

The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution

What It Is and How to Fight It



By Michael Pröbsting

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***The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution:
What It Is and How to Fight It***

A Marxist analysis and strategy for the revolutionary struggle

By Michael Pröbsting

This book is dedicated to all those who devote their lives to the working class' liberation struggle and to the building of the revolutionary world party without which this liberation struggle can not win.

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Introduction

We are living in an extraordinary historic moment. What is happening in these days and weeks is a combination of four interrelated developments.

1) *The Third Depression*, i.e. a devastating economic slump of the capitalist world economy which is certainly no less dramatic than the crisis which started in 1929;

2) A wave of anti-democratic attacks of a scale which has not been seen in the imperialist countries since 1945 and which triggers a global turn towards *Chauvinist State Bonapartism* and the creation of a monstrous Leviathan-like state machinery;

3) *COVID-19*, a pandemic which endangers many lives and which is exploited by the ruling classes in order to spread fear, to deflect attention from the capitalist causes of the economic crisis and to justify the turn towards chauvinist state bonapartism;

4) Similar to the situation in 1914 after the beginning of World War I we can observe a gigantic wave of opportunist capitulation by large sectors of the reformist workers movement and the so-called left as they fully support or at least do not denounce the global lockdown and the suppression of democratic rights which the ruling classes are imposing in the name of combat against the pandemic.

The global counter-revolutionary offensive under the cover of COVID-19 is not only a historical watershed but also a complex and peculiar phenomenon. Hence it raises a number of questions both for the Marxist analysis as well as for the revolutionary strategy and tactic. The present book shall help revolutionary militants to better understand this issue and to find a correct orientation for the struggles in the coming period. This book is based on past documents of the RCIT which we have published since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis – most importantly our Manifesto “*COVID-19: A Cover for a Major Global Counterrevolutionary Offensive*”. (See also the Appendix) ¹ Hence, we will not repeat all our positions and arguments at this place but rather elaborate a number of

1 COVID-19: A Cover for a Major Global Counterrevolutionary Offensive. We are at a turning point in the world situation as the ruling classes provoke a war-like atmosphere in order to legitimize the build-up of chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes, 21 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-a-cover-for-a-major-global-counterrevolutionary-offensive/>. We also refer to our Open Letter: Act Now because History is Happening Now! A call to all revolutionary organizations and activists to join forces against the global counter-revolutionary offensive under the cover of COVID-19, 26 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/open-letter-act-now-because-history-is-happening-now/>. All documents which the RCIT has published on the COVID-19 crisis are collected at a special sub-page in our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/collection-of-articles-on-the-2019-corona-virus/>.

issues in more detail.

We have to make an important qualification. This book is written under extraordinary circumstances as it appears in the midst of a historic crisis. More precisely, it has been written in the early stages of this crisis. Hence, we are talking about a process which is still in a state of flux. The author of these lines strongly recognized this when the editing process of the book revealed that the data on the economic slump were already outdated only a few days after writing the draft!

It would be certainly easier if this document would be written not now but in a few months time when the picture is clearer. However, that would be an academic approach, unworthy of Marxists. The task of revolutionaries is not to observe and comment from outside but to intervene in the class struggle, to provide the vanguard with an analysis and an orientation for the tasks of the day. Hence, revolutionaries can not wait until everything is over. Our dictum is the famous formula which Marx stated in his 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: "*Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.*"²

Lenin as well as Trotsky liked to quote Napoleon who said "*On s'engage et puis ... on voit.*" ("First engage in a serious battle and then see what happens.") Our task – and the task of all revolutionaries – in this extraordinary historic situation is to grasp as soon as possible and as good as possible the nature of the current events and to elaborate a strategy and tactic for the battles ahead. Marxists must draw a line *now*, must begin the struggle against the global counter-revolutionary offensive *now* and not wait until everything is clear ... because when everything is clearly evident, it could mean that the reactionary developments have successfully established a new and disadvantageous relation of forces. Our task is to intervene in his process and to influence it as much as possible in the interest of the international working class and the oppressed.

For these reasons, this book is not an academic exercise but an attempt to grasp a crucial and ongoing assault of the ruling class and to elaborate a strategy for the resistance. Hence, it is also a contribution to the debate about the current upheaval in the world situation which has begun among socialists and activists in the international liberation movement of the workers and oppressed. It shall help to clarify the political basis for close collaboration of revolutionaries all over the world. This is all the more urgent because if liberation fighters do not succeed in uniting on a clear programmatic basis in order to advance the construction of a World Party of Socialists Revolution, the capitalist counter-revolution could result in a barbaric destruction of humanity and its living conditions.

12 April 2020

² Karl Marx: Theses on Feuerbach (1845), in: MECW Vol. 5, p. 5 (Emphasis in the original), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>

I. The peculiar character of the current crisis: a *Triple Catastrophe*

It is certainly no exaggeration to characterize the current cataclysm as a *triple catastrophe*. It is a combined event of 1929, Leviathan and pandemic, i.e. of the worst economic slump since 1929, a global simultaneous turn towards Chauvinist State Bonapartism as well as a a dangerous health crisis. It is crucial to understand the concrete dynamic between these three crises in a correct way.

Superficially, on the surface, it seems that the pandemic is that one of these three crises which is the dominating factor, which is determining the course of the other two. Let us look at this question a bit closer.

How severe is this pandemic?

How severe is this pandemic? Obviously one has to be cautious at this point to make any prognosis about the further course of this disease. However, it is evident that this is a dangerous pandemic which has already cost many lives and which will cost many more. At the same time, it is equally important to point out that it is neither the first health catastrophe in modern times nor the only one which has wracked the world recently. One has just to think about the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Between the time that AIDS was identified (in the early 1980s) and 2018, the disease caused an estimated 32 million deaths worldwide. In 2018 alone about 37.9 million people were living with HIV and it resulted in 770,000 deaths. However, this is a pandemic which primarily affects the poor countries in the Global South. 25.6 million people infected with HIV (67.5% of the total) live in Sub-Sahara Africa. At the same time, only 2.2 million (5.8%) of those infected live in Western Europe and Northern America, i.e. the imperialist West. And of those who died in 2018, only 1.67% lived in these Western countries.³

In contrast to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the COVID-19 disease has – until now – primarily affected the imperialist countries, first in East Asia and then in Western Europe and the U.S. One could add numerous other diseases which are plaguing the poor countries of the Global South. Therefore Marxists have to take care that they don't adapt to the ideology of imperialist self-centeredness: when a pandemic wrecked the poor countries, it causes no more than a few crocodile tears from the UN and some financial crumbs. However, when the rich countries face such a pandemic, "the world stands still". Marxists have to condemn those leftists who adopt such a reactionary outlook as guilty of social-

3 UNAIDS: FACT SHEET – WORLD AIDS DAY 2019, p.1 and p.5

imperialist arrogance.

It is worth pointing out that there have been also various diseases in the imperialist countries which cost a lot of lives without causing any panic, not to speak about a global shutdown. For example, about 2.6 million people die of respiratory infections each year world-wide – without much notice.⁴ The influenza epidemics in the past decades have caused globally 290,000-650,000 death each year, without provoking any major political initiative by the ruling class.⁵ The overall all-cause influenza-attributable mortality in the 2017/18 season was estimated to be about 152,000 deaths in Europe alone!⁶ In 2015 France experienced the deadliest year since the end of World War II. This was attributed to the influenza as well as extreme weather. According to official statistics, a 9-week long particularly harsh flu epidemic had a decimating effect on people aged 65 and over, causing 24,000 extra deaths.⁷ In the U.S. alone, 160,201 people died in 2017 because of chronic respiratory disease and cancer killed 599,108.⁸

In addition, let us note that the capitalist crisis itself has massive consequences for public health. A long-time study published by *The Lancet* journal showed that “unemployment increases are associated with rises in cancer mortality”. The authors of the study arrive at the conclusion: “We estimate that the 2008–10 economic crisis was associated with about 260 000 excess cancer-related deaths in the OECD alone.”⁹ We point out that these figures are limited only to the rich imperialist countries (OECD) which have a much better health system than the countries of the Global South.

