

Socialist Equality Party holds series of public meetings on “The Socialist Answer to Brexit: For the United Socialist States of Europe”

By the Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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The Socialist Equality Party (UK) held a series of public meetings between October 6 and October 12 titled “The socialist answer to Brexit: For the United Socialist States of Europe.” The meetings, held in London, Manchester, Sheffield, Bradford, Glasgow and Cambridge, were addressed by Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Chris Marsden.

The purpose of this week’s meetings is to discuss the fundamental political issues raised for the working class by the crisis surrounding Brexit.

The situation changes from day to day, but one thing is for certain: whether Boris Johnson gets a deal from the European Union or not, whether it gets through parliament or not, whether or not there is a second referendum—neither side in the Brexit debate, Remain or Leave, will accept the legitimacy of the other’s “victory.” Britain’s ruling elites will continue to tear into each other. Brexit will continue to be the most severe crisis of political rule for Britain’s ruling elite since the end of the Second World War.

And what is the working class to make of this? The *Guardian* ran an article this month reporting the observation of several linguists that terms relating to Brexit are growing too fast for the public to keep up.

Tony Thorne, based at King’s College London, is calling for help to build a public glossary of “Brexit speak” and “the toxic terminology of populism,” having listed more than 200 terms that have bloomed in recent years he says reflects “a shattered political landscape.”

“People ought to familiarise themselves otherwise they risk being bamboozled and duped,” Thorne says.

With apologies to the professor, however, to cut through the confusion generated by Brexit will take more than a glossary of terms—even though I am sure many in this audience would appreciate one!

The confusion is not simply over terminology, but over the politics of Brexit as it is understood by Marxists—that is what social interests the contending factions represent in reality rather than the grandiose and bogus claims they make of themselves.

We have Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, the Eton educated Thatcherite who earns the equivalent of £2,291 per hour just for writing his *Daily Telegraph* column, and the equally scabrous Nigel Farage, a public school boy and former city trader—both posing as defenders of the “people’s will” and the sovereignty of Britain’s parliament against the Brussels bureaucracy.

Then we have the Remainers, led by an alliance of hated Thatcherites and Blairites from the Labour Party, who also claim to represent the people’s will (but in 2019 as opposed to 2016) as well as the “rule of law” and, of course, parliamentary sovereignty.

It is behind these cynical right-wing hypocrites, pro-business politicians and enemies of the working class that we are told we must take sides by

the professional liars of the mainstream media.

That such a state of affairs has continued for three years is a staggering indictment of all those tendencies that purport to speak for the working class—who have themselves created a situation where millions define themselves and their politics not in terms of their class position, but rather attribute a class position to whether or not someone backs Brexit.

By one side we are told that Brexit somehow represents the genuine working class in The North, betrayed by the “cosmopolitan elite” concerned to safeguard their supposedly “privileged existence.” By the other that Brexit supporters are aging racist troglodytes—to be fought against in alliance with the essentially progressive upper class and the EU, with which we are all supposed to have so much more in common socially and culturally.

Those here today represent those sections of the working class who reject such divisive political nonsense and are looking for an alternative on which the entire working class can be mobilised across all artificial divisions of race, nation, region and generation against the common class enemy.

You are here because, having read the *World Socialist Web Site*, or followed the Socialist Equality Party for any length of time, you are either in agreement with the independent socialist perspective we advance or want to find out more about what we stand for. It is my intention today to explain why we take the positions we do and how convincing millions more is both necessary and possible—provided that the role of the misleaders and miseducators of the working class responsible for sowing such dangerous divisions are politically exposed.

Late last month we published a perspective column for the *WSWS* that has been circulated widely during the campaign for today’s meeting and took the same title, “The socialist answer to Brexit: For the United Socialist States of Europe”.

