

Socialist Equality Party discusses building an anti-war movement with UK workers

Richard Tyler
31 March 2022

Workers including bus drivers, healthcare staff and teachers active in rank-and-file committees in the UK were invited by the Socialist Equality Party to discuss a fight against war based on the working class and socialism.

Opening the meeting last Saturday, SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden drew attention to a point made in the February 28 *World Socialist Web Site* Editorial Board statement, NATO goes to war against Russia: “The essential causes and interests of wars are often not at first apparent. They are concealed by an avalanche of propaganda. However, sooner or later, the real and more profound driving forces and significance of the conflict emerge.”

Three weeks later, Marsden said, it was now clear that what is involved is not only a war in Ukraine, but a campaign by the US and NATO imperialist powers for war against Russia and a redivision of the world that also has China in its sights.

We were now at the “most dangerous point in history,” he continued, where the use of nuclear weapons was not only being considered but planned.

The US and the other imperialist powers were being driven by an acute crisis that was economic, social, and political.

During the pandemic, the major corporations and oligarchs had been given trillions of dollars, euros, and pounds, “and now this must be clawed back.” Price rises and spending cuts were adding to a social and political catastrophe under conditions where people are already desperate. “Everything is set to get worse. War abroad means class war at home.”

Preventing war meant facing up to the absence of a mass anti-war movement. “The old anti-war movement has collapsed; the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) and Labour lefts do not offer any genuine means for opposing the escalating war danger.”

“Our answer to war,” Marsden concluded, “is the development of a mass anti-war movement, based on the international working class. The fight against imperialist war must be developed as a conscious and international political movement for socialism.”

Introducing the discussion, SEP Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps stressed that the question of the war was not exhausted simply by pointing to “who fired the first shot”. What was necessary was to understand the context, all the players involved, their interests and objectives, “and where these events are threatening to take us.”

The present conflict, said Scripps, followed 30 years of uninterrupted US-led wars and interventions, many involving NATO or NATO powers: Iraq, Yugoslavia, everything done in the name of the “war on terror”, Afghanistan, Iraq again, Libya, Syria.

“All those military campaigns were about gaining geostrategic advantage for the US for the benefit of its banks, its corporations.” That objective had now turned US predatory attentions towards Russia and China. US strategy documents had been talking about the need to prepare for “great power conflict”.

In the discussion, Jude argued, “We should also link into the fight for Julian Assange’s freedom. He represents the stance of opposition to war through his exposures on WikiLeaks.”

Marsden said Assange’s fate was the personal embodiment of the collapse of the anti-war movement, “He represents everything the anti-war movement has abandoned. If there was an anti-war movement today worth of the name, it would be carrying placards with Assange’s picture on them.” Instead, “the Stop the War Coalition wanted to make their figurehead the Corbynite Labour MPs.”

Jude asked how to counter government and media propaganda.

Marsden answered, “We have to start from where we are. The anti-war movement has collapsed, a new one has to emerge. An objective conflict is developing between the working class and ruling class. What we must do is fight for clarity. We must explain as clearly as possible what is actually happening. In these circumstances, knowledge is the most essential weapon the working class can have.”

Several participants spoke on the domestic crisis. Laura noted that the previous Wednesday had been National Covid Remembrance Day and “there wasn’t even a minute’s silence in parliament because they are too busy preparing a world war.”

Adam commented, “I feel that an anti-war movement is vitally important as the war is going to have a knock-on effect on our standard of living globally.”

Jay added, “Working people will be forced to pay for this war like they are for Covid.”

Scripps replied that the war had been going for a month and already massive social fault lines were opening up. Forecasters were saying that there would be a collapse of living standards in Britain in the next months, “double what we saw after 2008.”

Education workers Chris P and Ruth referenced the censorship of material critical of NATO’s warmongering or the government’s pandemic policy on social media.

Katrina, a nurse, described how “as a healthcare professional social media is banned. People have been sacked for comments on Facebook. It’s policed by the employers. We can’t even say what sort of day we’ve had, or we get hauled into the office. As nurses, we are silenced.”

“In the last month, we have shed about half a dozen senior members of staff who have been there quite a while. This leaves it all on the shoulders of junior staff, which can put patients at risk. The NHS [National Health Service] is shedding staff left, right and centre. It is a nightmare.”

Medical student Sanya said, “Like frontline workers, medical students are being forced into high-risk environments.”

Laura thanked Katrina, adding, “Patients are the collateral damage from decades of relentless cuts and underfunding. The connection between war abroad and war at home could not be clearer, with what millions of people have suffered in the pandemic.”

Chris D added, “Here in Northern Ireland the COVID cases are rising rapidly, and the hospitals are on the brink again, but the media are acting like the pandemic is over.”

Stephen, a care worker, said he had not detected any major susceptibility to pro-war hysteria among those he worked with, “or at least none that could not be dispelled by explaining the background to the current situation.”

Tim, a secondary school teacher, said he had been struck by how his Year 12 pupils quickly understood that there was a bigger picture than just Putin ordering the invasion of Ukraine. “Straight away they said, well the US and NATO have provoked this.”

Tony Robson said members of the London Bus Workers Rank-and-File Committee shared a broad anti-war sentiment. They “had not forgotten or forgiven these previous illegal wars. They live in a country where war criminals get knighted, not sent to The Hague [for prosecution].”

The fundamental issue was to give a lead to anti-war sentiment, which meant a reckoning with Labour and the unions. Referring to the mass P&O sackings, he said workers knew that if this is not defeated then it will provide a pretext for a wholesale attack, “But there was no expression given to that sentiment by these organisations.” Instead, they were waging a nationalist campaign, “lining up workers behind ‘their’ ruling class in a race to the bottom,” when workers’ only way forward is an international struggle.

Shortly after the meeting, bus worker Jason sent in his thoughts. Calling the meeting “insightful”, he said, “Young people deserve better than the decades of inter-generational war that has been waged on them.” He added, “There is no effective voice for the working class. Where I live the local Labour party/supporters walk around with placards that say, ‘give our young people the skills for tomorrow’. Yet they helped defund and turn it into what it now is.”

Katrina commented, “I’m really glad I came online. I wasn’t going to but actually what is the point in moaning if you’re not prepared to do something about it? It was so informative and has definitely changed some of my way of thinking.”

Closing the event, Marsden said that developing an anti-war movement ultimately meant building an anti-war party. This meant joining and funding the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact