

Socialist Equality Party (Canada) holds meeting to discuss pandemic election and struggle for socialism

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (Canada) held a successful meeting entitled “Canada’s pandemic election, the resurgence of working class struggle and the fight for socialism” on Saturday. The event took place two days ahead of Monday’s September 20 federal election.

The meeting, held in both English and French, was co-chaired by Roger Jordan and Richard Dufour, two leading SEP members and writers for the *World Socialist Web Site*. The platform of speakers included: Keith Jones, SEP (Canada) National Secretary; Joseph Kishore, National Secretary of the SEP in the United States; Laurent Lafrance, a Quebec educator and member of the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC); and Christoph Vandreier, Deputy Chairman of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Jordan placed the meeting in the context of the rampaging global pandemic, rapid shift to the right within the ruling elite, and upsurge of the class struggle in his opening remarks. “We have justly characterized Monday’s poll as a pandemic election,” he told the online audience. “Over 27,300 Canadians have officially fallen victim to the pandemic, but the true figure is closer to 50,000. All official parties agree on the homicidal strategy of mass infection and death, as can be seen by the opening of all schools in every province in recent weeks.”

In his opening report, Jones provided a comprehensive analysis of the election campaign, which he said was unfolding amid “an unprecedented crisis,” and stressed that the coming period would see a dramatic intensification of class struggle. “Canada is now being roiled by its fourth wave of mass COVID-19 infections and death, a wave that was well underway when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recklessly plunged the country into a pandemic election,” Jones remarked near the beginning of his speech. “The virus’ emergence was a biological event. But the global pandemic is a social crime and crime against humanity perpetrated by the world’s capitalist elites—above all the capitalist oligarchs and their political representatives who rule the North American and European imperialist powers.”

Jones outlined the “profits before life” strategy that has guided the Canadian ruling elite’s pandemic response. This consisted of keeping schools and workplaces open as much as possible to ensure corporate profitability and providing hundreds of billions of dollars in public funds to the super-rich to protect their wealth. “Rather than fighting the pandemic, the energies of the political establishment were focussed on organizing bailouts for the capitalist elite, with the Trudeau government and Bank of Canada, to take but one example, funneling \$650 billion into the financial markets and coffers of corporate Canada,” explained Jones. “Ever since, their overriding concern and aim has been to resume the extraction of profit from working people at full tilt, in accordance with the mercenary mantra, first popularized by the *New York Times* and then

taken up by Trump and governments around the world that ‘the cure must not be worse than the disease’.”

He pointed to the growth of working class resistance around the world to the ruling class’s murderous agenda. “From India, Colombia and Brazil, where mass struggles have erupted against social inequality, state repression and moves to outright dictatorship, to North America, where workers are mounting militant strikes against decades of wage, job and benefit cuts, the working class is increasingly asserting its independent class interests,” said the SEP national secretary.

Jones stressed that these struggles must be “united and transformed into an independent political movement of the working class for socialism.”

Jones also addressed the campaigns of all the major parties, which have been dominated by support for the pandemic policy of mass infection and death and backing for a major military build-up. He emphasized the thoroughly deceitful character of the campaign waged by the New Democrats, who have posed as critics of the Trudeau and denounced him for catering to the super-rich after playing the key role in propping up his Liberal minority government for the past two years.

The speech included a sharp warning to workers about the growing threat of a military conflagration with China. “On August 14, that is the day before Trudeau called the election, the US and Canadian defence ministers signed an agreement to ‘modernize’ NORAD, the Canada-US aerospace and maritime defence agreement, for a new era of ‘strategic competition,’ that is preparations for war with China and Russia,” Jones stated. “That this has not been the subject of any comment during the election campaign only underscores that it enjoys all party support.”

He explained that the threat of war arises from the crisis engulfing US imperialism, which he termed a “decrepit power.” The repeated debacles the American ruling elite has suffered, from the 2008 financial crisis through the collapse last month of the Afghan puppet regime it expended vast amounts of “blood and treasure” sustaining for two decades, also constitute, Jones emphasized, an existential crisis for the Canadian bourgeoisie. For the past eight decades, Ottawa has relied on its military-strategic alliance with Washington to uphold and advance Canadian imperialism’s predatory interests around the globe.

In his speech, the US SEP leader Joe Kishore addressed the growth of the class struggle in the United States and the collapse of American bourgeois democracy.

He pointed to the scale of death from the pandemic, noting that the US recently surpassed the grim milestone of one in every 500 inhabitants dying from COVID-19. “The impact of the pandemic both arises out of and is enormously intensifying a thoroughgoing crisis of the entire social and political order in the United States,” said Kishore. “This past week, revelations from a forthcoming book by *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Robert Costa detail the efforts by Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley to avert a conflict with China staged by Trump as part of his efforts to remain in power. This included a meeting in the days following Trump's January 6 coup attempt of top military officers in which Milley instructed them not to launch a nuclear weapon without his authorization. Such is the state of 'American democracy'."

"Only eight months ago, the president of the United States sought to orchestrate a fascist insurrection to stop the transfer of power and establish a personalist dictatorship. The Democrats, while covering up the seriousness of the danger, left the outcome of the conflict in the hands of the military and intelligence agencies. Not only has no one been held accountable for the coup attempt, but Trump himself is busy building up his personalist movement, holding rallies to denounce the election as stolen and telling meetings of police officers that if he were back in charge there would be free rein for 'law enforcement'."

