

SEP (UK) Congress resolution The COVID-19 pandemic, the international class struggle, and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

13 November 2020

This resolution was adopted unanimously by the membership of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain at its Fifth National Congress, which was held online from October 24–27, 2020. It was amended by the incoming National Committee in consideration of fundamental contemporary developments in the United States.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the international class struggle, and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a trigger event, accelerating the already far-advanced economic, social, and political crisis of the world capitalist system. It has erupted under conditions in which the world is in the grip of an escalating trade war, economic breakdown, a turn towards authoritarian forms of rule, and a growth of imperialist militarism that threatens a global conflagration. The virus has swept across national borders, proof of the interconnectedness of all aspects of contemporary economic and social life. This global crisis threatening the lives of millions requires a global solution.

2. In its New Year's statement, published January 3, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) wrote, "The arrival of the New Year marks the beginning of a decade of intensifying class struggle and world socialist revolution." [1] It drew attention to the extraordinary worldwide eruption of the class struggle throughout 2019—in Tunisia, India, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, the United States, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Kenya and South Africa, and epitomised in Europe by the "Yellow Vests" movement and public sector strikes against Macron in France. All these struggles were animated by opposition to the devastating consequences of social inequality and opposition to the corrupt governments that have imposed it on behalf of the oligarchy.

3. The pandemic has given renewed impetus to this global resurgence of the class struggle. The working class is confronted with a crisis for which there is no progressive solution under capitalism, based on the division of the world into antagonistic nation-states competing for global dominance of markets and resources, and the control of society's means of production by a financial oligarchy whose obscene wealth depends upon the brutal exploitation of the mass of the population. The pandemic would never have claimed so many lives and led to such economic ruin had it not been for the criminal response of the capitalist class and its governments. They seized on the pandemic to deepen the decades-long looting of society's resources on behalf of the super-rich in multi-trillion-dollar bailouts that dwarf those passed after the 2008 global financial crash. The reckless return to work and reopening of schools and universities that has now led to a resurgence of the pandemic is dictated by the need to claw back the cost of the bailouts from the working class.

4. In defining the pandemic as a trigger event [2], the WSWS compared it to the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, which initiated a chain of events culminating in the outbreak of World War I. The assassination accelerated the historical process, but it

acted upon pre-existing and highly inflammable socioeconomic and political conditions. Just as the mass slaughter of the First World War was only ended by the October 1917 revolution in Russia, bringing the current pandemic under control and ending the economic catastrophe it has inflicted on the world's people demands a revolutionary struggle against capitalism, leading to the conquest of state power, the establishment of democratic control by the working class over the economy, the replacement of the anarchy of the market with scientific planning, the ending of the nation-state system, and the construction of a socialist world. A socialist society would be based on equality, the elimination of poverty, oppression and discrimination, and would make possible a massive rise in the standard of living and the level of social culture, and the protection of the planet against climate change and environmental degradation. This requires the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world party of socialist revolution, to provide the essential worldwide strategy and leadership.

5. The centre of the global crisis of capitalism is the United States, where Donald Trump is refusing to accept losing the November 3 presidential election and is actively engaged in a coup to establish a personalist dictatorship. The victory of Joseph Biden was a massive popular repudiation of Trump, with the Democrats' victory secured largely through an increased working class and youth vote. But Trump has responded as he threatened to before the election—seeking to mobilise sections of the military, police, and border patrol, inciting fascist gangs, and using bogus claims of voter fraud to enable Republican legislators, fronted by his Attorney General William Barr, and a stacked Supreme Court to overturn the result. Trump's conspiracy has the full support of the Republican Party, which now acts as a fascistic and criminal syndicate.

6. Opposing Trump's coup and the threat of dictatorship cannot be entrusted to the Democrats, whose sole concern is to uphold the interests of US imperialism against the working class. Whatever happens in the immediate period ahead, there will be no return to "normality". The move towards authoritarian rule is not the product of Trump as an individual. The democratic structures in the US are breaking down under the weight of the insoluble economic and political crisis of American and world capitalism, characterised by staggering levels of social inequality, exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the homicidal "herd immunity" policy of the ruling classes. The Democrats, a party of Wall Street and the military, fear above all an explosion of popular protest and resistance from below that would threaten the rule of the financial and corporate oligarchy. Prior to the election, they refused to mobilise against Trump's coup plotting even when he threatened to send in the army against those protesting the police murder of George Floyd, and after his appeal to the far right prompted a plot to kidnap and murder Democrat Governor Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan. Their pro-business agenda then

allowed Trump to increase his own vote among sections of the most oppressed workers by exploiting their social misery and hatred of the political establishment. In the aftermath of the election, Biden is systematically dismissing any threat of a coup and urging “unity” with the Republicans. His offer to the US ruling elite is to reject Trump’s plans and allow the Democrats to head a right-wing administration of austerity and militarism, run on the say-so of the Republican Party, while denouncing socialism and relentlessly promoting race and identity to divide and demoralise the working class. This would create the best conditions for the further growth of a far-right movement, whether led by Trump or someone else.

7. The Socialist Equality Party in the US is calling for a nationwide political strike to remove Trump and his co-conspirators. If Trump succeeds in overturning the election it will provoke a massive outpouring in every city in the country under conditions where the state and its forces of repression lacked any semblance of legitimacy. Not only did Biden defeat Trump in terms of the popular vote and the electoral college vote—the states and areas he won are the most powerful economic and industrial areas of the US, with a massively powerful working class. But the defeat of the attempted coup d'état depends upon the intervention of the working class, which must take the lead in the defence of democratic rights. This movement cannot stop short of breaking the grip of the oligarchy and restructuring economic life on a socialist basis. Such a struggle by workers in the US against the threat of dictatorship will meet with massive support from workers all over the world and deliver a blow to the imperialist powers everywhere.

8. The authoritarian turn in the US is an advanced expression of global developments. In every country, the ruling class is cultivating far-right forces and preparing the state for use against the working class. Europe has seen the accession of fascistic parties to government in the east and to the position of the official opposition in France, Italy, and Germany. The rise of Alternative for Germany (AfD) has proceeded under the protection of the state security apparatus. The army, police and secret services have been directly implicated in arson attacks, racist murders, and political assassinations by the far-right. This conspiracy proceeds behind the legitimisation and advocacy of the AfD’s anti-migrant and militarist agenda by the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. In the UK, prominent pro-Remain Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered by a fascist, screaming “Britain First”, in June 2016, in the final stages of the Brexit campaign. A fascist plot to assassinate a second Labour MP just one year later was thwarted. On March 3, 2019, then Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was physically assaulted by a right-wing thug during a visit to Finsbury Park mosque, who screamed a pro-Brexit statement.