Experiences from Russia after the downfall of Stalinism produce an even

4 Yanis Roussel, Audrey Giraud-Gatineau, Marie-Therese Jimeno, Jean-Marc Rolain, Christine Zandotti, Philippe Colson, Didier Raoult : SARS-CoV-2: fear versus data, *International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents* (2020), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijantimicag.2020.105947>

5 See on this e.g. WHO: Up to 650 000 people die of respiratory diseases linked to seasonal flu each year, 14 December 2017 <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/detail/14-12-2017-up-to-650-000-people-die-of-respiratory-diseases-linked-to-seasonal-flu-each-year>; Iuliano AD, Roguski KM, Chang HH, Muscatello DJ, Palekar R, Tempia S, et al. Estimates of global seasonal influenza-associated respiratory mortality: a modelling study. *Lancet*. 2018;391:1285-300. Medline:29248255 doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(17)33293-2; Paget J, Spreuwenberg P, Charu V, et al. Global mortality associated with seasonal influenza epidemics: New burden estimates and predictors from the GLaMOR Project. *J Glob Health*. 2019;9(2):020421. doi:10.7189/jogh.09.020421

6 J. Nielsen et al: European all-cause excess and influenza-attributable mortality in the 2017/18 season: should the burden of influenza B be reconsidered? in: *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* Volume 25, Issue 10 (October 2019), pp. 1266–1276

7 Thomas Seymat: Flu and weather made 2015 the deadliest year in France since World War II, 15/02/2016 <https://www.euronews.com/2016/02/15/flu-and-weather-made-2015-the-deadliest-year-in-france-since-world-war-ii>

8 Tom J Velk: Are pandemic policymakers blinded by expertise? March 31, 2020 <https://asiatimes.com/2020/03/are-pandemic-policy-makers-blinded-by-expertise/>

9 “Economic downturns, universal health coverage, and cancer mortality in high-income and middle-income countries, 1990-2010: a longitudinal analysis,” Mahiben Maruthappu, Johnathan Watkins, Aisyah Mohd Noor, Callum Williams, Raghieb Ali, Richard Sullivan, Thomas Zeltner, Rifat Atun, *The Lancet*, online May 25, 2016, doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(16)00577-8, www.thelancet.com, Vol 388 August 13, 2016, p. 694

more dramatic picture. During the first half of the 1990s Russia's economy contracted by 40%. According a study, the economic collapse resulted in the premature death of as many as five million Russian men in the 1990s.¹⁰

And according to a study by the Institute for Public Policy Research, more than 130,000 deaths in the UK since 2012 could have been prevented if improvements in public health policy had not stalled as a direct result of austerity cuts.¹¹

It should not go unmentioned that respiratory ailments chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lower respiratory infection, and cancer – of the trachea, bronchus or lungs – are three of the leading causes of death in the world. Many of these cases are caused or contributed to by two man-made factors: pollution and chronic smoking. According to the WHO smoking results in about 8.2 million deaths annually. And air-pollution has caused about 8 million premature deaths every year.¹²

These are just a few examples which demonstrate that a large number of deaths because of pandemics or other health risks have never provoked any major political initiative by the ruling class. This indicates that the current global lockdown is not primarily motivated by concerns of the capitalist class about public health.

One could object that COVID-19 is a new disease and no vaccine is available until now. Therefore, it affects not only the popular masses but also the bourgeoisie and its ruling circles – up to Prime Ministers including their families and advisers. No doubt, this is an important reason why this pandemic has created a lot of panic in the ruling classes of the imperialist countries – despite the fact that it has claimed considerably less victims until now than other pandemics. And since it is exactly these countries which dominate global institutions this has also been a reason why the WHO, UN etc. are all ringing the alarm bells. This also helps explaining why U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres characterizes the current pandemic as the worst global crisis since World War II: “COVID-19 is the greatest test that we have faced together since the formation of the United Nations” – albeit, we repeat, much less people have died globally until now than in other pandemics!¹³

Is it the case that the capitalist class is panicking because this pandemic severely affects the working class, i.e. the labor forces who create the surplus val-

10 James Ciment: Life expectancy of Russian men falls to 58, BMJ 1999; 319 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.319.7208.468a> (Published 21 August 1999)

11 Toby Helm: Austerity to blame for 130,000 ‘preventable’ UK deaths – report, 1 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jun/01/perfect-storm-austerity-behind-130000-deaths-uk-ippr-report>

12 Pitamber Kaushik: Recessions, longevity and the Covid-19 ‘sweet spot’, 11 April 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/recessions-longevity-and-the-covid-19-sweet-spot/>

13 U.N. warns of ‘dire’ effects of coronavirus, ‘greatest test’ since WWII, 1 April 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-un/u-n-warns-of-dire-effects-of-coronavirus-greatest-test-since-wwii-idUSKBN21J6EJ>

ue and, hence, the basis for profits? This is also not really the case as it is mainly older people and those with seriously illnesses who are mostly endangered. Dr Kluge, the WHO Regional Director for Europe, said in a recent statement: *“We know that over 95% of these deaths occurred in those older than 60 years. More than 50% of all deaths were people aged 80 years or older. We also know from reports that 8 out of 10 deaths are occurring in individuals with at least one underlying co-morbidity, in particular those with cardiovascular diseases/hypertension and diabetes, but also with a range of other chronic underlying conditions.”*¹⁴

This is also, by the way, the reason why Europe suffers particularly strong from this pandemic. According to Dr Kluge, *“of the top 30 countries with the largest percentage of older people, all but one (Japan) are our Member States in Europe. The countries most affected by the pandemic are among them.”*

It would be rather strange that the bourgeoisie enters in a stage of panic because older people are dying who don't play a significant role in the capitalist production process and who, in the logic of profit, are only severely straining the pension system.

Neither can any intelligent person claim that the imperialist bourgeoisie is panicking because millions of people could die in the Global South. They did never care about the poor who are dying every year because of hunger, diseases and wars! Why should they suddenly do so now?!

It is true that we don't know the further course of the pandemic. As we noted above, the influenza epidemic cost the lives of more than 150,000 people in Europe alone in the 2017/18 season. The latest study on the COVID-19 crisis estimates a similar number of deaths for Europe in the first wave (151,680 deaths for the whole of Europe with the UK as strongest hit with more than 66,000 deaths).¹⁵ May be more will die in this pandemic. But it is absurd to believe that the ruling classes, which didn't lift a finger in similar events in the past, would suddenly be willing to crash the economy, i.e. their profits, because two or three times as many people could die as did in an annual influenza epidemic!

One has to add to all this that, as we have pointed out repeatedly in our documents, the authoritarian methods which the ruling class apply in their combat against the pandemic are not particularly efficient. Countries which are putting their population under lockdown – like Italy or Spain – suffer nevertheless the highest numbers of casualties in the world. In contrast, countries like South Korea, which have not put their population under lockdown but applied mass and free testing, have been much more successful. This is all the more remarkable

14 Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge (WHO Regional Director for Europe): Statement – Older people are at highest risk from COVID-19, but all must act to prevent community spread, Copenhagen, 2 April 2020, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/statements/statement-older-people-are-at-highest-risk-from-covid-19-but-all-must-act-to-prevent-community-spread>

15 COVID-19: What's New for April 7, 2020, <http://www.healthdata.org/covid/updates>; see also AFP: Britain set for 66,000 COVID-19 deaths, most in Europe: study, 07/04/2020 <https://www.france24.com/en/20200407-britain-set-for-66-000-covid-19-deaths-most-in-europe-study>

as South Korea has been the first country after China which faced a significant number of people infected by the Corona Virus. There are also other countries which have contained the number of death until now without any mass lockdown of the population.

All experience demonstrates that free mass testing is the most important instrument in combating the pandemic. However, most imperialist governments have not applied this method but limited themselves to test only those people who have already severe symptoms. Various European countries even refused for a long time offers from South Korea or China to get testing kits. The Austrian government absurdly stated in late March that mass testing “*is not useful.*”¹⁶

Furthermore, as has been noted widely, it is absurd if governments, on one hand, force people to stop any social activity and to stay in their homes, and at the same time to continue running non-essential production where people meet in their work places.