Noting that the Brexit conflict has provoked a crisis of rule for British imperialism that has few historic precedents, it explained that this has served to expose the terminal decay of parliamentary rule—so that Johnson proceeds against opponents, led by Labour’s Jeremy Corbyn, he knows fear doing anything that might ignite broader opposition, including holding a general election. It concluded:

“Only a fresh political turn based on the class struggle offers a way to fight back. Parliament is indeed a rotting corpse, with no faction of the ruling class having any genuine concern for democratic rights...

“The reactionary nationalist agenda of Brexit cannot be opposed by a turn to the EU, which is developing its own military capacities and only this week signalled its support for US war preparations against Iran. It is at the same time building border walls and concentration camps for migrants and continuing with austerity measures just as savage as those planned by the Brexiteers.”

We also insisted:

“No opposition to these plans will be forthcoming from Corbyn, whose sole function for the past four years has been to ensure that there is no organised political struggle against the ruling class. Today he speaks openly as the prospective figurehead for a ‘caretaker’ government and potential saviour of British imperialism...”

“What is now necessary is for the working class to begin the struggle to take state power, for a workers’ government and socialism. The answer to the Brexit crisis is not unity with the EU, but class unity in a continent-wide struggle against all of Europe’s governments for the United Socialist States of Europe.”

I want to expand on these key issues reviewing the record of the SEP since the Brexit referendum was announced. On February 29, 2016 the SEP issued its statement, “For an active boycott of the Brexit referendum.” From a concrete examination of the issues involved, we concluded that neither option could be endorsed. We explained that, though the June 23 referendum was portrayed as the most democratic of instruments because it allows the “people” to decide, it was highly undemocratic.

There was only a binary choice to be made, either to Remain or to Leave, and no opportunity to register an argument as to why anyone was in favour or against remaining in the EU. Because for that to take place there must be a party that advances a political argument, a programme, with which you can express agreement.

All that was on offer to workers and young people was to declare for one of two officially constituted campaigns, both led by right-wing, pro-business, pro-austerity, militarist, anti-worker, anti-migrant forces. As we wrote:

“The Remain and Leave campaigns are both headed by Thatcherite forces that stand for greater austerity, brutal anti-immigrant measures and the destruction of workers’ rights. Their differences are over how best to defend the interests of British capitalism against its European and international rivals under conditions of economic slump and the escalation of militarism and war.

“There can be no good outcome of such a plebiscite. Whichever side wins, working people will pay the price. It is not a question of choosing the ‘lesser evil’—both options are equally rotten.”

Let me make this clear. The SEP is irreconcilably hostile to the European Union, but our opposition is from the left, not the right.

The EU is not an instrument for realising the genuine and necessary unification of Europe, but a mechanism for the subjugation of the continent to the dictates of the financial markets.

Rather than being united it is a forum in which competing states fight amongst themselves and conspire against the working class. Therefore, we stressed:

“No support can be extended to the Remain campaign. This option has the backing of much of Britain’s corporate elite, who regard EU membership as essential to their ability to compete internationally—not least through a continued offensive against the living standards of the working class throughout the continent. It also has the support of the United States and the major European powers, which fear that a British exit (Brexit) could provide the catalyst for the EU’s unravelling and jeopardise the NATO alliance and its agenda of militarism and war...”

We noted above all the role played by the EU in imposing devastating social attacks on the working class of Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain—which provides an unanswerable refutation of the claims being made by Corbyn, Labour and the TUC that the EU offers social protection to the working class. But we then insisted:

“None of this imparts a progressive character to the Leave campaign or justifies lending even the most critical support to it. Its claim that the British parliament and its parties are any less instruments for imposing the wishes of finance capital than the EU is a transparent fraud...”

The Leave campaign was led by staunch advocates of austerity. So,

when Johnson and Farage were pledging to siphon money bound for the EU into the NHS, we insisted that austerity was “Made in Britain” and had gone further here than almost anywhere else in Europe.