9. The grotesque show trial of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at London’s Old Bailey encapsulates the resort to authoritarianism in Britain. For exposing war crimes, Assange has over the last decade been subject to unlawful detention, psychological torture, assassination plots and the naked denial of due process as part of plans to extradite him to the US, where he faces life imprisonment and even the death penalty. The recent extradition hearing was a legal travesty that witnessed the junking of all democratic procedures by the judiciary, under instruction by Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Conservative government. This has the full support of the Labour Party and an embedded media, who care nothing for the chilling impact on press freedom of the prosecution of a journalist and publisher under the Espionage Act. Likewise, they have endorsed the panoply of repressive state measures put in place during the pandemic, epitomised by the formation of the Joint Biosecurity Centre, comprising GCHQ and MI5, to head the official COVID-19 response, and Johnson’s promise for “military support where required to free up the police.” Having accrued extraordinary repressive powers under the Coronavirus Act, the government is also set on passing the Overseas Operations Bill, protecting British armed forces personnel who have committed war crimes

from prosecution, and the Covert Human Intelligence Sources Bill, allowing “confidential informants” to break the law, including committing crimes such as torture, murder and sexual violence. Public authorities authorised to use the Bill’s powers include all intelligence agencies, the police, and the Serious Fraud Office.

10. The second wave of the pandemic will be larger than the first. The temporary suppression of the virus in Europe, bought at tremendous cost during lockdown, was squandered by the premature reopening of the economy. This has produced a resurgence of COVID-19 in every European country, so that the UK has been forced to join France, Germany, and Belgium in a renewed lockdown. But its limited nature means the virus will continue to rip through society, as millions of workers and young people are herded into unsafe workplaces, schools, and universities. The pandemic will overwhelm the National Health Service (NHS), with predictions of over 85,000 further deaths in the UK. Cancer and other essential treatments will inevitably be suspended, leaving people to die. During the first wave of the pandemic, Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders were authorised illegally and without consent in care homes, and for the mentally and physically disabled. This winter, nothing will be done once again to prevent the deaths of the sick and elderly, who are regarded as expendable since they no longer make profits for the capitalists.

11. The announcement by pharmaceutical giant Pfizer of the development of a vaccine for COVID-19, with a reported success rate of 90 percent, only underscores the necessity of urgent measures to contain the spread of the virus and save lives until it or another vaccine is widely available. Mass production for a global rollout is an immense logistical exercise that would take many months. Moreover, the availability and distribution of the vaccine comes into immediate conflict with the subordination of production to the profit motives of the giant pharmaceutical companies and the conflicting interests of competing nation-states. The progress toward a vaccine demonstrates the criminal character of the policy of “herd immunity” implemented by governments throughout the world. With science providing an answer to the pandemic, the argument that it is necessary to “live with the virus” and accept a mass loss of life is exposed as a murderous justification for keeping open the economy. The working class must now intervene to ensure that hundreds of thousands do not needlessly die in the coming weeks and months because the capitalists must have their profits.

12. The developing movement of the working class will be driven not only by this growing danger to workers’ lives, health, and democratic rights but by the worsening threat of mass unemployment, hardship and poverty. The massive inflation of the stock market through speculation and financialisation has produced grotesque levels of social inequality, which the pandemic has enormously exacerbated. The world’s billionaires have seen their combined fortunes soar to a record high of \$10.2 trillion during the pandemic, an increase of 25 percent. In contrast, millions have lost their jobs, while the International Labour Organization anticipates a loss of income for workers of up to \$3.4 trillion and the United Nations estimates that 265 million more people are at risk of starvation. The UK is one of the most socially polarised countries in the world after four decades of unrelenting attacks on living standards that were accelerated following the 2008 crash by Labour and then the Tories, who declared a new “age of austerity”. By 2019, 14.3 million people in Britain were living in poverty and a third of these in deep poverty. Sixty percent of these were the working poor. Destitution was experienced by 1.5 million people. Close to 40 percent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. The pandemic and the looting of the economy by the major corporations have made this situation much worse.

13. The pandemic has had a profound impact on the consciousness of the working class. It has fully revealed the parasitic, anti-social, homicidal character of the capitalist system. For decades, the “entrepreneurs” and

the super-rich were held up as the creators of wealth and the motors of progress. Now the term “key worker” has become part of national discourse. It encapsulates an essential and profoundly revolutionary truth: that the working class is the producer of all social wealth, without which society cannot exist. It is because the veil has been ripped off the reality of social relations that the bourgeoisie—with Trump and Johnson leading the pack—is railing against socialism and left-wing “agitators” and seeking to ban any expression of anti-capitalist sentiment.

14. The re-entry of the working class into mass political and social struggles poses immense political, theoretical, and practical responsibilities before the Socialist Equality Party. The central historic task facing the party is that elaborated by Trotsky in the founding programme of the Fourth International: the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. Popular anti-capitalist sentiment and determination to oppose the ruling class onslaught must be transformed through the intervention of the ICFI into a conscious struggle for socialism. A review of how the crisis has developed in the UK, the opposed responses of the capitalist class and the working class, and of the essential role played by the SEP in fighting for the independent political mobilisation of the working class—in a rebellion against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy—is essential to the development of a new socialist movement of the working class.

The policy of herd immunity

15. The Johnson government was the first in the world to publicly admit to pursuing a policy of “herd immunity”—allowing the virus to spread throughout the population with virtually no obstacles in its path. This fascistic policy was consciously pursued based not only on financial considerations but also on a belief rooted in eugenics and Social Darwinism that the weak, the aged and the infirm must be culled through a policy of social euthanasia. It was the culmination of the social warfare policy that began under Margaret Thatcher, who famously declared that there was no such thing as society, and continued by her successors, including the Blair and Brown Labour governments, as they transformed the UK into a playground for the super-rich. The vast increase in social inequality and the systematic decimation of essential services and social infrastructure created the perfect conditions for the pandemic’s spread.

16. The Tories knew the consequences of their inaction. They were warned in 2011 that an influenza pandemic would likely claim 750,000 lives. The findings of “Exercise Cygnus”, held in 2016 to determine the readiness of the NHS for a novel respiratory influenza pandemic, were concealed. Officials involved later said that it “killed a lot of people” and that the “NHS was stretched beyond breaking point.” But in pursuit of the glutting of the oligarchy, the NHS was forced to find “efficiency savings” of £22 billion, 100,000 nurses and doctors’ jobs were eliminated, and hospital beds were halved, leaving only 3,700 adult critical care beds. Stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE) were slashed by a third. For months, the government ignored all warnings of the impact of COVID-19. China imposed a lockdown in Hubei province on January 23. On January 30, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that the coronavirus was a “public health emergency of international concern”. But a member of the government’s pandemic advisory group later admitted, “Almost every plan we had was not activated in February.”

17. It was only on March 3 that the government published its four-point “action plan” for dealing with coronavirus, which blithely stated, “The majority of people with COVID-19 have recovered without the need for any specific treatment, as is the case for the common cold or seasonal flu.” Johnson’s advice was to “wash your hands with soap and hot water

for the length of time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice.” Two days later, Johnson made his first public admission that the government was pursuing a policy of allowing “the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures.” During a March 12 Downing Street press conference, Sir Patrick Vallance, the government’s chief scientific adviser, said, “It’s not possible to stop everyone getting it and it’s also not desirable because you want some immunity in the population to protect ourselves in the future.” Because of this, the UK’s 20,000 care homes—housing over 400,000 elderly and vulnerable people—were turned into killing fields. A March 17 directive from NHS England instructed that elderly patients should be cleared out of hospital beds, without being tested for COVID-19—affecting 25,000 people. As a result, between March 2 and June 12, 28,186 “excess deaths” were recorded in care homes in England, with over 18,500 residents confirmed to have died with COVID-19.

18. The government’s sole concern was to use the pandemic to engineer a further transfer of social wealth to the banks and major corporations. The entire global financial system was on the verge of collapse. Since the 2008 bailout, governments have made their central banks responsible for trillions in corporate debt—under conditions where around 20 percent of listed businesses in the US and UK are now considered “zombie” companies, surviving only because of ultra-low interest rates and access to very cheap debt. On March 17, UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that £330 billion would be made available in loan guarantees for businesses affected by the virus—equivalent to 15 percent of the UK’s annual GDP—and promised an “unlimited lending capacity.” These sums were dwarfed by a new round of money printing—£895 billion in quantitative easing (QE), close to the total £1 trillion in QE measures between 2009 and 2020 that was funded through a decade of austerity. This was a global process. One day later, the European Central Bank began buying €750 billion of government and corporate debt. On March 25, the US Congress passed the CARES Act, pumping \$2 trillion into the economy, and setting aside \$454 billion to cover losses by the Federal Reserve, enabling it to make more than \$4 trillion available in loans.

19. The ICFI defined the deliberate inaction of governments as “malign neglect.” On February 28, it issued a statement, “For a globally coordinated emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic!” The ICFI urged the working class to “demand that governments make available the resources required to contain the spread of the disease, treat and care those who are infected, and secure the livelihoods of the hundreds of millions of people who will be affected by the economic fallout.” The statement included a series of “comprehensive and urgent emergency measures” centred on the understanding that “The response to the coronavirus cannot be coordinated on a nation by nation level.” The virus was “a global problem. The solution must be global.” The ICFI called for a “massive allocation of resources for health care and treatment,” as well as “Direct financial support and income compensation for all those impacted by the economic consequences.” Rejecting the lie that there was no money for such an emergency response, it demanded that resources must be found by taxing the fortunes of the oligarchs. It then insisted, “In demanding that capitalist governments implement these emergency measures, the international working class does not abandon its fundamental aim: the ending of the capitalist system. Rather, the fight for emergency action will raise the consciousness of the working class, develop its understanding of the need for international class solidarity, and increase its political self-confidence.” [3]

20. This call gave voice to the mounting anger in the working class. March saw wildcat strikes by postal workers over coronavirus safety concerns; strike votes by sixth-form college lecturers and drivers on the London Underground; the threat of strikes by other train staff, postal workers nationwide, and library workers; and petitions by doctors on PPE supplies, and by hundreds of thousands of parents demanding the closure

of schools. This was part of a European-wide wave of protests and strikes—by Amazon workers in France and Italy, Italian metal and chemical workers, Portuguese dockers, rail and airport staff—against government indifference to the threat posed by the virus. The *Financial Times* Europe Editor Tony Barber warned of the pandemic functioning as the trigger event for revolution, as predicted by the ICFI:

“It is in the nature of cataclysmic events, such as the pandemic, to accelerate and refashion historical developments that would have happened anyway. The first world war intensified turmoil in Russia, leading to the revolutions of 1917, and drove forward the emergence of the US as the 20th century’s leading global power... The pandemic and its economic fallout, unless brought under a measure of control, is sure to have similar large-scale consequences.” [4]

21. Fear of this growing opposition and its consequences forced Johnson to make a series of concessions, including the March 20 closure of schools and Sunak’s announcement of a furlough scheme, under which the government would pay 80 percent of wages for employees unable to work, up to £2,500 a month. The scheme eventually covered 9 million workers and temporarily prevented mass redundancies. Emergency legislation banned new evictions for three months. On March 23, Johnson finally announced a national lockdown.

22. At the same time, the bourgeoisie was preparing its state apparatus to repress an inevitable eruption of social discontent. On March 13—even while the economy remained fully open—the government postponed elections scheduled for May 7 for local authorities, the London Assembly, and seven regional mayors, for one year. In an ominous development, the Act allows for the suspension of other elections by the Secretary of State or the Minister for the Cabinet Office. Just two days after lockdown, the Coronavirus Act was passed, giving the government dictatorial powers. Ministers could restrict or prohibit gatherings anywhere in England and Wales, close premises and impose the forced detention and isolation of anyone, including children, for any length of time. 20,000 military personnel were placed on standby as a “COVID Support Force” charged with maintaining “public order.” Police could detain anyone “at risk or suspected of having the virus,” halt “any vehicle, train, vessel or aircraft,” and close ports. These moves built on Operation Yellowhammer, drafted in preparation for a no-deal Brexit, allowing for the deployment of up to 50,000 regular and reserve troops, backed up by 10,000 riot police.

23. The lockdowns forced on governments throughout the world saved millions of lives. A team of leading experts published a report in *Nature*, June 8, which found that “across 11 countries, since the beginning of the epidemic, 3,100,000 [2,800,000- 3,500,000] deaths have been averted...” [5] This included 470,000 in the UK. But the delay of the lockdown, its partial character, the past gutting of health and social care, the failure to track and trace, and the criminal policy of sending the already infected into care homes, was to end in the UK becoming the centre of the pandemic in Europe. Exemptions for “key workers”—widely abused by companies—meant around 10 million people, a third of the workforce, had to continue working throughout the pandemic.

The campaign to reopen the economy and the corporatist role of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy

24. Lockdown was viewed by the ruling elite as an imposed concession to be done away with as soon as possible so that the major corporations could return to making profit and clawing back the cost of the bailouts. For this, the despised Johnson government relied on the trade unions and the Labour Party, led first by Jeremy Corbyn and then Sir Keir Starmer. Party policy under both leaders was corporatism—direct collusions

between the government, trade unions and the employers in policing the class struggle. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Labour under Corbyn met regularly with Johnson. TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady wrote an open letter to the *Times* pledging to “get stuck into the job of rebuilding our country so that it works for everyone. Just as we did after the Second World War.” This cynical reference is meant to invoke memories of major post-war social concessions associated with the welfare state and the setting up of the NHS. This time, however, collusion between the unions, the government, and the employers is aimed at the elimination of all the remaining social gains of the working class. It meant sabotaging every action by workers against the government and the employers, including the Communication Workers Union’s rejection of a near-unanimous national strike vote by Royal Mail postal workers. On March 15, the University and College Union cancelled picket lines in the largest-ever strike of higher education staff at 74 institutions over pensions, pay and working conditions.

