

Globalisation, solidarity and cooperation

28th April 2020

Dear comrades, dear friends,

We would like to send our greetings and best wishes to all Socialist International members and friends across the globe. We are facing an unprecedented situation, a global health crisis that is evolving into a global economic and social crisis. The scale of the challenge is huge and the long-term effects will vary country to country and region to region. If we do not act, we risk a sharp rise in public and private debt, unemployment, lower living standards and inequality for years to come. The most vulnerable are once again at risk of paying the highest price.

Some are calling this pandemic the end of globalization and interdependence. Populists are offering nationalistic solutions. However, global solidarity is the only solution. We are confident, that together we can overcome this challenge, protect the most vulnerable and emerge from this crisis stronger and more united.

We would like to update you on the situation in Finland:

The COVID-19 situation in Finland

The situation is evolving daily, but the figures on 28 April were as follows:

- 4,740 lab-confirmed infections
- 193 people have lost their lives. The median age of the deceased is 84 and most have had at least one underlying chronic illness
- Some social distancing rules and restrictions will be in place at least until the end of July
- Social distancing measures such as school and restaurant closures and banning of large gatherings have been able to slow the spread of the virus and the government is considering easing restrictions
- The economic impact will be severe with the economy expected to shrink by at least 10 % this year.

In Finland, our social democrat led government has led a strong response to the crisis, which has earned them strong approval ratings from the general public. The Social Democratic Party has become Finland's most popular party (20.4%), according to a survey published by the leading daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat on 25 April. Altogether, the five parties in Prime Minister Sanna Marin's centre-left coalition government have an approval rating of 55.8 %, up from 52.5 % a month earlier.

Social distancing measures in place

The Government introduced several social distancing measures to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, to safeguard the capacity of healthcare sector and to protect vulnerable at-risk groups of people.

- Schools are closed at least until 13 May
- Restaurants remain closed at least until the end of May

- Public events of more than 500 people are prohibited until 31 July
- Restrictions on internal movement have been eased with the reopening of the Uusimaa border, but the government is still urging people to avoid unnecessary travel. The Uusimaa region, the region around the capital city Helsinki, has seen the most cases of the virus and its border was closed off from the rest of the country from 28 March until 15 April.

The government will decide on the re-opening schools and the fate of mass summer events such as festivals in the coming days and weeks. The Prime Minister signalled that it is possible for the Finnish society to move gradually and in a controlled manner to the next stage of epidemic management. However, not all restrictive measures can be lifted at once.

The economic impact

The Finnish Finance Ministry announced last week that the national economy is heading for a sharp plunge. If restrictions remain in place for half a year, this will have a huge impact on the economy. Forecasts estimate that the GDP of Finland would shrink by 12 % and the public sector deficit would exceed 10 % of GDP this year. The unemployment rate would increase to 8 %. State finances would remain in substantial deficit for years to come.

To alleviate the negative impact of the coronavirus epidemic, the government has promised a stimulus package of nearly 1.5 billion euros in direct support to companies. Finland will also spend an extra 4.1 billion euros this year for much needed support. Further measures are currently being considered.

The EU has also taken action, which we welcome. The Commission is expected to present a substantial economic recovery package in May.

Together we will overcome this global crisis

As we emerge from this crisis, the world will not be the same as it was before the Covid-19 pandemic. It is clear that no one can succeed alone, now is the time for more common action at the global and EU levels.

As Socialist International members, it is our duty to ensure that we seize this opportunity for transformation. Our common goal is to emerge stronger and build more resilient societies and offer better welfare for our citizens. I wish you all the success in the fight against the corona virus and the challenge of rebuilding our economies and societies.

Best regards,

Eero Heinäluoma
Vice President of the Socialist International
Member of the European Parliament

Tero Shemeikka
Internatinal Secretary
The Finnish Social Democratic Party