The central political consideration shaping our approach centred on the recognition that, against the background of escalating militarism, trade tensions between the major powers and the degrading treatment meted out daily to refugees by the EU, the most dangerous error we could make was to in any way blur the lines between an internationalist and socialist opposition to the EU and any form of “left nationalism.”

Under conditions of a mass movement of the working class against the EU, involving strikes and appeals for cross-border solidarity, say with the Greek working class and other victims of EU austerity, a vote to leave the EU could have acquired an anti-capitalist character. But that possibility had been sabotaged by Syriza, which betrayed its mandate in Greece and agreed to impose the dictates of the EU and International Monetary Fund, along with the social democrats, Stalinists and pseudo-left groups who all hailed Syriza as the new model for the “left.”

To call for a leave vote, therefore, only promoted the most nakedly reactionary forces in British politics and would accelerate the breakup of the EU under the pressure of growing national antagonisms that boosts far-right forces across the continent.

The SEP set out to define the independent political standpoint of workers and youth through which they could demarcate their independent class interests from the opposed camps of the bourgeoisie. And in so doing, we have charted a course for the entire European working class. We wrote:

“British workers cannot find a way out of the current economic and political impasse on the basis of a nationalist programme. The notion of returning to an isolated and sovereign British state in today’s global economy is as archaic as Stonehenge...”

“Against the national chauvinism and xenophobia promoted by both sides in the referendum campaign, the working class must advance its own internationalist programme to unify the struggles of workers throughout Europe in defence of living standards and democratic rights.”

Summing up our central argument in “The case for an active boycott of the Brexit referendum,” on June 7, 2016, we wrote:

“The SEP does not advocate the break-up of the EU on the basis of economic nationalism and anti-immigrant xenophobia. We say that workers and young people must oppose the EU on an independent class perspective—not the nationalist splintering of the continent, but the development of a common offensive against both the EU and its constituent governments.”

“Everywhere, amid deepening economic crisis, free trade is giving way to trade war, financial security to insecurity and joblessness, prosperity to austerity, the free movement of people to the erection of razor wire borders and concentration camps, democracy to dictatorship and the rise of the fascist right.

“The collapse of the EU is preparing the way for an explosion of the very national antagonisms it was meant to end. Unless the working class intervenes, the end result will be humanity dragged once again into the maelstrom of world war.”

The stand we took put us into conflict with literally everyone else, including with Corbyn who led the pro-EU campaign under conditions where the despised Cameron could not. But here I want to focus on the struggle we had to wage against what became the dominant position on the “left”—the advocates of the Left Brexit strategy Corbyn had so recently abandoned.

The very first polemic we wrote was against George Galloway, the former Labour Party and Respect MP who learned his nationalist politics in the school of Stalinism and who was therefore the most unabashed in his alliance with the far-right forces leading the Leave campaign.

His own first public act was to mount a platform, together with

Labour's Kate Hoey, alongside Farage and various representatives of the arch-Thatcherite wing of the Tory Party such as MPs Bill Cash, Peter Bone and former Shadow Home Secretary David Davies.

In February 23, we wrote, "George Galloway's appearance at the Grassroots Out campaign in support of Britain leaving the European Union does not merely muddy the class line. It obliterates it." His remarks centred throughout on the claim that divisions between left and right and between the working class and the British ruling class counted for little when compared with the shared necessity to defend British sovereignty. He identified the EU referendum with the Second World War, which he said "was as Mr. Churchill said, our finest hour... When we all went forward together—Mr. Churchill and Mr. Atlee and Mr. Bevan... That's what we are doing here tonight. Mr. Farage and me. Miss Hoey and Mr. Davies. Left, right, left, right, forward march."

On Twitter, he later said of Farage, "We are allies in one cause. Like Churchill and Stalin..."

We answered such statements by explaining, "The first responsibility of a socialist is to oppose the mixing of class banners. In the referendum, this means rejecting all appeals for working people to fall in behind one or another faction of the bourgeoisie who are fighting between themselves solely over which strategy best upholds the interests of British imperialism.