Another assertion made by the capitalist governments is that they need to impose the lockdown in order to “win time” so that the health care system does not collapse. If that would be true these governments would utilize the weeks of lockdown in order to do mass testing of the population and to build new hospitals and ICU. Likewise they would vastly expand the number of health workers and raise their salaries in order to improve their working conditions. We have seen in late January in Wuhan that hospitals can be built in ten days if the will to do so exist! However, as a matter of fact, the capitalist governments in general did not use the recent weeks and months to conduct such massive investments in the health sector. Hence, the justification of the lockdown that it would help to win time is just a pretext.

All these facts demonstrate beyond doubt that combating the Corona Virus is not, and has never been, the *primary* motivation in the decisions of the imperialist governments.

In summary, there is no reason to assume that the pandemic itself is the main cause for the global lockdown and the shutdown of the capitalist economy by the ruling classes. This is even more so the case as the ruling classes took such initiative at a moment when “only” a fraction of the number of deaths in past epidemics had already died. Hence, it is evident that the global shutdown which we are currently experiencing must have different causes.

16 ORF: Flächendeckende CoV-Tests „nicht sinnvoll“, 23 March 2020, <https://orf.at/stories/3159019/>

*A dangerous moment for the bourgeoisie:
The Third Great Depression began in 2019
simultaneously with a global wave of class struggles*

We have elaborated in our documents on the COVID-19 crisis that the pandemic emerged at a crucial turning point in world politics. In the second half of 2019 two key developments of historic proportions took place. First, the most severe slump of the capitalist world economy began. And, secondly, a global wave of class struggles and popular uprisings shattered nearly all continents.

We have analyzed these struggles in numerous statements and articles and will therefore not deal with this issue at this place.¹⁷ It is however undeniable that the global counterrevolutionary offensive which is currently taking place under the cover of the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in an end of nearly all of these struggles. In Hong Kong, India, Iraq, Chile, France, Catalunya and various other countries the popular masses were forced to retreat in the recent weeks.

We have also analyzed the opening of the current Great Recession in various documents.¹⁸ At this place we want to add just a few figures as we possess now a more complete picture of the development of the capitalist world economy of last year.

According to the latest figure of the *CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis* global industrial production started to decline in March-May 2019. Obviously this trend was uneven in different regions. The old imperialist states in the West already entered a recession in 2019, albeit the U.S. a bit later than Western Europe and Japan. The same is true for Latin America and the Middle East. Asia, except China, also faltered. China was the single major country which continued experiencing a certain growth dynamic. (See Table 1 and 2) At this point we leave aside the question if the official figures for China are really ac-

17 For an overview and a characterization of these events see, in addition the relevant statements on the individual countries, Michael Pröbsting: Are We Nearing a New "68 Moment"? A massive upsurge of global class struggle in the midst of a dramatic shift in the world situation 22 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/are-we-nearing-a-new-68-moment/>

18 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: No, the Corona Virus is not the Main Cause of the Global Economic Slump! Bourgeois Media Officially Recognize the Beginning of another Great Recession, 3 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/corona-virus-is-not-the-main-cause-of-global-economic-slump/>; Chapter "Another Great Recession has begun" in RCIT: World Perspectives 2020: A Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 8 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2020/>; Michael Pröbsting: Another Great Recession of the Capitalist World Economy Has Begun. The economic crisis is an important factor in the current dramatic shift in the world situation, 19 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/another-great-recession-of-the-capitalist-world-economy-has-begun/>; see also Michael Pröbsting: The Next Looming Great Recession. Observations on the Latest Stock Market Slump and the Structural Crisis of the Capitalist World Economy, 12 October 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-next-looming-great-recession/>

curate or, as many critics claim, if they do not tend to exaggerate the country's economic growth.

However, as we have pointed out in past documents, China's continuing growth was only possible because it experienced simultaneously a huge explosion of debt. In fact, the level of indebtedness grew faster in China since 2008 than in any other major capitalist country! According to the *Institute of International Finance* (IIF), a well-known think tank on this issue, China's gross debt surged dramatically from 171% of GDP in Q4 2008 to 299% in Q1 2018.¹⁹

Table 1. Global Industrial Production, 2017-19 (in Volume)²⁰

	2017	2018	2019
World	3.6	3.1	0.8
Advanced economies	3.1	2.4	-0.3
United States	2.3	3.9	0.9
Japan	2.6	1.0	-2.4
Euro Area	3.1	0.9	-1.7
Other advanced economies	4.3	3.0	0.9
Emerging economies	4.0	3.7	1.8
China	6.5	6.2	5.8
Asia (excl. China)	4.2	3.8	0.1
Eastern Europe / CIS	3.2	2.9	2.1
Latin America	-0.7	-2.2	-5.0
Africa and Middle East	0.7	1.0	-3.2

Table 2. Manufacturing in the U.S. 2017-19 (in percent)²¹

2017	Annual		2019 (Quarters)			
	2018	2019	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2.0	2.3	-0.2	-1.8	-3.3	0.7	-0.6

Table 3. World Merchandise Trade, Percentage Changes²²

(Prices / Unit Values in US-Dollars)

2017	2018	2019
5.9	6.1	-2.6

19 Cary Springfield: How Much of a Concern Is China's Debt Problem? International Banker, April 29, 2019 <https://internationalbanker.com/banking/how-much-of-a-concern-is-chinas-debt-problem/>

20 CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis: CPB World Trade Monitor January 2020, 25.3.2020, p. 5

21 FRB: Industrial Production and Capacity Utilization, FEDERAL RESERVE statistical release, 17.03.2020, p. 14; Quarterly percentage changes are at annual rates.

22 CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis: CPB World Trade Monitor January 2020, 25.3.2020, p. 3

This increase of debts has continued since then and by Q3 2019 China's debt already approached 310% of GDP.²³ It is important to recognize that this explosion of debt has been particularly relevant for China's capitalist corporations. The non-financial corporate debt-to-GDP ratio jumped from 93% in 2009 to 153% last year, one of the highest in the world. The IIF warned that China was the major driver of global non-financial corporate debt. China's bond defaults also hit records in 2018 and 2019.²⁴

However, despite all these efforts, China too was in the grip of the declining dynamic as it experienced its lowest economic growth in 30 years. The same picture of a world economy entering recession can be seen from the decline in world trade. (See Table 3)

As we have stated in the last RCIT's *World Perspective* document, the beginning of this recession in combination with the global wave of popular uprisings opened a *pre-revolutionary world situation* in autumn 2019. This development was the *single most important factor* which caused the ruling classes to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a cover for launching a counterrevolutionary offensive with mass lockdowns and the build-up of chauvinist state bonapartist regimes.

To achieve this, the capitalist class was prepared to risk a significant escalation of the recession via the shutdown of many businesses. They were even more prepared to do so as they, illusionary, hope that this will be a sharp but short recession, i.e. something which bourgeois economists call a "*V recession*". Surely, this is rather hope than serious science. But it reflects the outlook of the ruling class. They calculate that they can overcome the crisis of the capitalist world economy by a decisive political intervention (an "*exogenous shock*"), by global shutdown, dramatic austerity attacks as well as bail-out programs for the capitalists. Such belief in a sharp but short recession is the reason why the ruling classes are prepared to take such a risk of shutting down the economy. They hope to utilize this supposedly short period for a shock-and-awe attack against the working class and the popular masses – or a "*Blitz-Krieg*" to use the language of World War II – and to get out of the crisis with a much more favorable relation of forces.

