

Covid-19: Generalised capitalist barbarism or World proletarian revolution

Thousands are dying every day, the hospitals are on their knees, there is a horrible “triage” between the young and the old among the sick, health workers are exhausted, infected, and some are dying. Everywhere a lack of medical equipment. Governments involved in a terrible competition in the name of the “war against the virus” and the “national economic interest”. Financial markets in free fall, surreal heists in which states are robbing each other of deliveries of masks. Tens of millions of workers thrown into the hell of unemployment, a torrent of lies from the state and its media...this is the awful spectacle offered by the world of today. This pandemic represents one of the most serious health catastrophes since the Spanish flu of 1918-19, even though, since that time, science has made extraordinary steps forward. Why such a disaster? How did it come to this?

We are told that this virus is different, that it’s much more contagious than the others, that its effects are much more pernicious and deadly. All that is probably true but it doesn’t explain the scale of the catastrophe. The underlying responsibility for this planet-wide chaos, for the hundreds of thousands of deaths, lies with capitalism itself. Production for profit and not for human need, the permanent search for cost effectiveness at the price of ferocious exploitation of the working class, the increasingly violent attacks on the living conditions of the exploited, the frenzied competition between companies and states – it is these basic characteristics of the capitalist system which have come together to culminate in the present disaster.

The criminal negligence of capitalism

Those who run this society, the bourgeois class with its states and its media, tell us with a concerned air that this epidemic could not have been predicted. This is a lie on the same level as those put forward by the climate change deniers. Scientists have been warning about the threat of pandemics like Covid-19 for a long time now. But governments have refused to listen to them. They even refused to listen to a report by the CIA in 2009 (“What will tomorrow’s world be like?”) which describes with startling accuracy the characteristics of the present pandemic. Why such blindness on the part of the states and the bourgeois class they serve? For a very simple reason: investments have to produce profits, and as quickly as possible. Investing in the future of humanity doesn’t pay, and just depresses share prices. Investments also have to reinforce the positions of each national bourgeoisie against others on the imperialist arena. If the crazy sums which are invested into military research and spending had been devoted to the health and well-being of the populations, such an epidemic would never have been able to develop. But instead of taking measures against this predictable health disaster, governments have not stopped attacking health systems, both at the level of research and of technical and human resources.

If people are dying like flies today, at the very heart of the most developed countries, it is in the first place because everywhere governments have cut budgets destined for research into new diseases. Thus in May 2018 Donald Trump got rid of a special unit of the National Security Council, composed of eminent experts and created to fight against pandemics. But Trump’s attitude is only a caricature of what all the leaders have been doing. Thus, scientific research into the coronavirus were abandoned everywhere 15 years ago because of the development of a vaccine was judged not to be “cost effective”!

Similarly, it is totally disgusting to see the bourgeois leaders and politicians, on the right and the left, weeping over the saturation of the hospitals and the catastrophic conditions in which health workers are forced to work, when the bourgeois states have been methodically imposing the norms of profit over the last 50 years, and particularly since the great recession of 2008. Everywhere they have been limiting access to health services, reducing the number of hospital beds, and intensifying the work load of health workers. And what are we to make of the generalised scarcity of masks and other protective garments, disinfectant gel, testing equipment, etc? Over the last few years, most states have got rid of stocks of these vital items in order to save money. In the last few months, they have not been anticipating the rapid spread of Covid-19, even though, since November 2019, some of them have been claiming that masks are of no use to non-carers – in order to hide their criminal irresponsibility.

And what about chronically deprived regions of the world like the continents of Africa or Latin America? In Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 10 million inhabitants can count on 50 ventilators! In Central Africa, leaflets were given out giving advice on how to wash your hands when the population doesn’t have enough water to drink! Everywhere the same cry of distress: *“we lack everything in the face of this pandemic!”*

Capitalism is the war of each against all

The fierce rivalry between each state in the world arena is blocking the minimum cooperation to contain the virus. When it first got going, the Chinese bourgeoisie judged it more important to do all it could to hide the gravity of the situation, in order to protect its economy and its reputation. The state didn’t hesitate to persecute the doctor who tried to sound the alarm and left him to die. Even the semblance of international regulation which the bourgeoisie has set up to deal with the lack of equipment has fallen apart: the World Health Organisation has been unable to impose its directives while the European Union has been incapable of introducing concerted measures. This division is considerably aggravating the chaos and the loss of control over the evolution of the pandemic. The dynamic of “every man for himself” and the exacerbation of generalised competition have become the dominant feature of the reactions of the ruling class.

The “war of the masks”, as the media call it, is an edifying example of this. Each state is grabbing the material it can through speculation, bidding wars, and even out-and-out theft. The US has been nabbing paneloads of Chinese masks promised to France. France has confiscated cargoes of masks heading by air for Sweden. The Czech Republic has seized at its customs barriers ventilators and masks destined for Italy. Germany has made masks heading for Canada disappear. This is the true face of the “great democracies”: thieves and gangsters of the worst kind!