"To do otherwise and to in any way endorse the nationalist and pro-capitalist agendas espoused by both the 'remain' and 'leave' campaigns sows dangerous political confusion, weakening the political defences of the working class at a time when the noxious fumes of nationalism, anti-migrant xenophobia and militarism are polluting the UK, Europe and the entire world."

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party (SP) would speak of Galloway's "mistake," just as they also speak of Corbyn's many, many mistakes! But theirs was only a more shamefaced example of the same politics—disguised only to the extent that they oriented not to Farage but various Stalinist trade union leaders who share Galloway's politics.

The SP was already in an electoral block with the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, No2EU, whose Stalinist press officer Brian Denny complained of "social dumping, whereby cheap foreign labour displaces local workers." The SP constantly apologised for the nationalist politics of their partners in the "pro-worker bloc," warning of "a danger in posing issues in such a way as to reinforce the idea that there are lasting solutions to the problems workers face within the confines of a nation state," while insisting that "the bigger danger is vacating the field to the right within the national terrain."

As for the SWP, its leading theoretician Alex Callinicos, complained, "Disastrously, a section of the radical left in Britain links opposition to the EU to rejection of one of its core principles, the free movement of labour," without naming names that would cut across its filthy alliance with these same forces.

But he makes abundantly clear the nationalist basis of the SWP's own politics. In "The internationalist case against the European Union," he rejected any possibility of a unified struggle of the European working class, writing, "Strategically, the problem is that since the 1980s, but more especially as a result of the euro zone crisis, a Europe-wide neoliberal regime is being constructed. Breaking that is most likely to happen at national level. To make successful resistance dependent on a coordinated movement at the EU level is to postpone that resistance indefinitely. The process of uneven and combined development implies that struggles are most likely to succeed at national level but can then be generalised. Dialectically, then, for internationalism to advance there have to be breakthroughs at the national level."

The socialist phrases employed by Left Leave were only ever a tawdry fig leaf for their anti-working-class nationalism. The EU is a big business

club, anti-working class, anti-democratic, anti-socialist, imperialist, just as they said. But what about the UK, the most blood-soaked of imperialist states? On this there was barely a word said!

Instead the pseudo-left groups discovered the hidden progressive features of a return to British sovereignty and its traditions of parliamentary democracy—to bring about the future election of a Labour government!

Lindsey German of Counterfire was openly enamoured of British democracy, declaring, "It's always difficult if you live in Britain to try to talk about British democracy as something superior to any other democracy when you have a 90-year-old unelected monarch and a House of Lords which is larger than the House of Commons astonishingly... But the crucial principle about democracy in this country, imperfect as it is, is that we do have the right to elect governments and to elect governments that can change things, and this is something we don't have in the European Union."

The SEP drew attention to the bitter history of attributing a progressive outcome to political initiatives dominated by right-wing nationalist forces. The most famous was the support extended to the Nazi Party by the Stalinised Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Under instruction from Stalin and the Comintern, the KPD lined up with the fascists in supporting what it dubbed the "Red Referendum."

Initiated by the Nazis, the referendum urged the removal of the Social Democrats from power in Prussia, Germany's largest state, which included the capital Berlin. The KPD supported the referendum on the basis that the Social Democrats were "social fascists" and were engaged in repression against the working class. Their removal, the KPD claimed, would be a step towards "national liberation" and a "people's revolution."

Trotsky was scathing about such efforts to develop national communism under the banner of the call for the "People's Revolution..". He described this slogan as "market competition with the fascists, paid for at the price of injecting confusion into the minds of the workers."

The political impact was devastating. The injection of nationalist poison into the German working class and the demobilisation of the overwhelming opposition to the Nazis of workers in the KPD and the SDP ended in the victory of fascism and the onward march towards world war.