25. After winning the leadership of the party in 2015, Corbyn dedicated himself to opposing any struggle by the working class and thwarting demands for the Blairite right-wing to be expelled. The result was a crushing defeat for Labour in the December 2019 general election and the coming to power of Johnson. The dying days of Corbyn’s leadership saw him collude directly with this same government, whose policies have led to the deaths of tens of thousands of workers. Corbyn signed off on the bailout of the banks and corporations and then agreed to the passage of the draconian Coronavirus Act, without even demanding a vote in parliament. Labour agreed to its post-lockdown renewal on October 1.

26. To this list of political crimes must be added Corbyn’s silence on the Johnson government’s imposition of “herd immunity”. As he later admitted, during regular meetings with the government “throughout the spring of this year... I remember distinctly going to a meeting at the Cabinet Office, where we got a lecture about herd immunity.” [6] Corbyn described the policy as “eugenic,” but made no warning to the working class and allowed Johnson to implement it. Up to the day he was replaced by Starmer on April 4, Corbyn spoke exclusively in the language of “national unity” and of not wanting to appear “relentlessly negative.” Starmer had to change nothing when he declared on becoming party leader, “Our willingness to come together like this as a nation has been lying dormant for too long... Under my leadership, we will engage constructively with the government, not opposition for opposition’s sake.”

27. On April 16, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab—with Johnson seriously ill with coronavirus—was forced to announce a three-week extension to the nationwide lockdown, while Sunak extended the jobs furlough scheme to give the TUC and Labour time to get the situation under control. On May 5, the Tories distributed seven documents drawn up in consultation with employers’ groups and the trade unions. The TUC’s document, “A trade union approach... on how to manage the mass return to work,” declared that the organisation “does not take a position on the science of how to manage a pandemic or the speed or nature of any return to work.” It added, “It is invidious to argue about the relative priority of public health or economic growth: both are important to the wellbeing of working people.” [7] Taking his cue, on May 10, Johnson declared that those who could not work from home, such as workers in construction and manufacturing, must return to work the following day. Sunak laid out a timetable to end the jobs furlough scheme by November. In such incremental steps, Britain’s national lockdown was wound up and was officially declared over on June 24.

28. The working class has paid a heavy price for the collusion of Labour and the TUC with the Tories and the employers. The virus is a poor man’s disease. Those in the most deprived communities were more than twice as likely to die as those in the wealthiest districts, and males in manual jobs four times more likely to die than those in professional occupations. The

number of people facing food insecurity quadrupled to 8.1 million (16 percent of the population). Over one million people lost all their income and 70 percent of households experienced falls in income. In September, nearly three million people claimed jobless benefit of some kind, six times higher than in the same period in 2019. One hundred thousand people used food banks for the first time between April and June. An estimated 700,000 people will be officially destitute by Christmas.

29. The pandemic confirmed that even the most elemental defence of workers' lives and livelihoods requires an organisational and political rebellion against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. The SEP sought to give leadership to the overwhelming opposition to the back-to-work drive and the reopening of schools planned for September. A May 27 statement warned:

"Millions are being driven back to their workplaces in dangerously unsafe conditions, joining a third of the UK workforce, including non-essential industries such as online retail warehouses and call centres, that have worked throughout the lockdown.

"The Conservative government knows it is placing millions of lives at risk and could not care less... The demand for a 'return to work' is driven by the need to restore the flow of corporate profits. Without a careful plan to implement a safe return to work, based on science and rigorously enforced, there will be an enormous increase in the rate of infection, resulting in serious illness and death.

"The working class cannot be made to pay for ensuring its safety. The costs necessary to ensure safe working conditions, as well as to provide health care and full income for all workers, must be borne by the corporations and the capitalist ruling elite...

"No confidence can be placed in corporate management to secure workers' safety. Nor can workers rely on the trade unions. Only a minority of workers are unionised, and the unions function as little more than arms of corporate management.

"Workers require their own organisations. In every factory, workplace, and office, workers should organise and elect trusted and respected workers who will represent them." [8]

30. On May 30, the SEP issued a statement demanding, "No to the reopening of schools! Build action committees to safeguard children and teachers!" The statement explained:

"The reopening of schools has nothing to do with genuine concern for the education and wellbeing of children. Teachers, children and even toddlers are being sent into unsafe environments that will become a breeding ground for COVID-19. The youngest and least able to follow safety measures are being packed off to school first as the lynchpin of the government's 'back to work' drive. Schools are being treated as little more than holding pens so that millions of parents can be sent to work in non-essential industries...

"Education workers and parents must now act independently by forming action committees to ensure the safety and well-being of children, staff, families, and communities." [9]

By June 1, more than a million children were kept at home by worried parents. In schools that were opened, only between 40 and 70 percent of pupils returned.

31. On June 5, the SEP issued a call for the formation of a London bus drivers' rank-and-file safety committee after it was revealed that at least 43 transport workers in London, including 29 bus drivers, had died from COVID-19. [10] The main drivers' union, Unite, was advocating a phased return to full service, in collusion with Transport for London and the bus companies, arguing against face masks, while organising a return to front-door boarding near the driver. In the NHS, the SEP urged support for its NHS FightBack initiative, insisting, "The challenge that faces NHS workers is the development of an independent political struggle against the ruling class and its political defenders in the fight for socialism and a workers' government. To wage this fight, action committees must be

established, independent from the trade unions, to safeguard the health and safety of doctors and nurses and to wage a political struggle for essential resources." [11]

The end of lockdown, the eruption of class struggle, and the resurgence of the pandemic

32. The initial relaxing of lockdown in the US saw the eruption of multi-racial and multi-ethnic protests sparked by the May 25 police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. This ignited demonstrations and solidarity actions throughout the world, in a powerful confirmation of the global character of the class struggle and expressing the common problems faced by workers in every country, whether police repression, austerity, or the deadly impact of the pandemic. While vigorously supporting this groundswell of opposition, the ICFI opposed the Black Lives Matter (BLM) advocates of a racialist, pro-capitalist perspective. The US SEP explained, "The aim of the racial sectarians is to deflect attention from the police as an instrument of the capitalist state and the front-line guardians of class rule. Moreover, the efforts to impose a racial narrative on the demonstrations are contradicted by their obviously multiracial, multi-ethnic and multinational character." [12] The essential political preparation for this offensive against racial politics was the work conducted by the SEP to oppose the "1619 Project," a campaign initiated by the *New York Times* in August 2019 seeking to discredit the American Revolution, the Civil War and its principal leaders in furtherance of the efforts by the Democratic Party to foster communalist politics, evaluating and explaining all social problems and conflicts in racial rather than class terms. [13]