As one of many examples for such silly optimism, we quote a prognosis of the British institute *Oxford Economics* which claims to globally employ 250 economists: "*The near-term outlook is extremely challenging. But we believe that – consistent with historical experience – the bounce back in activity will be very strong once social distancing measures are relaxed, and monetary and fiscal stimulus combine with a resumption in discretionary spending. Businesses that can weather the crisis should be prepared for a strong end to 2020 and start to 2021, with global growth rising as high*

23 IIF: Global Debt Monitor Sustainability Matters, January 13, 2020, p. 2

24 Cary Huang: Coronavirus has lit the fuse on a time bomb in China's economy: debt, South China Morning Post, 5 April 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3078018/coronavirus-has-lit-fuse-time-bomb-chinas-economy-debt>

as 5.3% in annual terms and averaging 4.4% for next year as a whole.”²⁵

History will laugh about such foolish statements (and we can assume that these economists are even well paid for spreading such nonsense)! As we emphasized in past documents on the world economy, the imperialist corporations as well as states are substantially more indebted today than they were before the last recession in 2008/09. This was already the case *before* the current recession began. The *Institute of International Finance* reports: “Global debt hit all-time high of nearly \$253 trillion in Q3 2019: Total debt across the household, government, financial and non-financial corporate sectors surged by some \$9 trillion in the first three quarters of 2019. By sector, general government (+\$3.5 trillion) and non-financial corporates (+\$3 trillion) saw the biggest in-creses, helping bring the overall global debt-to-GDP ratio to a fresh high of over 322%.”²⁶

This is particularly the case for non-financial corporations as well as governments. The IIF states in another report: “Corporate debt is already very high relative to earnings - and earnings prospects are deteriorating: At nearly \$75 trillion, the fast-growing mountain of global corporate debt (ex-financials) is around 93% of global GDP - vs 75% in the run-up to the 2008 global financial crisis.”²⁷

Add to all these, the gigantic new financial aid programs which the imperialist states are currently spending in order to save the capitalists during the current meltdown. An U.S. economist estimates that Trump’s aid package of \$2.2 trillion, the equivalent of nearly 11% of annual output, will be followed by various financial programs of the *Federal Reserve* banking system worth another \$4 trillion. He concludes that the total sum of “outlay of borrowed money, and printed money, [will amount] to about one-third the entire annual gross domestic product of the world’s richest society.”²⁸

A similar process of huge accumulation of additional public debt is taking place in most other imperialist countries. Japan’s Abe government just decided on a nearly US\$1 trillion emergency plan which is the equivalent of 20% of the country’s GDP. The emergency packages of other governments are smaller but still very large. Australia is spending about 9.7% of GDP, Canada 8.4%, Germany’s 4.9% and France 2%.²⁹

While every calculation can only be of provisional nature at this juncture (and might be already outdated when these lines are published), economists estimate that the financial emergency programs which have been adopted by governments around the world equal currently about 7 trillion US-Dollar which is

25 Oxford Economics: World Economic Prospects March 2020 2nd Update, Executive Summary, p. 2

26 IIF: Global Debt Monitor Sustainability Matters, January 13, 2020, p. 1

27 IIF Weekly Insight: COVID-19 infects corporate debt markets, March 12th, 2020

28 Tom J Velk: Are pandemic policymakers blinded by expertise? March 31, 2020 <https://asiatimes.com/2020/03/are-pandemic-policymakers-blinded-by-expertise/>

29 William Pesek: Japan’s \$1 trillion stimulus misfire, 8 April 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/japans-1-trillion-stimulus-too-little-too-late/>

about 8% of the global GDP!³⁰

Of course, economic activity will not decline indefinitely. Even the slump of 1929-32 ended at one point. The capitalist production process is based on an *expanded reproduction of capital* as Marx elaborated in Vol. III of *Capital*. However, it is clear that this recession will not be short but long and any upswing will be rather shallow than strong. We saw this process already at the last recession. As we have emphasized repeatedly the upswing period of the last business cycle after 2008/09 was the weakest since World War II. The next upswing will take place on the basis of an even larger sum of debts and, at the same time, against the backdrop of a capitalist world economy divided by protectionist borders.³¹

However, even such a sluggish recovery is still far away as we are still just at the beginning of the process of collapse of the capitalist world economy. Hence, it is much too early to make a comprehensive assessment of its severity. However, the bourgeois economists are forced to correct their predictions downwards every week and it is already obvious that this slump is no less dramatic than the crisis of 1929-33.

Currently, the bourgeois economists estimate that each month of lockdown will result in a loss of 2% of output. Such the OECD states in its latest assessment: *“It is clear that the impact of the shutdowns will weaken short-term growth prospects substantially. The scale of the estimated decline in the level of output is such that it is equivalent to a decline in annual GDP growth of up to 2 percentage points for each month that strict containment measures continue. If the shutdown continued*

30 Kristalina Georgieva (IMF Managing Director): Confronting the Crisis: Priorities for the Global Economy, April 9, 2020 <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/04/07/sp040920-SMs2020-Curtain-Raiser>

31 For the RCIT's analysis of the capitalist world economy since the Great Recession in 2008/09 see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries (Chapter III), RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Latest Stock Market Panic, 8 February 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-stock-market-panic-february-2018/>; RCIT: World Perspectives 2017: The Struggle against the Reactionary Offensive in the Era of Trumpism, Chapter I, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 59, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2017/>; RCIT: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries (January 2016), Chapter II and III, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 46, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/>; RCIT: Perspectives for the Class Struggle in Light of the Deepening Crisis in the Imperialist World Economy and Politics. Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation and Perspectives Ahead (January 2015), in: Revolutionary Communism No. 32, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-january-2015/>; Michael Pröbsting: World economy – heading to a new upswing? in: Fifth International, Volume 3, No. 3, Autumn 2009, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-economy-crisis-2009/>; Michael Pröbsting: Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism (2008), in: Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis, London 2008, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>

for three months, with no offsetting factors, annual GDP growth could be between 4-6 percentage points lower than it otherwise might have been.”³²

JPMorgan Chase has already lowered its estimation on U.S. economic growth for the first and second quarters. The investment bank now expects real U.S. GDP to decline by -10% in the first quarter and by another -25% in the second quarter.³³ In just three weeks, a staggering 16.8 million Americans have been thrown onto the unemployment rolls.³⁴ Federal Reserve policy maker James Bullard predicts that the jobless rate could rise to 30%. These are even more dramatic dimensions than that of 1929-33! In that period, unemployment in the U.S. was 24.9% at its peak.³⁵

However, these are not the most pessimistic prognosis. “Morgan Stanley predicted that the U.S. economy, the world’s biggest, would shrink 5.5% this year, the steepest drop since 1946, despite an unprecedented aid package. An eye-watering 38% contraction is predicted for the second quarter. The bank said Britain was heading for a slump that could be worse in the short term than the 1930s.”³⁶

Similarly, the Euro Area’s economy is predicted to shrink at an annualized clip of 10%.³⁷

In contrast to 2008-09 the recession this time also strongly affects China – the second leading imperialist economy. According to the *South China Morning Post*, “profits at China’s industrial firms plummeted 38.3 per cent from a year ago in the first two months of 2020, with the biggest loss on record offering fresh evidence of the overwhelming impact of the coronavirus on the world’s second largest economy.”³⁸ In China too, unemployment is on the rise, endangering social stability. In February, the urban jobless rate jumped to a record-breaking 6.2% compared to 4.9% in April 2018.³⁹

32 OECD: Evaluating the initial impact of COVID-19 containment measures on economic activity, 27 March 2020, p. 1

33 JPMorgan further lowers U.S. growth forecast for Q1, Q2 –report, March 28, 2020 / <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-gdp-jp-morgan-idUSL1N2BL0B4>

34 Michelle R. Smith, Christopher Rugaber and Marina Villeneuve: 16.8M Americans thrown out of work as economic toll rises, 9 April 2020, <https://apnews.com/c06a37220e461922c61bdf18c3a20c3e>

35 Kimberly Amadeo: Unemployment Rate by Year Since 1929 Compared to Inflation and GDP, <https://www.thebalance.com/unemployment-rate-by-year-3305506>

36 Cate Cadell, Lisa Shumaker: With over a million coronavirus cases, economic freefall looms, April 2, 2020 / <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus/with-over-a-million-coronavirus-cases-economic-freefall-looms-idUSKBN21K38K>

37 Europe midday: Stocks slip as service sector surveys point to sharp GDP fall, 3 April 2020, <https://www.sharecast.com/news/market-report-europe/europe-midday-stocks-slip-as-service-sector-surveys-point-to-sharp-gdp-fall--7414895.html>

38 Orange Wang: Coronavirus: China’s industrial firms’ profits plummeted almost 40 per cent at start of 2020, *South China Morning Post*, 27 March, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3077232/coronavirus-chinas-industrial-firms-profits-plummeted-almost>