Turning to the growth in class struggle, Kishore pointed to efforts by workers at Volvo Trucks in Virginia and Dana auto parts across the United States to organize a struggle against corporate-dictated concessions independently of the pro-employer trade union apparatuses. In both cases, the workers have established rank-and-file committees in recent months with the support of the SEP. "There is a palpable level of anger, a desire to fight, in the working class," continued the speaker. "The bill for the decades' long growth of social inequality, facilitated by the trade unions, is coming due..."

"The development of a movement in the working class must develop, and in fact is developing, as a rebellion against the corporatist trade unions. In the United States, the unions are functioning as nothing more than labor contractors, overseeing slave labor conditions amidst an expanding pandemic. The teachers unions have played the central role in enforcing the reopening of schools, with the head of the American Federation of Teachers travelling the country to try to convince parents to ignore the science and endanger the lives and health of their children."

Addressing the meeting in French, Lafrance outlined the reasons why educators and other workers from across the country came together to found the CERSC in March 2021. He pointed to the growing anger among teachers over the lack of safety measures in schools, and the reckless pandemic reopening policy pursued by every government across the country.

"Teachers are ready to fight these policies," Lafrance declared. "But they lack the leadership to bring the science and a class struggle political perspective to workers. This is what our committee is all about. Among our demands are the closure of schools and a transition to distance learning with all the necessary technological support, as well as the immediate cessation of all non-essential production, with full financial compensation for workers. These two key measures must be part of a global strategy to eliminate and eradicate COVID-19. Scientists have convincingly demonstrated that these measures, combined with rigorous contact tracing, case isolation, temporary lockdown, travel bans, and a vaccination campaign, could eradicate COVID-19 within two to three months. The resources for all these measures exist, but they are being hoarded by the rich and super-rich."

In the concluding speech, Vandreier, who is the lead candidate for the SGP in Germany's federal election on September 26, explained how the political situation confronting workers in Germany is similar to that in Canada. Workers face a ruling elite ruthlessly prioritizing corporate profits over human life; encouraging the growth of the far right; trashing social programs; and rearming for war. "Germany's Dax stock exchange has risen by 60 percent. The ten richest Germans have increased their wealth by 35 percent to 242 billion dollars during the pandemic," Vandreier explained. "And now, after workers have been forced into unsecured jobs and risked their lives, they are expected to bear the financial burden of the crisis. Companies and the government are launching a general attack on workers' rights."

In remarks highly relevant to a Canadian audience given the prominent role played by right-wing extremist forces around the People's Party of Canada during the election campaign, Vandreier drew a connection between the explosive growth of militarism and the strengthening of the far-right internationally. "With its course for war against Russia and China, the German elite is picking up directly where it left off in the last century, when it twice reduced the world to rubble," the SGP deputy chairman explained. "With the upsurge of militarism, with the profit-before-life policy and the social attacks, all the fascist filth of the past is also being spewed up again. Such ruthless policies in the interests of the super-rich are incompatible with democratic rights for the people."

"That is why the ruling class is increasingly relying on authoritarian and fascist forces. Trump's coup attempt on 6 January was a warning in this respect. Even the oldest Western democracy is collapsing. This has not changed under President Biden, who represents the same Wall Street interests as Trump and preaches 'unity' and 'reconciliation' with the Republican leaders who supported and connived in the coup attempt."

"In Germany, this development is particularly advanced. The police, army and secret services are riddled with right-wing terrorist networks that are covered up by the highest levels of the state. Despite the countless terrorist attacks, the leaders and backers of the fascist networks are still at large."

Vandreier also dealt with the growth of worker opposition to these policies in Germany and throughout Europe. "We declared at the beginning of the election campaign that we were running to give the growing opposition to right-wing policies a voice and a perspective," he said. "And we have done that day after day. Already when the WISAG workers at Frankfurt airport protested against wage theft and dismissals, we organised international solidarity and declared that an international and a political struggle is necessary to defend their jobs."

Vandreier also noted the support given by the SGP to striking nurses in Berlin, train drivers across Germany, and educators and students opposed to the dangerous reopening of schools.

In the discussion period that followed the speeches, speakers responded to queries about the role of electoral politics, and the SEP's analysis of the new US-led war alliance against China involving Britain and Australia. Jones and Kishore also rejected any orientation to pressuring the New Democrats or unions to the "left," citing the experience of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK to show that social democracy is a right-wing tool of big business.

Concluding the meeting, Jordan stated that the speeches had painted a picture of a crisis-ridden bourgeois order around the world. "But the capitalist crisis is also giving rise to another process, the radicalization and political awakening of the international working class," he added. "The decisive question now is to provide these struggles with the political leadership that is indispensable to secure their victory. This requires the building of the Socialist Equality Party as a mass socialist party of the Canadian and international working class. As Lenin and Trotsky insisted throughout the Russian Revolution, it is only through the medium of a party that workers can be made conscious of the historical and political tasks they confront, and intervene as an independent political force into social, economic, and political life."



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