Unprecedented attacks on the exploited

For the bourgeoisie *“profits are worth more than our lives”* as striking car workers shouted in Italy. In all countries, it delayed as long as possible putting in place measures of confinement to protect the population in order to keep national production going at any cost. It was not the threat of a sharply rising death toll which in the end led to the lock-downs. The many imperialist massacres that have been going on for over a century, fought in

the name of the national interest, have definitively proved the contempt that the ruling class has for the lives of the exploited. No, our rulers don't care about our lives! Especially when the virus has the "advantage", as far as the bourgeoisie is concerned, of mowing down the sick and the elderly, those it sees as "unproductive". Letting the virus spread and do its "natural" work in the name of "herd immunity" was actually the initial choice of Boris Johnson and other leaders. In each country, what tipped the scales in favour of the lock-downs was the fear of the disorganisation of the economy and, in certain countries, the threat of social disorder, the mounting anger in response to the negligence and the rising death tolls. What's more, even if they involve half of humanity, the social isolation measures are in many cases a total farce: millions of people have been obliged to crowd together every day on trains, tubes and buses, in the factories and supermarkets. And already the bourgeoisie is looking to end the lock-downs as quickly as possible, at the very time when the pandemic is hitting hardest, trying to find ways to provoke the least discontent by sending workers back to work sector by sector, firm by firm.

The bourgeoisie is perpetuating and planning new attacks, even more brutal conditions of exploitation. The pandemic has already thrown millions of workers into unemployment: ten million in three weeks in the US. Many of them, who have irregular, precarious or temporary jobs, will be deprived of any income. Others, who have some meagre social benefits to live on, are faced with no longer being able to pay rent and the costs of medical care. The economic ravages have started to accelerate the world recession which was already looming: explosion in the food prices, massive lay-offs, wage cuts, growing job insecurity etc. All states are adopting measures of "flexibility" by calling for sacrifices in the name of "national unity in the war against the virus".

The national interest that the bourgeoisie is invoking today is not our interest. It's this same defence of the national economy and this same generalised competition which has, in the past, led it to carry out budget cuts and attacks against the living conditions of the exploited. Tomorrow, it will serve up the same lies when, following the economic devastation caused by the pandemic, it will call on the exploited to pull their belts in further, to accept even more poverty and exploitation. This pandemic is an expression of the decadent character of the capitalist mode of production, of the many expressions of the rotting of present day society, along with the destruction of the environment, pollution and climate change, the proliferation of imperialist wars and massacres, the inexorable descent into poverty of a growing portion of humanity, the number of people obliged to become migrants or refugees, the rise of populist ideology and religious fanaticism, etc (see our text "Theses on the decomposition of capitalism" on our internet site: https://en.internationalism.org/ir/107_decomposition) It's an indicator of the dead-end that capitalism has reached, showing the direction in which this system is leading humanity: towards chaos, misery, barbarism, destruction and death.

Only the proletariat can change the world

Certain governments and media argue that the world will never be the same as it was before this pandemic, that the lessons of the disaster will be drawn, that in the end states will move towards a more humane and better managed form of capitalism. We heard the same refrain after the 2008 recession: with hand on their hearts, the states and leaders of the world declared "war on rogue finance", promising that the sacrifices demanded to get out of the

crisis would be rewarded. You only have to look at the growing inequality in the world to recognise that these promises to "reform" capitalism were just lies to make us swallow a new deterioration in our living conditions.

The exploiting class cannot change the world and put human lives and social needs above the pitiless laws of its economy: capitalism is a system of exploitation, in which a ruling minority draws its profits and its privileges from the work of the majority. The key to the future, the promise of another world, a truly human world without nations or exploitation, lies solely in the international unity and solidarity of the workers in struggle!

The wave of spontaneous solidarity within our class in response to the intolerable situation inflicted on the health workers is being derailed by the governments and politicians of the whole world into the campaign of applause on doorsteps and balconies. Of course this applause will warm the hearts of the workers who, with courage and dedication, in dramatic working conditions, are looking after the sick and saving lives. But the solidarity of our class, of the exploited, can't be reduced to a five minute round of applause. It means, in the first place, denouncing the governments of all countries, no matter their political colouring. It means demanding masks and all the necessary protective equipment. It means, when it's possible, going on strike and affirming that, as long as health workers don't have the material they need, as long as they are being hurled towards their deaths with uncovered faces, the exploited who are not in the hospitals will not work.

Today, while the lock-down lasts, we can't wage massive struggles against this murderous system. We can't gather together to express our anger and our solidarity through massive struggles, through strikes and demonstrations. Because of the lock-down, but not only that. Also because our class has to recover its real source of strength, which it has shown so many times in history but which it has since forgotten: the potential for uniting in struggle, for developing massive movements against the ruling class and its monstrous system.

The strikes that broke out in the automobile sector in Italy or in supermarkets in France, in front of New York hospitals or those in the north of France, the enormous indignation of workers refusing to serve as "virus fodder", herded together without masks, gloves or soap, for the sole benefit of their exploiters, can today only be scattered reactions and cut off from the strength of an entire united class. Nonetheless, they show that the workers are not prepared to accept, like some kind of inevitability, the criminal irresponsibility of those who exploit us.

It's this perspective of class battles that we have to prepare for. Because after Covid-19 there will be the world economic crisis, massive unemployment, new "reforms" which are nothing but further sacrifices. So, right now, we must prepare our future struggles. How? By discussing, exchanging experiences and ideas, on different internet channels on forums, on the phone, as much as possible. Understanding that the greatest scourge is not Covid-19 but capitalism, that the solution is not to rally behind the killer state but to stand against it; that hope resides not in the promises of this or that politician but in the development of workers' solidarity in the struggle; that the only alternative to capitalist barbarism is the world revolution!

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE CLASS STRUGGLE!

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