33. Hundreds of solidarity demonstrations against police brutality were held across the UK, attended by as many as 137,500 people. The Tories responded with demands for repression, with Home Secretary Priti Patel pledging to bring the "thugs and criminals... to justice." The SEP's warning that Johnson and Patel "calculate that the protests against the murder of George Floyd are the harbinger of a far broader eruption of the class struggle" was confirmed within a week when John Apter, Chairman of the Police Federation for England and Wales, and Ken Marsh, chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation, called on the government to ban all protests for the duration of the pandemic. This threat underscored the SEP's insistence that genuine opposition to state repression means rejecting attempts by the BLM movement to "turn the objective striving of the working class, and particularly the youth, for unity against class oppression—contained in the George Floyd protests—into a culture war framed around a supposedly fundamental racial divide. It denies that racism is a mechanism to divide and rule by the capitalist class and blames it on 'white people' and 'white privilege', opposing a unified struggle of workers against capitalism, against class oppression, in favour of support for 'black capitalism', of 'equality of oppression' with more black people in corporate management, etc..." The SEP urged the mainly young protestors to turn towards the working class and the fight for socialism. "What is posed is not an offensive against statues reflecting the legacy of slavery, but a struggle by the entire working class, black, white and Asian, against the very real and very contemporary dangers of state violence to defend and perpetuate wage slavery." [14]

34. The Johnson government proceeded with plans for the reopening of schools despite warnings of a second wave of infections between 2.0 and 2.3 times the size of the original wave. On August 8, the SEP issued the statement, "For a general strike against the reopening of schools." It explained:

"At every stage of this offensive against education workers and

children, as with the wider ‘back to work’ drive, the Tories have counted on the collusion of the trade unions and the Labour Party. The National Education Union, for example, fully supports the reopening of schools, asking only for a ‘regular review’ of whether masks should be worn, ‘in light of developments in scientific opinion, experience and practice elsewhere.’ Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said this week that reopening schools was ‘the priority’ and that ‘Any steps the government makes to regain the trust of the British people will have Labour’s full support.’” [15]

35. The demobilisation of opposition among teachers and parents by the education unions and the Labour Party enabled schools to reopen September 1, with no social distancing and no PPE for children or staff. Children in primary schools were expected to return to classrooms of 30, while secondary school “bubbles” could include entire year groups of up to 240. Attendance was enforced through the threat of fines. The result of ending the lockdown and the back-to-work and back-to-school drive was inevitable—the resurgence of the virus to levels comparable with the previous height of the pandemic, with millions under some form of regional lockdown, thousands of schools and universities infected, and students imprisoned in their halls of residence. The end of the furlough scheme, notwithstanding its extension until April 2021, is expected to see the unemployment rate spiral to 6 million and a staggering increase in homelessness.

36. At its Sixth National Congress, held online from July 19 to July 24, 2020, the US SEP predicted that the end of lockdowns would inevitably unleash explosive class struggles. The resolution passed by the Congress stated:

“The first half of the year has been dominated by the response of the ruling class to the pandemic. The response of the working class will come to the forefront in the second half. The disastrous consequences of the ruling class’ policies have delivered a staggering blow to the legitimacy of the capitalist system. The corporate response to economic collapse—mass layoffs, wage-cutting, demands for the further slashing of expenditures for Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other vital and already underfunded social programs—will meet with growing resistance in the working class. Opposition will mount to working in unsafe conditions and to school re-openings that facilitate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. There will be opposition to evictions and foreclosures. Therefore, the Socialist Equality Party foresees an immense growth of working-class struggle, which, through the intervention of the party, will assume a politically class conscious and anti-capitalist character.” [16]

This is already finding expression internationally and in the UK. In Greece, students occupied 700 schools within weeks of them reopening. Strikes demanding wage increases and contract revisions erupted among dockers in the port of Piraeus and at Olympic Air. Thousands protested in Madrid at the imposition of lockdowns only covering working-class districts. There have been strikes by teachers in France against school reopenings, by 2.3 million public sector workers in Germany, and by public transport workers in both countries. Mass anti-government protests are taking place in Belarus and Poland, in defence of abortion rights. Strike ballots of London Underground drivers and Metroline London bus workers have both returned an overwhelming yes vote, and ballots are also being held in the UK among train drivers and conductors, British Airways ground staff and flight crew, British Telecom workers, and university staff.

The failure of “Corbynism” and the bankruptcy of the pseudo-left

groups that “Corbynism” could “re-establish a new workers’ party” (Socialist Party) and represented a “rebirth of social democracy” (Socialist Workers Party.) Even before Corbyn’s election in 2015, the SEP wrote that no change of leader, nor even an influx of left-leaning members, could change the historically and programmatically determined character of Labour as a “right-wing bourgeois party... complicit in all the crimes of British imperialism” that “has functioned as the principal political opponent of socialism for more than a century.” [17] The SEP Congress resolution of November 2016 explained that Labour’s rightward lurch was not simply the product of bad leaders, such as Tony Blair, but had profound objective roots in fundamental shifts within world capitalism associated with globalisation which had “dramatically undermined” the viability of the old labour organisations that were “embedded in the nation-state system.” [18]

38. Throughout his tenure as Labour leader, rather than oppose austerity, Corbyn instructed Labour councils to impose the cuts demanded by the Tories, while his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell courted the City of London. Rather than mobilise workers against militarism and war, Corbyn capitulated on every key issue—allowing free votes on war in Syria and the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons programme, as part of NATO’s military build-up against Russia. Based on a programme of economic nationalism, he abandoned his lifelong opposition to the European Union (EU) and joined the official Remain campaign in the Brexit referendum. Against popular demands to drive out Labour’s right-wing, Corbyn repeatedly reached out to the Blairites, who made clear they preferred a Tory victory to tolerating the party’s association with nominally “left-wing” policies. Not only did Corbyn pave the way for Starmer and his collusion with the Tories, but his refusal to fight the bogus allegations of “left-wing anti-Semitism” and the persecution of his supporters have ended in his own suspension from the party and an escalating McCarthyite witch-hunt seeking to drive out all those who joined Labour genuinely seeking a left alternative to Blairism. Corbyn has paved the way for a broader offensive against left-wing sentiment among workers and youth, with anyone opposing imperialist war crimes in the Middle East and Israel’s repression of the Palestinians to be branded an anti-Semite.

