow the election. Comrades Joe Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz and the other speakers will explain in greater detail the policies of our party. They will examine different aspects of the political crisis. But they will all emphasize that the only effective response to Trump's efforts to create a fascistic regime is one that is based on the independent social and political mobilization of the working class, and that mobilization must begin by preparing mass popular resistance to any attempt by Trump and the fascist

gangs that are working with his encouragement to suppress votes and overturn the results of the election.

There will be no return to “normal” after November 3. The extreme tension that surrounds this election is an expression of the explosive state of American society. Capitalism, riven by social inequality, driving toward war, is incompatible with democracy. If democracy is to survive in the United States, it must be reconstituted on entirely new—that is, socialist—foundations.

That is why we hope that after hearing today’s speakers, all those who are participating in this webinar will make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party.

We are not miracle workers. We don’t make promises, we don’t promise instantaneous cures. We are confronting a vast historical crisis upon which hinges the fate of humanity. There is no easy solution.

We are a revolutionary party that tells the working class the truth. If the working class is to prevent the establishment of the most horrific dictatorship the world has ever seen, it must take up the fight for power. Those who are listening and who agree with this perspective must make the decision to build the movement that is fighting to put an end to capitalism, bases itself on the lessons of history, and has confidence in the strength of the working class.

Trotsky said it very well and very simply in 1938 when he was speaking of the danger of fascism coming to the United States. He said the workers will have to accept socialism or they’ll be forced to accept fascism. We must tell the truth. We can only take responsibility for ourselves. That is the conception that has guided our movement.

We have fought throughout this campaign to explain the political issues to the working class. The quotes that I have cited are just a small number of literally hundreds of articles and statements that we have published this year. Every word that we have published has been vindicated by events, so we can speak with some confidence about the future.

We are not just working for November 3, or November 4, or for the month of November. We are preparing for the great struggles that lie ahead, and we are confident that we will find an ever greater response as workers come to recognize the correctness of our analysis.



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