The Left Leave crowd all justified their embrace of Brexit by insisting that in the long run, any victory for Johnson et al., would tear the Tories apart and pave the way for Corbyn to come to power at the head of a Labour government. As we wrote, "The KPD championed the slogan 'After Hitler, our turn!' For its part, the perspective of Left Leave could be summed up as 'After Boris, Jeremy!'"

In the aftermath of the referendum campaign, whose last week saw the assassination of pro-Remain Labour MP Jo Cox by a fascist, the pseudo-left were over the moon about Brexit and still more anxious to dismiss the threat from the right. The leader of the Socialist Party wrote, "It is totally false to draw the utterly pessimistic conclusions which some small left groups have done that this result could lead to a 'carnival of reaction' in Britain and encourage right-wing forces in Europe and elsewhere."

Once again, the pseudo-left insisted that the future leftward course of politics still depended on Corbyn, with John Rees of Counterfire writing, "Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of Labour, alongside mass campaigns like the People's Assembly and the trade unions, is the only chance the left has of reaching out to the core working class constituencies that so obviously detest the political elite and everything it stands for... For this to happen a second victory for Jeremy Corbyn is essential. All else, including the continued success of all left campaigns, depends on it."

The claim that flirting with the hard right is not really that dangerous and will create the basis for a shift to the left flies in the face of all

historical and recent experience. Brexit was followed by similar developments elsewhere. This includes Donald Trump's presidential victory based on his assertion of "America First," which is the alliance against Germany and France on which the entire Brexit agenda is based. But it is also revealed in the growth of the far right throughout Europe, including its coming to power in Hungary, Italy and Austria and the rise of the AFD to become the main opposition in Germany. This is the real measure of the hard-right danger—the presence of fascists in the Bundestag and now the attack on a Synagogue by a far-right gunman.

None of this justifies support for other factions of the bourgeoisie, including Remain. We are a party rooted in history and we understand how such alliances only facilitate the growth of the far right. One of the leading mouthpieces of the Remain camp is Paul Mason, who spent his youth in Workers Power and now writes for the *Guardian*, where he published, "Labour's best tactic to beat Boris Johnson? A popular front." He writes: "I can predict now the screams of protest from many Labour activists. But the popular-front tactic has deep antecedents in the very political traditions the modern Labour left emerged from... In Spain, to the fury of conservatives who had formed their own electoral alliance with the fascists, the Popular Front took power in January 1936. In May that year the Popular Front won in France, giving the country its first socialist prime minister..."

"So the popular-front tactic is not some piece of niche, retro-leftist memorabilia. It is the property of the western democratic tradition; the only tactic that halted or delayed the march to fascism in the 1930s. And it was invented by the Corbynistas of their day."

What a cynical political charlatan! Mason knows very well that the Popular Front was the policy of the Stalinised Communist Parties. He stops in 1936 because he knows that the policy of subordinating the working class to the supposedly "progressive" bourgeoisie led to catastrophic defeats, above all in Spain where a potential revolutionary overthrow became instead the arena of victory for Franco and the antechamber to World War II.

His is an apologia for the manoeuvres of the Blairites to secure a government of national unity with the Liberal Democrats et al that Corbyn has allowed to maintain control of the Labour Party. But this raises the question of what has happened to the schema of the Lexiteers of Brexit leading to a leftward shift led by Corbyn?

In the referendum campaign Corbyn, elected Labour leader by a landslide in September 2015 pledged to ending the pro-business, pro-war policies of Blair and Brown, supported the majority view of Britain's corporate elite who viewed EU membership as essential to their ability to compete internationally. However, when the referendum was lost the Blairites responded by seeking Corbyn's removal—only to see him re-elected in June 2016 by an even bigger majority by hundreds of thousands of workers and youth.

Cameron was forced to resign, giving way to Theresa May, and still Corbyn refused to wage a fight. Even so in 2017, May's snap general election produced a surge in Labour support and reduced the Tories to a minority government. Corbyn responded with yet another retreat, opposing demands for the Blairites to be deselected even as his supporters were witch-hunted out of the party as anti-Semites" for opposing Israel's repression of the Palestinians.