39. Masses of people have been brought face-to-face with the bankruptcy and treachery of political parties that have dominated protest movements and what passed for left politics over an entire historical period. The model for “Corbynism” was Syriza in Greece and a host of other anti-Marxist, fake-left tendencies, including the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, the Democratic Socialists of America in the US, and Podemos in Spain, which have all integrated themselves into bourgeois and imperialist politics. Rooted in affluent sections of the middle class, they insist that the working class is no longer a revolutionary force but has been superseded by a multitude of social constituencies defined by national, racial, gender or lifestyle identities. For decades, these parties palmed off their politics as radical or anti-capitalist when they were nothing of the sort. Their essential function on behalf of crisis-ridden capitalism is to pre-empt and prevent the emergence of an independent political movement of the working class for socialism. To identify and explain these parties’ role, the ICFI developed the term pseudo-left: they support capitalism, oppose the class struggle, embrace philosophical irrationalism, and support neo-colonial wars.

40. The central lessons of the failure of “Corbynism” were summed up in a December 14, 2019 statement by the WSWS Editorial Board on Labour’s electoral debacle:

“What is exposed in Labour’s debacle is a type of politics that seeks to deny the revolutionary nature of the working class. Under Corbyn’s leadership, Labour ditched any class appeal in favour of promoting an agenda based on the identity politics of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.

“The ideologist of the middle-class left, Chantal Mouffe, described

37. The pandemic serves as an epitaph for the claims by the pseudo-left

Corbyn as potentially the most successful example of a new wave of ‘left populism’ because he ‘stands at the head of a great party and enjoys the support of the trade unions.’ The outcome would depend on his rejecting the ‘traditional left political frontier... established on the basis of class’...

“Corbyn’s debacle is the exposure not just of the Labour Party, but of the entire perspective of the ‘parliamentary road to socialism.’ The great questions of war, poverty, and social inequality are not going to be solved with cleverly-run election campaigns.

“The precondition for resolving any of the great social problems confronting mankind is a massive mobilisation of the working class and the intensification of the class struggle on a global scale. Only a movement that identifies itself with this struggle, that breaks through the miserable nationalist debate over Brexit, and fights for a programme of international proletarian unity, will be able to win the confidence of the working class and lead it in the fight for socialism.” [19]

Brexit, inter-imperialist antagonisms, and the danger of war

41. The SEP insisted during the 2016 Brexit referendum that, whatever the confused, anti-establishment sentiment they exploited, the Leave forces represented the most right-wing, xenophobic layers within the Tory party, seeking to “complete the Thatcher revolution” domestically, to better pursue trade and military war abroad. But we warned that the pro-Remain forces, led by Labour and the TUC, offered no alternative—seeking to preserve access to the European market in an alliance with US imperialism, by leveraging the UK’s role as a bulwark for Washington’s interests on the continent. We called for an *active boycott* of the referendum, warning, “There can be no good outcome of such a plebiscite. Whichever side wins, working people will pay the price,” [20] and called for workers to adopt the perspective of a unified struggle across the continent for socialism. In contrast, all the pseudo-left groups lined up behind one or another capitalist faction, with the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party (SWP) advocating a “Left Leave” vote portraying Brexit as the basis for a national road to socialism through reforms implemented by a Corbyn government. Other smaller groups also lined up behind Corbyn, while backing Remain and promoting the “progressive” virtues of the EU. The lining-up of advocates of “Left Leave” with the Tory right was epitomised by their most prominent spokesman George Galloway mounting a joint platform with then UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage to proclaim, “Left, right, left, right, forward march together!” It confirmed that there is no line which the pseudo-left is not prepared to cross in its opposition to the struggle for socialist internationalism and defence of capitalism and the bourgeois nation-state.

42. The pandemic has served as definitive proof that all conflicts within the ruling class over Brexit are between two equally reactionary factions, divided over how best to advance British imperialism’s global interests but united in their intense hostility to the working class. There is nothing to distinguish between the UK and its European competitors in their response to the pandemic. Europe’s workers were sacrificed while the EU powers focused on their own corporate bailouts. No European-wide measures were taken to combat the pandemic, with the worst affected countries such as Italy and Spain left to fend for themselves. In the UK, the Leave and Remain factions of the bourgeoisie united in support of “herd immunity” and sacrificing workers’ lives to defend their profits. The northern constituencies that helped deliver the Leave vote and Johnson his electoral majority in 2019 have been especially cruelly exposed to the pandemic. As for the claims that exiting the EU would put the “Great” back into Britain, the pandemic has accelerated centrifugal

tensions within the UK itself that threaten its break-up. Demands for a second independence referendum in Scotland are now joined by the calling into question of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and destabilisation of Ireland on both sides of the border. The English regions are being pitted against one another, as Labourites in the northern cities unite with Tories in demanding a redistribution of wealth from London and the South East.

43. Johnson’s threat to tear up the Withdrawal Agreement with the EU and grant the UK powers to control trade terms with Northern Ireland confirms that the driving force for Brexit was the huge escalation of inter-imperialist antagonisms produced by the global crisis of the capitalist system, antagonisms which led to two world wars in the twentieth century. The cataclysmic events in the US now place the UK ever more firmly at the centre of the global escalation of trade war and militarism. Johnson’s goal is to utilise Brexit to transform the UK into a deregulated, cheap labour “Singapore-on-Thames” in alliance with the Trump administration, which views the EU as a rival to be broken up. The Johnson government has been dreading the possibility of a US election victory for the Democratic Party—which is opposed to Brexit—knowing the factional warfare within the British ruling class has never been resolved. Moreover, the price demanded for London’s alliance with Washington is full support for deepening hostilities towards Russia and China, including barring China’s Huawei from the UK’s 5G network and withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear agreement co-sponsored by Germany, France, China, and Russia.

44. As in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Britain continues to play the role of an *agent provocateur* for the US, witnessed in its utilising of the still unexplained Skripal poisonings against Russia and leveraging of its former colonial role in Hong Kong as a catspaw against China. Sooner rather than later, British imperialism will have no choice other than to try and resolve its desperate plight in an explosion of military violence. No less than the US, Britain’s war preparations are gathering speed, following the Ministry of Defence’s 2018 report that “the world has returned to an era of fierce competition after 30 years of relative stability,” with plans for a greater military presence “where we have economic interests,” including two new military bases in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia. The UK’s new £3 billion HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier will make its maiden voyage to the Far East next year at the head of a nuclear-armed strike group to take part in US-Japanese military exercises against China. Preparations are also underway for military hostilities against Russia, prefigured by military exercises in Georgia and the Atlantic in September. Numerous flashpoints threaten to involve the major imperialist powers, including the Armenia/Azerbaijan conflict and the conflict between Turkey and Greece in the eastern Mediterranean. This is only one element in the complex web of wars and antagonisms involving Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, also centring on the Persian Gulf, where the US Navy has carried out provocations against Iran, and in Libya and the Sahel that are part of a scramble for Africa and its vital resources.

