

Strong response to Australian SEP meeting on COVID-19 and the lessons of 2020

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Socialist Equality in Australia won an enthusiastic response to its online public meeting—“COVID-19 and the lessons of 2020: A socialist perspective for the struggles ahead”—on Sunday afternoon.

Detailed reports from SEP speakers provoked questions on a range of subjects from the almost 90 people in attendance from Australia, as well as New Zealand and the Philippines. The Q&A session continued for over hour after the main reports. Those attending included, workers—young and old—teachers, students, unemployed and retirees. A full video of the event is available [here](#).

SEP assistant national secretary Max Boddy, who chaired the meeting, reviewed the horrifying global death toll from COVID-19, telling the meeting that the pandemic had brought to the surface all the underlying contradictions and rotteness of the profit system and placed revolutionary struggles on agenda.

Boddy explained that US, European, Australian and others governments had been warned of the dangers but refused to take any serious action. He contrasted this with the scientific analysis and socialist program elaborated by the world Trotskyist movement and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

SEP national committee member Evrim Yazgin was the first speaker. Yazgin is president of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Melbourne.

“The experiences of 2020,” he said, “have been etched into the memory of an entire generation” who were on the frontlines, having been forced back into schools as part of the so-called “reopening of the economy” and the murderous “herd immunity” policies.

“Even more than before COVID-19, the future confronting young people is one of joblessness, high cost of living, unaffordable housing, debt, and financial stress,” Yazgin said. The current real rate of youth “underutilisation” and unemployment was over 48 percent, he said, adding that this, along with other social attacks, had produced a major increase in mental health issues among youth.

Pointing to the political radicalisation of young people globally, Yazgin said the real fear of the ruling establishment is that growing numbers of young people are becoming attracted

to socialism and Marxism.

SEP national committee member Mike Head reviewed the recently released report on war crimes by Australian special forces troops in Afghanistan, the growth of militarism, the use of the army domestically, and the ever-rising danger of a US-led imperialist war against China.

Head said the long-delayed war crimes report was a whitewash that exonerated the military high command and every Australian government—Liberal-National and Labor alike—who endorsed the invasion of Afghanistan. Most of the atrocities took place under the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard. Like Iraq, the occupation of Afghanistan, he said, was an illegal neo-colonial war for resources and geo-strategic domination over the Middle East and Central Asia.

The crimes in Afghanistan were not the actions of isolated individuals, Head continued, but the responsibility of Australian governments and the military high command. These leaders should be placed on trial for crimes against humanity, just as the Nazi leaders were after WWII.

Instead, the speaker noted, the only ones being prosecuted are the whistleblowers—ex-military lawyer David McBride and WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange—while the government was boosting military spending by \$575 billion in the next decade, including \$3 billion extra to special forces in the next two years. Head warned about the anti-China, wartime-like atmosphere being created and the antidemocratic and repressive “foreign interference” laws introduced to intimidate and prosecute anti-war opponents.

Tom Peters from the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand spoke about the relentless glorification of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern by the corporate media, including the *New York Times*, as well as the unions and pseudo-left, and its political purpose.

“This narrative is based on lies,” he said, and an attempt to divert attention from the Labour government’s attacks on workers and youth and its total support for the US war preparations against China.

“The fact that New Zealand has not suffered mass deaths from COVID-19 has been falsely attributed to Ardern’s leadership,” he said. Her government, he explained, imposed a

lockdown in late March only because it feared mass action by teachers, healthcare workers and tens of thousands of others.

“The government’s main response to the pandemic was to protect the rich, diverting tens of billions to corporations through subsidies, loans and bailouts. The Reserve Bank is printing \$100 billion to buy bonds from the private banks—an astronomical sum for a small country like New Zealand.”

Peters reviewed the nationwide strikes by nurses and teachers in 2018 and 2019 and their betrayals by the unions, and the escalating assault on jobs, wages and conditions and rising housing crisis and poverty throughout the country.

The final speaker, SEP national secretary Cheryl Crisp, quoted from the prophetic WSWS statement “The decade of socialist revolution begins,” written on January 3 this year by David North and Joe Kishore.

“We could not know that within two months of that insightful assessment the world would be transformed. The WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International alone were able to make such an assessment,” she said.

Crisp reviewed the human catastrophe produced by COVID-19 which was now escalating out of control in country after country—an indictment of the capitalist system and its ruling elites.

She explained that 2,977 Americans died in the 9/11 terror attacks which were used as the pretext to launch wars that cost \$6 trillion. While the same numbers of Americans are now being killed every day by COVID-19, the Trump administration and US President-elect Joe Biden both insist that there is to be no money for lockdowns or support for affected workers and small businesses because it would adversely impact on Wall Street.

The social and political crisis in the US, Crisp warned, was sharpest expression of processes underway in every country. The development of a vaccine, even in if successfully distributed and administered will not result in a “return to normal.” She warned that although the impact of the pandemic in Australia and New Zealand, thus far, had not been on the scale of other countries, this could rapidly change.

“It would be a grave error to assume that the attitudes of the ruling class and their governments here are any different to their counterparts internationally. And while the health crisis is not as acute here as elsewhere, the economic, social and political impact has been profound.”

Crisp also noted that the March lockdowns and other measures were only instituted because of growing opposition to the continued operation of schools and other workplaces. This had been preceded two months earlier by seething hostility toward the Morrison government because of its callous and indifferent response to devastating summer bushfires, the most destructive in Australian history.

The speaker reviewed how Australian governments, state and federal, and employers throughout the country, with the active assistance of the unions had seized on the pandemic to launch a

massive social assault on the working class.

Crisp pointed to increasing strike action and other forms of resistance by workers internationally. “The mass opposition which is developing throughout the US, Europe, the UK, Asia and India is the initial expression of a revolutionary movement of the working class internationally,” she said.

“The conditions under which the working class in every country now lives and works are increasingly impossible and unsustainable, but it must undertake these struggles by discarding and rejecting the old nationalist leaderships which defend capitalism. The fight for the creation of rank-and-file committees is an important first step in the political independence of the working class.”

What is required, Crisp said, is a conscious revolutionary leadership, a party of the Bolshevik type, in important sections of the working class prior to the outbreak of these struggles. Without that the working class will be defeated.

“We are at a turning point in history; there’s not unlimited time. If you agree with this analysis then you must act. Now is not the time to prevaricate or sit on the sidelines but to join this party and fight to build it to lead the working class in the overthrow of capitalism, rid the world of inequality and the inevitable descent to war, and establish a socialist society.”

Following the reports several questions were asked, including why soldiers did not oppose the government’s war policies and whether reformism or gradualist change was an alternative to revolution.

Another participant commented on the mental health crisis afflicting many young people that had worsened by the pandemic and hoped that limited mental health initiatives announced by the government should remain after COVID-19. Questions were also asked about the role that art and artists could play in revolutionary struggles and whether artists could be revolutionaries.

All the questions were answered in detail by the speakers and can be watched on the public meeting video.

Many attendees posted chats praising the speakers and thanking them for their reports and the answers to the questions. Donations totalling \$2,800 were contributed to the SEP’s Monthly Fund, another indication of participants serious and spirited response to the meeting.



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