When May's government was brought to the brink of collapse over Brexit in April this year, Corbyn abandoned calls for a general election and entered into weeks of talks on how to defend the "national interest." Instead of facing a mobilised working class, May was therefore brought down by her hard-line Brexit faction who replaced her with Johnson.

Having facilitated the formation of the most right-wing government in post-war history, Corbyn has offered to lead a "caretaker government" to unite all the pro-Remain opposition parties, in alliance with pro-EU Tories, against Johnson, that would delay Brexit. Supposedly only then,

after a manoeuvre that can only strengthen the right wing and deepen divisions in the working class, will he call a general election that Labour is far more likely to lose than at any time in the last four years.

Meanwhile the forces he appeals to are busy scheming of takeovers, expulsions and splits with the aim of forming a government of national unity to end Brexit while continuing with the austerity and militarism agenda that began with the "Thatcher revolution."

We have been vindicated in our insistence since Corbyn first took office that Labour cannot be reformed and that there is no possibility of a return to its reformist past, based on national economic regulation, under conditions of globally organised capitalism.

Yes, under capitalism, globalisation serves the interests of a privileged few who grow fabulously wealthy at the expense of the impoverishment of the world's billions. But the globalisation of economic life, with production organised across national borders, is both objectively progressive and necessary. By massively increasing the productivity of human labour, it provides the material foundations for the development of a socialist society.

But to achieve this, the grip of the super-rich oligarchy over society must be broken and the economy liberated from the restrictions placed upon it by the profit system and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states.

Any turn to nationalism to develop British capitalism as an answer to EU-dictated austerity will only mean still deeper social attacks, protectionist trade war measures and militarism. The national tensions that produced Brexit are only one manifestation of the global eruption of inter-imperialist antagonisms provoked by the bitter competition between rival powers for control of the world's markets. Left unchallenged, these tensions lead inevitably towards authoritarian rule, trade and military war.

I want to return briefly to Galloway to show how right we were in warning of the reactionary logic of left nationalism. In May in Almaty, Kazakhstan, he shared a platform with Trump's fascist advisor Steve Bannon at the Eurasia Media Forum. The debate between the two was more akin to a love-in as they agreed again and again. Bannon declared that right-wing nationalist forces were on the march across Europe because, "People understand that the highest amount of control they can have is at the national level, not in some amorphous transnational level. You see a rise in nationalism and that is positive... Brexit and [Trump's victory] are inextricably linked... It's a revolt by working class people, particularly in formerly heavily manufacturing countries that live in a new serfdom... That day is over."

To this Galloway replied, "I am a working-class man from the same ethno-religious background as Steve Bannon. Though we have many other differences. But our people of whatever colour, wherever they came from, however they pray, are asserting themselves. And the elites' day is done... It's about democracy, not nationalism. Steve Bannon is right. The only way that you have any chance of controlling the elites and monopolies and the exploiters is on a nation state level."

This is where nationalism inevitably leads—social and political reaction of the blackest sort.

We oppose capitalism based on class struggle and socialist internationalism. Capitalism is driving headlong towards disaster and is hovering on the brink of a second global recession that will dwarf 2008 due to the extraordinary build-up of debt and fictitious capital.

And because Brexit drowns out all other news, let me indicate just how close the world is coming to war. This year there have been at least seven major NATO exercises based upon plans for war against Russia, all along its borders and involving former Warsaw pact countries. Next year the Defender 2020 military exercise begins involving 17 NATO states, including the US and Germany, in the largest military deployment in Europe in 25 years, The US military will be transferring a full division to Poland and the Baltics—making up 20,000 of a total of 37,000 soldiers

taking part.