45. The only way to halt the drive towards a new world war is the international unification of the struggles of the working class against war, the pandemic, and capitalism, based on a revolutionary socialist programme. The policy of “herd immunity” is directly connected with the drive to trade and military war. The ruling class calculates that the fall in life expectancy will save hundreds of billions in pension, health, and social welfare provisions so that this cash bonanza can be redirected towards paying for the multi-trillion corporate bailouts and the military budget. The ICFI counterposes to this imperialist strategy the fight to unify the working class internationally in a common struggle against the bourgeoisie. Central to this is the perspective of the European sections of the ICFI for the United Socialist States of Europe, against the EU and all the imperialist powers, as part of a world socialist federation. The struggle

against the policy of mass death requires the independent mobilisation of the working class and the preparation of general strikes across the continent, to overthrow the ruling elite in every country and establish workers' governments.

Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

46. Meeting the revolutionary challenge of this new period depends on the assimilation by the cadre of the SEP of the historic lessons of the decades-long struggle to build a Marxist revolutionary leadership. In his opening report to the August 2019 international summer school, WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North identified a new stage in the history of the Trotskyist movement:

"We are now witnessing the intersection of a new revolutionary upsurge of the international working class with the political activity of the International Committee. The world crisis that we are analysing is one in which the International Committee is an increasingly active and direct participant..."

"The objective processes of economic globalization, identified by the International Committee more than 30 years ago, have undergone further colossal development. Combined with the emergence of new technologies that have revolutionized communications, these processes have internationalized the class struggle to a degree that would have been hard to imagine even 25 years ago. The revolutionary struggle of the working class will develop as an interconnected and unified world movement. The International Committee of the Fourth International will be built as the conscious political leadership of this objective socio-economic process. It will counterpose to the capitalist politics of imperialist war the class-based strategy of world socialist revolution." [21]

47. The foundation for the ICFI's response to this new stage in the class struggle centres above all on the extraordinary theoretical and political work conducted since the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party in 1986. This marked the decisive victory of the Trotskyist movement against Pabloism, which sought to subordinate the Fourth International to the social democratic, Stalinist, and petty-bourgeois nationalist movements that dominated the workers' movement in the post-war period. It led to an unprecedented renaissance of Marxism, including a fundamental study of the implications of the globalisation of production for the future course of the class struggle and the socialist revolution. The Socialist Equality Parties were founded from 1995 onwards on the understanding that globalisation had rendered the nationalist programmes of the old mass parties and trade unions bankrupt. This meant that the class struggle would be international not only in content but also in form. The radicalisation of the masses would therefore not take place within the framework of the old organisations, but in a struggle against them that must be led by the sections of the ICFI. The launching of the *World Socialist Web Site* in February 1998 arose out of this transformation of leagues into parties, becoming the chief mechanism through which the ICFI is being established as the new revolutionary leadership of the international working class.

48. The central political responsibility of the SEP is to take full part in the development of the *World Socialist Web Site* as the authoritative voice of Marxism and the instrument through which the world working class will be unified in a struggle for socialism. The WSWS was relaunched on October 2 with a major redesign that is aesthetically pleasing and provides for heightened functionality. But the redesign was guided by an understanding that the historic breakdown of the world capitalist system, accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic, is generating an immense growth of interest within the working class in socialist politics, history,

and theory. In announcing the relaunch, David North explained, "throughout this lengthy process, our central concern has been the development of the World Socialist Web Site as the focal point, in the international struggle for socialism, of theoretical education, political analysis, cultural enlightenment and the revolutionary organization of the working class... The WSWS will provide access to the programs and major statements of the International Committee and its sections. All those who are looking for a socialist movement based on Marxism—which upholds the genuine revolutionary legacy of the 1917 October Revolution, defends historical truth, and conducts a relentless fight against all variants of neo-Stalinism, reactionary nationalism, reformism, opportunism and middle-class pseudo-leftism—will be able to follow the work of the Fourth International and study its history and program." [22]

49. An essential theme of Trotsky's writings since his *The Lessons of October* in 1924 was to elaborate the decisive role of political leadership in the struggle for socialism. Without a correct political perspective and the development of a revolutionary cadre to fight for this in the working class, tragic historical experiences prove that even the most favourable objective situation can end in defeat. Trotsky warned that any major turn in the objective situation brings new pressures on the party as it is required to alter its tactics and methods of organisation to meet the new demands of the class struggle. The 2018 Congress resolution of the US SEP summarised the essential conclusion drawn by Trotsky that political defeats "were frequently the consequence of incorrect policies by the socialist party in the course of revolutionary struggles... But another cause of defeats is the failure of the Marxist party to recognize and respond, in a timely and sufficiently determined manner, to the approach of a revolutionary crisis. The defeat of the German Revolution in 1923 is the most significant example of such a failure of political initiative. In the present situation of deepening crisis, it is the latter mistake that the revolutionary movement must be determined to avoid." [23]

50. The SEP will intervene directly in all the struggles of the working class to encourage its independent militant activity, raise its political consciousness and understanding of the socialist and internationalist perspective, and win the most advanced workers and youth to the party. The SEP endorses the statement by our US comrades in their 2020 Congress resolution: "Revolutionary politics does not unfold in some sort of distant, ethereal and super-human realm. Even the most favourable objective conditions need to be acted upon by politically conscious workers, who have been educated by the party... The party must patiently explain to workers and youth the nature of the crisis and the strategy of the struggle for socialism. But the need for patient explaining must not become a justification for passive contemplation. Opportunities to translate political understanding into practical actions must not be missed. The aim of the party is to lead workers in struggle." [24]

51. Trotsky wrote: "The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. Its political aim is the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie. However, the achievement of this strategic task is unthinkable without the most considered attention to all, even small and partial, questions of tactics. All sections of the proletariat, all its layers, occupations and groups should be drawn into the revolutionary movement. The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution." [25]

52. In carrying out its work, the SEP advances a series of transitional demands that connect the issues and needs arising from the concrete situation to the strategy of world socialist revolution. The SEP demands an end to the criminal back-to-work drive and school reopenings, the repudiation of the corporate bailouts, and the establishment of workers' ownership and democratic control of the major banks and corporations to

provide income to all those impacted by the pandemic, to fund containment measures and expand healthcare and social protections. These demands proceed from the fundamental premise that the response to the pandemic must be determined by what workers and society as a whole need, not what the capitalist system and the financial oligarchs are prepared to give. These transitional demands lead inexorably to the essential conclusion: the need to establish workers' power and abolish capitalism.

The SEP will undertake specific tasks in the fight for this perspective:

· Build rank-and-file committees

53. The SEP will intensify its efforts to build rank-and-file safety committees, which have already been established among autoworkers, educators and students in the US, Australia, Germany and the UK, and among London bus drivers. The purpose of these committees is to wage an independent struggle in defence of the safety of the working class and to defend livelihoods from the assault of the ruling elite. They are critical centres for directing the rebellion against the corporatism of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, developing socialist consciousness, and recruiting workers into the party.