39 Gordon Watts: China fears scourge of unemployment, *Asia Times*, April 2, 2020 <https://>

However, these are just the official figures. China's official data only cover the urban workforce (442 million) but exclude the 290 million migrant workers who are often more vulnerable to economic fluctuations. According to estimations of Liu Chenjie, chief economist at fund manager Upright Asset, *"the pandemic may have pushed 205 million workers into "frictional unemployment", where they want to work but cannot or are unable to go back to work. If true, that figure would represent more than a quarter of China's 775 million workforce and would be vastly higher than the 6.2 per cent figure posited by the government's survey."*⁴⁰

Likewise, we see similar dramatic developments in India. The draconic 21-day lockdown imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's has catastrophic consequences for India's workforce of 471 million. Only 19% of them are covered by social security, two-thirds have no formal employment contract, and at least 100 million are migrant workers. Many of them have been sent in headlong flight back to their villages. As a commentator remarks: *"There has been nothing like it since partition in 1947."*⁴¹

As a result of these developments, the world economy is in the midst of a slump of historic proportions. Bloomberg Economics says the global economy will shrink almost 2% year-on-year in the first half, with the euro-area suffering the worst back to back quarterly contractions in its history. And Goldman Sachs said the region's economy could shrink more than 11% quarter-on-quarter in the three months through June.⁴²

The Asian Development Bank expects that the cost of the coronavirus pandemic could be as high as \$4.1 trillion, or almost 5 per cent of global gross domestic product.⁴³

All this goes hand in hand with a total collapse of world trade. An article reports in despair and disbelief: *"Global business to business transactions have dropped by an eye-watering 62 percent since March 8, according to the latest data from Tradeshift."*⁴⁴

The World Trade Organization estimates in its latest prognosis a total col-

asiatimes.com/2020/04/china-fears-scourge-of-unemployment/

40 Frank Tang: Coronavirus: China's unemployment crisis mounts, but nobody knows true number of jobless, 3 April 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3078251/coronavirus-chinas-unemployment-crisis-mounts-nobody-knows>

41 Adam Tooze: The Normal Economy Is Never Coming Back, Foreign Policy, 9 April 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/09/unemployment-coronavirus-pandemic-normal-economy-is-never-coming-back/>

42 Fergal O'Brien: Global Economy Crashes on Mass Coronavirus Business Shutdowns, Bloomberg, 24. März 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-24/europe-dragged-into-record-recession-in-battle-to-halt-virus?srnd=premium-europe>

43 Bloomberg: Coronavirus could slash global GDP output by almost 5 per cent amid 'severe financial turmoil', ADB says, 3 April 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-03/global-cost-of-coronavirus-could-reach-4-1-trillion-adb-says>

44 Liquidity Crisis Looms, as Tradeshift Reports 62% Drop in Global Trade Transactions, 17 March 2020 <https://www.cbronline.com/news/business-to-business-transactions-tradeshift-data>

lapse of the volume of world merchandise trade in the year 2020 of between -12.9% (“*optimistic scenario*”) and -31.9% (“*pessimistic scenario*”).⁴⁵

The economist Nouriel Roubini points out well the historic dimensions of the current slump. “*The shock to the global economy from COVID-19 has been both faster and more severe than the 2008 global financial crisis and even the Great Depression. In those two previous episodes, stock markets collapsed by 50% or more, credit markets froze up, massive bankruptcies followed, unemployment rates soared above 10%, and GDP contracted at an annualized rate of 10% or more. But all of this took around three years to play out. In the current crisis, similarly dire macroeconomic and financial outcomes have materialized in three weeks.*”⁴⁶

Other economists characterize the current events as a “*war-like scenario without the physical asset destruction*”. “*The global economy’s most abrupt and consequential shock in at least a generation is unfolding at ports and other hubs of international commerce as the U.S. and Europe struggle to contain the coronavirus pandemic. The Great Recession, the Sept. 11 attacks, the 1973 oil embargo – none of these modern crises constricted trade flows as quickly and as sharply as the Covid-19 disease has. Not even World War II delivered the kind of sudden economic knockout that is paralyzing global supply chains and rendering almost silent the most bustling cities in the developed world as businesses close and consumers obey orders to stay at home. “This could be seen as a war-like scenario without the physical asset destruction,” World Trade Organization Chief Economist Robert Koopman told Bloomberg in a telephone interview.*”⁴⁷

And the economist Adam Tooze observed in an article with the telling title “*The Normal Economy Is Never Coming Back*”: “*As the coronavirus lockdown began, the first impulse was to search for historical analogies - 1914, 1929, 1941? As the weeks have ground on, what has come ever more to the fore is the historical novelty of the shock that we are living through. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, America’s economy is now widely expected to shrink by a quarter. That is as much as during the Great Depression. But whereas the contraction after 1929 stretched over a four-year period, the coronavirus implosion will happen over the next three months. There has never been a crash landing like this before. There is something new under the sun. And it is horrifying.*”⁴⁸

In summary, it is clear that we are experiencing the beginning of the Third Depression – after the first in 1873-96 and the second in 1929-39.

45 WTO: Trade set to plunge as COVID-19 pandemic upends global economy, Press Release, 8 April 2020, p. 9

46 Nouriel Roubini: A Greater Depression? Mar 24, 2020, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/coronavirus-greater-great-depression-by-nouriel-roubini-2020-03>

47 Bryce Baschuk: World Trade Hit by Virus Sees Worst Collapse in a Generation, Bloomberg, 26. März 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-26/world-trade-rocked-by-virus-sees-worst-collapse-in-a-generation>

48 Adam Tooze: The Normal Economy Is Never Coming Back, Foreign Policy, 9 April 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/09/unemployment-coronavirus-pandemic-normal-economy-is-never-coming-back/>

How did the ruling classes arrive to their decision for a mass lockdown?

Naturally, we don't possess all the information of the decision making at each step of this process. However, it seems to us that the following is the most likely scenario as we already noted briefly somewhere else.⁴⁹

As we have said above, the fundamental background for the decision-making of the ruling classes has been the dramatic world situation based on the combination of the beginning recession and the global wave of popular uprisings in the second half of 2019. It is this background which pushed the ruling classes in many countries to utilize, or let us better say, to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic for their political goals. By this we do not mean that this pandemic has been the result of a "global conspiracy", i.e. a secret agreement between the Great Powers to coordinate in launching a global anti-democratic attack. No, this was obviously not the case.

It is safe to say that the bourgeoisie rather stumbled in this crisis. But the smarter sections of the ruling circles (i.e. not the clowns a la Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro) soon recognized the potential to utilize this crisis. China, a leading Great Power, certainly played a crucial role in this process. As generally known, the Corona Virus first emerged in Wuhan, a major industrial city in China. The Stalinist-capitalist regime in Beijing deployed draconic measures and imposed a lockdown for many millions of people in Hubei and other regions. It seems that they were able to successfully contain the virus (at least they are able to pretend so until now) and at the same time to keep the people under control. This has been all the more important for the regime as it had faced recently a dangerous development. For half a year or so it experienced pre-revolutionary events in Hong Kong which were closely followed by the world public.⁵⁰ This was evidently a worrisome development for the regime. This was even more the case as it feared that this example could inspire Chinese workers and youth in other major cities. This worry was not unfounded as the

49 Michael Pröbsting: COVID-19 Crisis: When Bourgeois Sources Reveal the Truth. On the plans and motivations of the ruling classes behind the global mass lock down and the suppression of democratic rights, 31 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-crisis-when-bourgeois-sources-reveal-the-truth/>

50 On the mass protests in Hong Kong see e.g. RCIT: China: Solidarity with the General Strike in Hong Kong! For an international solidarity movement as the Stalinist-Capitalist regime in Beijing prepares a brutal crackdown! 01 August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/solidarity-with-the-general-strike-in-hong-kong/>; China: Long Live the Popular Uprising in Hong Kong! After protestors storm the parliament: general strike against the extradition bill and the Lam Administration! 03 July 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/long-live-the-popular-uprising-in-hong-kong/>; China: Mass Protests against Reactionary "Extradition Law" in Hong Kong. For an indefinite general strike to kill the bill and to bring down the Administration of Carrie Lam! 18 June 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-mass-protests-against-reactionary-extradition-law-in-hong-kong/>.

mass protests in Wuhan in summer 2019 showed.⁵¹

It remains to be seen if Beijing can continue to keep its population under control. The mass riots in Hubei on 27 March showed that this is certainly not guaranteed.⁵² However, for now the Xi regime and its dictatorial methods seem to have succeeded. This made the “*Chinese methods*” a model for other capitalist governments and business leaders – including those in Western imperialist countries.