The parallels between the crisis of rule developing in Britain and the US are stark, both involving moves by one faction of the ruling class to remove a leader from power. But there too everything depends upon rejecting any support for the “lesser evil.” Writing on the Democrats move to impeach Trump, the WSWS makes clear the unified approach taken by our world party and its sections. We wrote:

“The working class must oppose Trump, but not on the basis of the needs of the corporations and the intelligence agencies. Working class opposition to Trump must be based on addressing the social needs of working people in the US and internationally: ending the wars, redistributing the wealth, defending democratic rights and guaranteeing the right of immigrant workers to travel and live freely and without harassment. This requires the independent mobilization of the working class in a struggle against both big business parties and the capitalist system.”

There are profound objective causes behind the drive towards austerity, authoritarian forms of rule, militarism and war. Not only the development of inter-imperialist antagonisms, but social antagonisms. The divisions between the super-rich financial oligarchy and the mass of working people struggling to survive have never been so acute and this is making democratic rule impossible.

But socialism too is objectively rooted, in the irreconcilable conflict between the classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

There are tremendous historical problems associated with the development of the political consciousness of the working class. The crisis of capitalism is at an advanced stage, but the understanding of this crisis, the political preparedness of the working-class lags far behind. This is due above all to the impact of Stalinism, its murder campaign against the Marxist leadership of the working class, which ensured decades of bureaucratic domination of the working class and ended in the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and China.

The working class requires a new perspective that meets up to the challenges of globally organised economic life, without which there can be no effective struggle against capitalism. The Fourth International, led today by the International Committee, is that party by virtue of its decades-long struggle for the programme and perspective of world socialist revolution against Stalinism, social democracy, the trade union bureaucracy and their pseudo-left apologists.

The richness of that struggle and its essential character for the political reorientation of the working class have been suggested in this report. But let me stress that our essential task is to overcome what Trotsky identified as the crisis of revolutionary leadership. Writing in 1940, he stressed:

All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet “ripened” for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only “ripened”; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.

But Trotsky also made this essential observation as to how and why this crisis of leadership can be overcome:

The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second, by the treacherous politics of the old workers’ organizations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus... As time goes on, their desperate efforts to hold back the wheel of history will demonstrate more clearly to the masses that the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind’s culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.

Today the same contradictions driving capitalism towards trade and

military war provide the impulse for the development of a powerful oppositional movement in the working class that will break free of the straitjacket imposed by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. The efforts of the capitalist class and its governments to be globally competitive demands an assault on the jobs, wages and conditions of workers in every country that has proceed unabated year after year. But finally, despite the deliberate suppression of the class struggle and immense confusion generated by the bureaucracies, the working class is beginning to fight back in a wave of strikes and protests throughout Europe and internationally.

That oppositional movement does not automatically lead to the working class drawing socialist conclusions. But it does create a new and favourable political climate where the Socialist Equality Party will be able to clarify fundamental issues of history and programme. It means that consciousness can develop rapidly, in leaps and bounds.

Our aim will be to consciously bring the struggles of the working class together—across all national borders and against the common capitalist enemy. Moreover, we meet today under conditions of a militarisation of world politics the likes of which has no parallel since 1945. This resurgence of militarism and war will inevitably meet a response from workers, especially young people, which we alone can provide with the necessary political leadership. That is the source of our revolutionary confidence and the impulse for all those who are not members of the SEP to join its ranks.

Marsden’s speech was followed by lively discussion at the meetings during a question and answer session. WSWS reporters spoke to some of those attending the meetings.

In London Derek said, “Chris’s presentation was full of knowledge, insight and, most importantly, strategy.

“The whole Brexit charade just diverts working people’s attention away from the only solution to their worsening problems—class solidarity. Reactionary ‘populist’ British nationalism versus always phoney, pro-European Union neo-liberalism. Our only way out, is for the working class to take control of a world that’s at the point of destroying itself and build a socialist future.”

Susan said, “Modern technology should mean we’re all better off. Instead we’re working harder for less and living worse.