54. Within these committees, the SEP seeks to educate workers as to the character of the trade unions and the role of the pseudo-left tendencies as apologists and the last line of defence for the trade union bureaucracy. We will stress the necessity to generalise the struggle of the working class, including through the formation of neighbourhood safety committees to combat the mounting social disaster facing millions. We will fight to link the struggle of workers in Britain with that of their class brothers and sisters in Europe and internationally, popularising the demand for a political general strike to bring down the Johnson government in Britain as part of a Europe-wide offensive of the working class.

· Defend immigrants and asylum seekers

55. The SEP will wage a determined struggle in defence of immigrants and asylum seekers. The victims of imperialist wars and brutal exploitation by the transnational corporations are subjected to the vilest crimes, hunted collectively by Europe's governments using warships, allowed to die in their thousands at sea, imprisoned in concentration camps and subject to deportation. The UK leads this frenzied offensive, mobilising the Royal Navy to turn away makeshift dinghies in the Channel while inciting the fascist right to attack migrants who make it to the UK. The SEP will demand an end to all deportations and call for refugees to be welcomed and provided with all the benefits of citizenship. We will work with our international comrades in combating the Fortress Europe policies of the EU governments, of which the measures taken by the UK remain an integral part. We will highlight the terrible death toll in the Mediterranean and the appalling conditions in which asylum seekers are held in de facto concentration camps.

· Oppose militarism and war

56. The SEP will intensify its opposition to imperialist militarism, which threatens to unleash a Third World War. The fight against war must be based on the working class. It must be anti-capitalist and socialist and waged independently from all political parties and organisations that defend the capitalist system. Above all, it must be international, uniting and mobilising the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle to end capitalism and its nation-state divisions and establish world socialism.

· Free Julian Assange!

57. The targeting of WikiLeaks and Assange is inseparable from the escalating drive to imperialist war and the move to authoritarian forms of rule. The explosion of US militarism—backed by its allies jostling for a share of the spoils—is accompanied by the ongoing destruction of democratic and legal rights and the overturning of international law. That is why the persecution of Assange has proceeded amid a virtual media blackout and with the testimony of *Guardian* journalists making up a

major element of the prosecution's case. The pseudo-left groups have maintained the same criminal silence they have imposed regarding Assange's fate since supporting the failed efforts to frame him on bogus sexual assault allegations in Sweden to secure his extradition. The pseudo-left and liberal milieu have renounced any pretence of anti-imperialism and have embraced regime-change operations in Syria, Libya and elsewhere based on support for "humanitarian intervention" and the espousal of identity politics. They view the disclosure of imperialist war crimes by WikiLeaks with undisguised enmity. Indeed, the *Guardian* joined with the *New York Times* and others to minimise the political damage from the release of the material leaked by Assange before turning on him in alliance with the state apparatus.

58. The SEP will step up its exposure of this conspiracy and combat the attempts to entrust Assange's fate to various bourgeois politicians, trade union bureaucrats, and NGOs as advocated by Counterfire and Don't Extradite Assange. The belated and insincere gestures of support from those such as Jeremy Corbyn are a cynical fraud—Corbyn refused to mobilise his millions of supporters in defence of Assange when leader of the Labour Party. The only way Assange can be freed is by linking this demand with the struggle of the working class against capitalism and imperialism, in opposition to the state, parliament, the judiciary and the bourgeois media. This is evidenced by the powerful support Assange secured among France's Yellow Vests and by the global campaign waged by the WSWS and sections of the ICFI, which have fought to educate and mobilise the working class, including doctors who demanded his freedom on medical grounds, autoworkers, teachers, students and young people. The SEP will urge workers to follow the example set by the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee and pledge their support for his release. The fight for Assange's freedom is inextricably linked to the struggle against state and corporate censorship of the WSWS and other left-wing, anti-war websites and individuals, and against the attempts by the German state to criminalise our comrades by designating the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP) as "left extremist" and unconstitutional.

· Defend art and culture

59. The SEP will take up the defence of art and culture under conditions in which hundreds of thousands of workers in the sector are facing the loss of their incomes and livelihoods. Chancellor Sunak's demand that artists "retrain and find other jobs" expresses the hostility of the ruling class toward art and its indifference to the fate of hundreds of theatres, museums, art galleries, orchestras, dance companies and music venues which are facing closure. As Trotsky wrote in 1938, "Art can neither escape the crisis nor partition itself off. Art cannot save itself." The defence of art and culture falls to the working class and the socialist movement. The fight for the full political emancipation of the working class and its cultural enlightenment are inseparably connected.

· Build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality

60. The SEP will mount an ambitious campaign to build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) on the campuses, in schools and among working-class youth, who have been hit hardest of all by the pandemic and the ongoing destruction of jobs. We will seek to mobilise a unified struggle by students with educators against the deadly impact of the reopening of schools, colleges, and universities under unsafe conditions. We will combat the attempts to exclude all anti-capitalist views from the curriculum and to censor opposition to Zionism and Israel's repression of the Palestinians, at the same time mobilising against the "Prevent" strategy that seeks to turn educators into spies and police informers. The IYSSE will wage a consistent theoretical offensive for socialism against the advocates of post-modernism and identity politics.

· Build European sections of the ICFI

61. The struggle for socialist internationalism proceeds at its highest

level through the fight to build the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution. There is no national solution to the global pandemic, as there is no national solution to any of the great problems confronting the working class. The building of a mass socialist movement in the British working class must be linked to the mobilisation of the international working class, the massive social force that can finally put an end to capitalist barbarism. The SEP has a particular responsibility to work with our comrades in the SGP in Germany, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France) and Sosyalist E?itlik (Turkey) to build sections of the ICFI throughout Europe. That work will be guided by the perspective outlined in our September 25 joint statement with the SGP in Germany, the PES in France and Sosyalist E?itlik in Turkey, "For a general strike to halt the resurgence of COVID-19 in Europe!"

"The European sections of the ICFI and its sympathizing group in Turkey reiterate the calls they have issued for a general strike against the murderous back-to-work and back-to-school policies. The task now facing the growing mobilization and political radicalization of the working class in Europe is the struggle to seize the resources stolen by the ruling class in years of obscene bailouts, bring down the EU governments, overthrow the capitalist system, and replace the reactionary EU with the United Socialist States of Europe." [26]

62. The most farsighted and politically principled workers and young people who join the SEP will be rooted firmly in the principles and history of the struggle for socialist internationalism embodied in the ICFI. The cadre of the SEP will provide the necessary leadership to the emerging revolutionary struggles of the working class.

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