It is important to bear in mind that in real life there exist not only the two radical alternatives that events either result from a full conspiracy by the rulers or that the rulers are totally surprised and unprepared. More often, a chaotic combination of both – planning und surprise – takes place.

To give a brief analogy. The First World War did not emerge out of the blue but no government had planned what actually happened. Leading circles of all Great Powers had military plans and mobilization concepts. They expected a war and were willing to wage it in order to increase their power and to dominate their enemies. But most rulers did not plan to wage such a war in summer 1914 – even not after the shots of Sarajevo. And those who actively advanced the beginning of the war – influential circles in the military headquarters in Berlin and Vienna – hoped to limit the conflict to a smaller number of enemies. And even after the beginning of the great slaughter, everyone expected to have the war finished by Christmas 1914. As generally known, things turned out pretty differently.⁵³

51 On the protests in Wuhan in summer 2019 see e.g. Yossi Schwartz: The Corona Pandemic is not the Problem but only a Symptom of the Decay of the Capitalist System. What can we learn from China? 27 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-covid-19-and-decay-of-capitalism/>; Kendra Brock: Environmental Protest Breaks out in China’s Wuhan City, July 04, 2019 <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/environmental-protest-breaks-out-in-chinas-wuhan-city/>; Keith Bradsher: Protests Over Incinerator Rattle Officials in Chinese City, July 5, 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/05/world/asia/wuhan-china-protests.html>; Thousands Protest Waste Incinerator Plans in China’s Wuhan, 4.7.2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/wuhan-protest-07042019141304.html>; Robyn Dixon: First Hong Kong protested. Now it’s Wuhan, China. What makes it Beijing’s latest headache? Jul 05, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-china-protests-wuhan-environment-20190704-story.html>

52 On the latest mass protests in Hubei see RCIT: China: Solidarity with the Mass Protests in Hubei! Thousands of Chinese workers clash with the police in protest against the state repression under the cover of COVID-19, 28 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-solidarity-with-the-mass-protests-in-hubei/>

53 There exists a vast literature about the origins of World War I. A highly informative book has been published by James Joll: The Origins of the First World War, Longman House, New York 1984; see also Fritz Fischer: Germany’s Aims In The First World War, W. W. Norton & Company, 1967; Christopher M. Clark: The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914, Allen Lane, London 2012; Sean McMeekin: July 1914: Countdown to War, Basic Books, New York 2013; Karl-Heinz Schlarp: Ursachen und Entstehung des Ersten Weltkrieges im Lichte der sowjetischen Geschichtsschreibung, Alfred Metzner Verlag, Hamburg 1971; Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch. Vollständige Sammlung der von Karl Kautsky zusammengestellten amtlichen

There exist certain parallels to the present situation. At the beginning of this year, nobody planned for a global lockdown and a world economy in free fall. But many governments were worried about both the state of the world economy as well as about the global wave of mass struggles. Furthermore, plans existed how to prepare for and how to react to a pandemic. As a recently published article of our comrade Almedina Gunić showed, the World Bank and the WHO made pretty accurate predictions of such a pandemic only a few months before the emergence of the Corona Virus in Wuhan. And they developed concepts how the ruling class should respond to such an event.⁵⁴

Then there has been the notorious “*Event 201*”, a simulation program of a pandemic organized in New York in October 2019 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In this simulation a virus, called CAPS (Coronavirus Associated Pulmonary Syndrome) spread globally. Three months in, the hypothetical illness had caused 30,000 illnesses and 2,000 deaths. The scenario ended after 18 months with 65 million people dead.⁵⁵ And shortly after the events in Wuhan, the CIA already warned about the pandemic in January this year, according to a report by *Foreign Policy*.⁵⁶ In summary, it is simply wrong to imagine that the ruling classes were unprepared for these events. Not, there have been sectors of the ruling class which foresaw such a pandemic and were prepared for such.

So when the pandemic was there, the more long-sighted sections of the ruling class realized soon that this is a once in a century chance to launch a counter-revolutionary offensive in a period of the worst crisis of the capitalist system. They did not do it in coordination but once it worked in China, others realized the chance and than a global chain reaction started.

All this does not exclude the fact that some sectors of the bourgeoisie are also in panic. Obviously they don't like it if people from their own class can also get infected! This is particularly relevant in the current situation since, as observers have noted, it has been people from the elite and the upper class who were among the first affected and who seemed to have played a crucial role in transmitting the Corona Virus to other countries. Below we reprint an excerpt from an interview with Jason Beaubien, the Global Health and Development

Aktenstücke mit einigen Ergänzungen; Im Auftrage des Auswärtigen Amtes nach gemeinsamer Durchsicht mit Karl Kautsky herausgegeben von Graf Max Montgelas und Prof. Walter Schücking, Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte m.b.H., Charlottenburg 1919, Vol. 1-5

54 Almedina Gunić: How could WHO and World Bank exactly predict COVID-19? The shady role of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, 26 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/how-could-who-and-world-bank-exactly-predict-covid-19/>

55 See on this e.g. Adam K. Raymond: Experts Simulated a Coronavirus Pandemic Last Year and It Killed 65 Million, 27.2.2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/02/a-simulated-coronavirus-pandemic-in-2019-killed-65-million.html>

56 Micah Zenko: The Coronavirus Is the Worst Intelligence Failure in U.S. History. It's more glaring than Pearl Harbor and 9/11 — and it's all the fault of Donald Trump's leadership, *Foreign Policy*, 25 March 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/25/coronavirus-worst-intelligence-failure-us-history-covid-19/>

Correspondent of the U.S: *National Public Radio*.

"GARCIA-NAVARRO: ...About this disease. It's almost like it seems the global spread has impacted a certain strata of society. It's people on cruise ships. It's members of Congress and politicians. I mean, we should say that it's not just exclusively those people, but..."

BEAUBIEN: Right.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: ...It's certainly notable that they've been affected.

BEAUBIEN: It is very notable. And it's quite interesting. I mean, one of the first major clusters in Europe in late January was among these 21 people at a ski resort in France. And one of them had come over from Singapore. And he appears to be the one that carried the virus with him to France. And this group of ski buddies then all dispersed. And some of them went to the U.K. And some went to Spain. And others went to other parts of France. Thirteen of those 21 ended up testing positive. You know, and we've seen these other clusters on cruise ships. You know, this might seem like cruise ships have something to do with transmission. And that could be true. But again, this is among people with a certain amount of disposable income that can afford a cruise. I was based - not based, but I was working out of Hong Kong earlier in this outbreak. And some of the very first cases in Hong Kong - they turned up at the Four Seasons Hotel and the W Hotel... (...) some of the most expensive hotels in Hong Kong. So far, we're not seeing that many cases in the poorest countries of the world, like in Africa or Central America. And when we do, it turns out it's primarily among people who've been arriving from Europe.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: But it's not just among the upper-middle classes - right? - who are on cruises or can take foreign vacations. There's another group here...

BEAUBIEN: Yeah.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: ...Which is really striking. We're seeing among the real social elite - politicians, sports stars, actors."⁵⁷

Another reason why we hear more about "prominent" and wealthy people being infected is because they can afford to get privately tested and receive better private treatment while many workers and poor have not been tested.

In summary, the events which led to the present chaotic global situation were a mix of panic, "conspiracy", repression and slump.