“Society is falling apart and the infrastructure steadily eroding. The Brexit issue doesn’t talk about that. People get stuck talking about the EU as if it’s the main issue. The conversation revolves around our ‘national identity’ and ‘freedom’ to make our own choices but this is nothing but a diversion for people and not a very original one. Patriotism, after all is the last refuge of a scoundrel.

“Jeremy Corbyn has expended his efforts in trying to keep the Labour Party together by constantly giving way to the Blairites rather than trying to unite the working class. [Former Labour MP] George Galloway is befriending [Donald Trump’s fascist former advisor] Steve Bannon who is steering a course towards fascism. Brexit is a fake issue.”

Mangoli said, “This was the first public meeting I have attended by the SEP other than on the issue of Julian Assange. It was very interesting as we all understood that Brexit will be a disaster for ordinary people, but what Chris Marsden explained, and I now agree with, is that both sides Leave and Remain are not for us.

“I was also interested in what Chris said about Corbyn, as he is a very weak leader and always does what the media wants. The SEP is telling the truth. As the speaker said, they never sugar coat the truth.”

Former teacher Elsa Collins attended in London and said the “meeting was interesting. I learned a lot of new things. When I raised that Corbyn is a good man and that Chris should speak to him he listened and respected my opinion. But it looks like Corbyn is uniting with those who exploit us.”

“I agreed with Chris, who I admire immensely. His message is very powerful. He must go and speak to workers internationally. Workers have to unite, but I still maintain that Britain has to stay in the European Union. It’s the only way they can unite. Outside the EU they are individuals. The United Socialist States of Europe formed by workers is a good idea, but it would be very difficult.”

In Leeds Charles said, “What struck me about the meeting was the realisation that the SEP was not only speaking about one country, i.e. the UK, and the problems in the UK, but about the problems of the whole world. They believe that people should be concerned about the problems of the working class all over the world. I was pleased to find that there are people who are prepared to dedicate their lives to fight for what they believe in— socialism.”

In Bradford, Joe, a university admin worker, said, “The title of the meeting was good and clear. The SEP is offering a different path than the Remain or Leave camps, which are the only ones covered in the mainstream media.”

“What I found most important and revealing was that Trump’s fascistic adviser Steve Bannon and the self-described ‘left’ George Galloway had been together on the same platform. I didn’t know about that previously.”

Joe thought the way Marsden had responded to a question about the invasion of Kurdish areas by Turkey was important. “It was striking how he explained that all the problems being faced by the people of the region—whether it’s the proxy wars, the social conditions—they all require the removal of the national borders and an international, socialist solution.”

“The US just used the Kurds for their own purposes for four years or more and then abandoned them to their fate. It was like the Kurdish leaders had done a deal with the devil, and then when they had served their purpose, they got turned on very quickly and very viciously. But that should not be used to justify the onslaught that is currently going on.”

Lara said, “I am alarmed at the possibility of being forced to leave the UK as a result of Brexit. I have lived in this country for my entire working life. I would have to undertake new job training and education to access work in my home country, Germany. My future suddenly feels so uncertain.”

She agreed with the presentation that no side of the Brexit divide represented the interests of the working class. “There is wall-to-wall media coverage on Brexit in Germany, which is treated as political satire. It is used to distract from the deep social problems in Germany and to cover up the crisis facing European capitalism.”

In Sheffield, Anthony said, “Firstly, I would like to say that I really enjoyed the meeting, and left feeling that I have found my political home. A new United Socialist States of Europe would be the perfect answer to the national inequalities that have rocked countries like Greece. The 2016 Brexit result is pretty much the product of a two-tiered European Union and the relentless push towards globalisation.

“Chris Marsden’s speech was fascinating and I hope to chat with him again soon. He touched on the build up to the coming World War and that definitely struck a chord with me. The recent US withdrawal from Syria is a sign of a tactic of constantly moving the troops round to confuse the enemy. This could be a sign they are soon to strike aggressively.”

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