Let us briefly deal with another argument. Many people – including those among the so-called left – tend to believe that the capitalist governments have decided to impose state of emergency and lockdown primarily in order to contain the pandemic. There is a well-known saying of the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, who summarized the essence of any military conflict by the famous words: "War is a mere continuation of policy by other means."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Jason Beaubien: COVID-19's Global Spread Among The Relatively Rich Has Been Remarkable, 14 March 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/15/815828858/coronavirus-and-the-rich-beaubien>

⁵⁸ Carl von Clausewitz: Vom Kriege (1832), Hamburg 1963, p. 22; in English: Carl von Clausewitz: On War, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-h/1946-h.htm>

This formula was often quoted by Friedrich Engels and V.I. Lenin and it is equally applicable to health policy. Hence, we can say that *health policy is a mere continuation of general policy by other means*. In other words, the health policy of the bourgeoisie does not follow specific laws different from others. They are rather subordinated to the general strategy of the ruling class. Hence the political counter-revolutionary offensive which has been launched by the ruling classes is a continuation of their long-standing policy to keep power and to safeguard their profit interests. They are just adapting this strategy to the current extraordinary circumstances (beginning of the Third Depression and the global wave of popular uprisings in late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic since January 2020).

The ultimate end of the era of Globalization

The dramatic events of the current triple crisis have also another historic meaning. They mark the ultimate end of the era of globalization. Again, this does not come as a surprise. In the past years, the RCIT has repeatedly pointed out that the regime of capitalist globalization is in deep crisis and will inevitably find its end. In our *World Perspectives 2017* and other documents we noted that “*the era of globalization is about to come to an end.*”⁵⁹ This end has definitely now come to pass.

The collapse of world trade, the creation of strong border control all over the world – and all this against the backdrop of the rising protectionist tariffs during the Global Trade War in the past two years – all these factors make it clear that the era of globalization has come to an end.

These developments are an inevitable consequence of the acceleration of the rivalry between the Great Powers in a period characterized by a deepening structural crisis of capitalism. The cake gets smaller and all players have to fight harder against each other to get their share. In addition, the necessity to strengthen the political role of the state – because of the political and social crisis as a result of economic slump, rocking unemployment, pandemic, etc. – will also increase state control over trade and capital flows.

When we speak about the end of this era we don’t mean a full retreat to protectionist autarky and the end of world trade. Such a full retreat is not possible at the present stage of capitalism where the productive forces are so massively developed that any national market is far too small for it. However, as we predicted some time ago, the collapse of the world market will rather trigger the creation of larger blocs dominated by this or that Great Power.⁶⁰

59 RCIT: *World Perspectives 2017: The Struggle against the Reactionary Offensive in the Era of Trumpism*. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 18 December 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2017/>

60 We predicted this development already a number of years ago. As we have outlined in our book *The Great Robbery of the South*, the process of globalization can be summarized by the formula

One important economic consequence of the end of globalization will be – sooner or later – a massive rise of prices of commodities. In other words, inflation – which was rather suppressed in many countries in the era of globalization – will become again a central feature of the world economy. This means that the struggle of the workers and urban and rural poor for higher wages, for price control, etc. will become increasingly important.

As we have pointed out in the past, such an end of an era of globalization is not unprecedented and has already happened before. The expansion of global capitalism in the late 19th century resulted in a massive growth of trade as well as of cross border investment. The highpoint was in 1913 when the onset of World War I ended the first era of globalization. The second era of globalization – which has come to an end now – only started in the 1990s. To illustrate the development of globalization in the first era we refer to the growth of world trade in this time. The share of trade in global GDP was approximately 18% in 1870, increased to 30% in 1913, collapsed to 10% in 1932.⁶¹ Likewise, there was a highpoint of globalization in 1913 when the stock of Foreign Direct Investment is estimated to have equaled 9% of world output. In the following decades, this share declined massively – only 4.4% in 1960 and 4.8% in 1980 – and regained similar standards like before WWI only in the 1990s.⁶²

Finally, we want to point out that, ironically, the era of globalization has been ended by a *truly global and historic event* – the COVID-19 pandemic and the chauvinist and counterrevolutionary reaction towards it by the ruling classes of the imperialist Great Powers. Such a *“war-like scenario without the physical asset destruction”* – to repeat the above-mentioned quote of a leading bourgeois economist – has been the ultimate factor for this historic watershed.

“Globalization = Internationalization + Monopolization.” The massive amount of accumulated capital, the development of the productive forces, etc. clearly demands a world market. A retreat to autarky is impossible today. However, we have also outlined that *“the same process of globalization which creates improved conditions for profits and extra-profits, also creates enormous contradictions and crisis at the same time. Furthermore, capitalism rests – and will rest as long as it exists – on national states. Without them the capitalist ruling classes can neither organize their domestic basis for exploitation nor possess a strong arm for support on the world market. However, the increasing rivalry between the Great Powers is undermining this globalization. The monopolies need a market as big as possible. But at the same time they need absolute dominance, unrestricted access for themselves but maximum possible restriction for their competitors. As a result there will be a tendency towards forms of protectionism and regionalization. Each Great Power will try to form a regional bloc around it and restrict access for the other Powers. By definition, this must result in numerous conflicts and eventual wars.”* (Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital* Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, Vienna 2013, pp. 389-390)

61 Mariko J. Klasing and Petros Milionis: Quantifying the evolution of world trade, 1870–1949, in: *Journal of International Economics*, Volume 92, Issue 1, January 2014, p. 186

62 UNCTAD: *World Investment Report 1994*, New York and Geneva 1994, p. 130

A new stage of rivalry between the Great Powers after the end of U.S. hegemony

The RCIT has pointed out since years that one of the most important developments in world politics is the decline of U.S. imperialism as the hegemon and the rise of China as a new imperialist power.⁶³ We have explained that the rivalry between these two Great Powers is a key factor to understand the dynamic of global relations. The Global Trade War since early 2018 and the resulting Cold War between Washington and Beijing have fully confirmed our analysis.⁶⁴ We note in passing that another important, and related, development has been the rise of Russia.⁶⁵ While it does not have the same significance as China, it is another imperialist power which challenges the hegemony of the U.S. (as the developments in the Middle East in the last years have demonstrated).

The current events in the course of the COVID-19 crisis mark a new stage in the global relation of forces. It is now becoming evident and visible for the whole world that the U.S. has lost its leading status. While China seems to have managed its COVID-19 crisis and was able to limit the number of victims, the

63 On the RCIT's analysis of the Great Power rivalry and China's and Russia's rise as emerging imperialist powers see the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. In particular we refer to the book by Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective*, RCIT Books, January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>. Concerning China, we refer readers in particular to Michael Pröbsting: *The China-India Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements?* 18 August 2017, *Revolutionary Communism* No. 71, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/>; Michael Pröbsting: *The China Question and the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, December 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-csr-pco-on-china/>; Michael Pröbsting: *China's transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power*, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4>.

64 See on this e.g. the numerous RCIT's documents on the Global Trade War which have been collected at a special sub-page on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/collection-of-articles-on-the-global-trade-war/>.

65 On the RCIT's analysis of Russia's rise as emerging imperialist powers see, in addition to the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>, the following works: Michael Pröbsting: *Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism*, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics*, 18 March 2014, *Special Issue of Revolutionary Communism* No. 21 (March 2014), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>.

U.S. is incapable of dealing with the pandemic and tens of thousands of people are consequently dying. European governments ask China for help and look to its state bonapartist regime as a model. No one asks the U.S. for support and certainly no government considers it as a model in any way.

This irresistible decay of the U.S. is also recognized by a growing number of bourgeois thinkers in the U.S. Francis Fukuyama, a leading liberal philosopher, is a characteristic example. Three decades ago, Fukuyama published a famous book after the collapse of the USSR in which he declared *“the end of history”*. Expressing Western imperialist triumphalism, he states in 1992 that capitalist liberal democracy is the superior social formation and it has finally won.⁶⁶ In the last years, he was already forced to beat a retreat. Today, faced with the pathetic performance of U.S. imperialism in the current COVID-19 crisis, he pessimistically states:

“When the pandemic subsides, I suspect that we will have to discard simple dichotomies. The major dividing line in effective crisis response will not place autocracies on one side and democracies on the other. Rather, there will be some high-performing autocracies, and some with disastrous outcomes. There will be a similar, though likely smaller, variance in outcomes among democracies. The crucial determinant in performance will not be the type of regime, but the state’s capacity and, above all, trust in government. (...) A democracy delegates emergency powers to its executive to deal with fast-moving threats. But willingness to delegate power and its effective use depend on one thing above all, which is trust that the executive will use those powers wisely and effectively. And this is where the U.S. has a big problem right now. (...) The intense distrust that Trump and his administration have aroused, and the distrust of government that they have instilled in their supporters, will have terrible consequences for policy. (...) In the end, I don’t believe that we will be able to reach broad conclusions about whether dictatorships or democracies are better able to survive a pandemic. Democracies such as South Korea and Germany have been relatively successful so far in dealing with the crisis, even if the U.S. is doing less well. What matters in the end is not regime type, but whether citizens trust their leaders, and whether those leaders preside over a competent and effective state. And on this score, America’s deepening tribalism leaves few reasons for optimism.”⁶⁷

In the 19th century, bourgeois politicians liked to use the phrase of *“The Sick Man of Europe”* when they referred to the Ottoman Empire or the Habsburg Monarchy. It might be appropriate to start talking about *“The Sick Man across the Atlantic”*.

It is however important to point out that it is not only the U.S. which is visible failing in the current COVID-19 crisis. Western Europe is also evidently overwhelmed by the crisis with its health sectors collapsing and tens of thousands

66 Francis Fukuyama: *The end of history*, The Free Press, New York 1992

67 Francis Fukuyama: *The Thing That Determines a Country’s Resistance to the Coronavirus*, 30 March 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/thing-determines-how-well-countries-respond-coronavirus/609025/>

people dying. Furthermore, the crisis demonstrated that the European Union is still riven by national divisions. When the crisis struck the continent, the rallying cry of its member states was “*everyone for himself*”. Each state only cared for itself and put no priority to support those states which were mostly affected by the pandemic (first Italy and then Spain).

It is evident that the current triple crisis of political, economic and health emergencies constitutes a make-it-or-break-it moment for the European Union. There are only two alternatives: either Germany and France – as the two dominating powers – succeed to constitute a strong centre and create a politically more centralized union (either the European Union or, more likely, a smaller federation based on the richer member states). Or the EU will fall apart resp. remains only a loose economic market. In the later case, the individual European states will have to look for alliances with Great Powers like China or the U.S. in which they could only play a subordinated role. The outcome of the current negotiations between the EU governments about the issuing of so-called *Pandemic Bonds* will be a first indication where the EU is going.

In any case, the pathetic performance of the old imperialist powers in the West – the U.S. and Western Europe – in the COVID-19 crisis demonstrates that the famous words of Oswald Spengler about the “*Downfall of the West*” once more are not only a literary phrase but an actual description of the current situation!⁶⁸

In our opinion, the COVID-19 crisis constitutes a political turning point which marks the end of the hegemony of U.S. imperialism. This does not mean that the U.S. is no longer one of the most important Great Powers in the world. It certainly is and will remain so. Neither does it mean that China has now become the new hegemon. In fact, it seems to us that the future course of development of world politics will be characterized by a lack of any hegemon. The U.S. is no longer capable of putting its mark on world politics. And China (and even less so any other Great Power) is not strong enough to do so.

What will be the result of such equilibrium of the Great Powers? It will be a further acceleration of the inter-imperialist rivalry – mainly between the U.S. and China. In fact, we are entering a period which can be characterized as a prelude for World War III.

Interestingly, some of the more intelligent bourgeois thinkers also recognize such a dynamic. Richard Haass, a well-known American veteran diplomat and an influential foreign policy adviser of the ruling class, states in a new essay that he expects an acceleration of the previous trend of the decline of the U.S. and more global conflicts. He arrives at the pessimistic conclusion, from the point of view of U.S. imperialism, that we are entering a period similar to the

68 We note in passing that we are aware that the official translation of Spengler’s book has been “*Decline of the West*” (translated by Charles Francis Atkinson and published by Alfred A. Knopf Inc. in New York in 1926). However, the original title in German language was “*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*” which contains a much stronger pronunciation than the official English translation.

1920s and 1930s:

*“But the world following the pandemic is unlikely to be radically different from the one that preceded it. COVID-19 will not so much change the basic direction of world history as accelerate it. The pandemic and the response to it have revealed and reinforced the fundamental characteristics of geopolitics today. As a result, this crisis promises to be less of a turning point than a way station along the road that the world has been traveling for the past few decades. (...) Yet the world that will emerge from the crisis will be recognizable. Waning American leadership, faltering global cooperation, great-power discord: all of these characterized the international environment before the appearance of COVID-19, and the pandemic has brought them into sharper-than-ever relief. They are likely to be even more prominent features of the world that follows. (...) Accordingly, the more relevant precedent to consider may be not the period following World War II but the period following World War I—an era of declining American involvement and mounting international upheaval. The rest, as they say, is history.”*⁶⁹

These developments do not come as a surprise for Marxists. We have predicted such in various RCIT publications. The task for revolutionaries now is to politically prepare for these developments and to advance the formation of a powerful international organization which can aid the working class and the oppressed in fighting against the imperialist hydra!

It is characteristic that large sectors of the reformist and centrist left completely failed to prepare for such developments as they staunchly refuse the Marxist analysis of China (and Russia) as a new imperialist power. They either view China as a progressive, “socialist” or “anti-imperialist” power which they support against the U.S.; or they characterize China (and Russia) as a kind of semi-colony or a “sub-imperialist” country. Again, such a mistaken analysis opens the road to side with Beijing (and Moscow) against the U.S. In short, the failure to recognize the imperialist nature of China and Russia inevitable leads these sectors of the left towards pro-Eastern social-imperialism. We emphasize once more that the failure to recognize the imperialist character of China and Russia can only result in the failure to understand the nature of the rivalry between the Great Powers. And the failure to understand this key feature of world politics, a feature which will become even more important in the coming period, can only result in complete confusion at best and utter social-imperialist servility to one or the other Great Power at worst.

⁶⁹ Richard Haass: The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It, Foreign Affairs, 7 April 2020 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-04-07/pandemic-will-accelerate-history-rather-reshape-it>

II. On the nature of the COVID-19 global counterrevolution

In this chapter we intend to deal in more detail with the features of the current global counterrevolution and its likely direction. Before doing so, we must point out that we are fully aware of the limitations of such an effort. Naturally, it is not possible at such an early stage to give a detailed characterization. In fact, the leading circles of the bourgeoisie themselves are still in full discussion about the future course. Furthermore, massive class struggles are inevitable in the period ahead and they naturally will also influence the course of the development.

Nevertheless, there are various objective tendencies resulting from past developments in world politics as well as from the nature of the current capitalist crisis which all point to a certain direction. It is important to analyze them in order to understand the challenges of the class struggles ahead. Abram Deborin, the leading Marxist philosopher in the USSR in the 1920s before the Stalinist clampdown, once stated that *“the Marxist must, above all, assess the general direction of the development.”*⁷⁰ And indeed, without a clear understanding of the fundamental dynamics, revolutionaries would be condemned to political disorientation.

Let us begin with an attempt to give a characterization of the development of bourgeois politics in the new era which has just opened up. Being aware of the limitations mentioned above, we think that the broad lines of development of capitalism are the following:

- a) Monopolization
- b) State Capitalism
- c) State Bonapartism
- d) Chauvinism

Before we discuss these in more detail we want to make a general observation. We think that these four characteristics are inseparable from each other. An economic catastrophe of 1929 dimensions inevitable accelerates a massive process of monopolization. Big fish eats many small fishes – particularly if it is hungry. In periods of deep crisis the big capitalists need more help and regulation from the state. They need a “strong fist” against potentially rebellious masses. And they need a “strong fist” against capitalist rivals abroad. All these dynamics necessitate a push of the monopoly bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries towards *Chauvinist State Bonapartism*. Naturally this process takes dif-

⁷⁰ Abram Deborin: Lenin als revolutionärer Dialektiker (1925); in: Unter dem Banner des Marxismus, 1. Jahrgang (1925-26), p. 224 (our translation)

ferent forms and different speeds – according to national circumstances as well as the course of the struggle between the classes. But as a general trend we will see such a process all over the world.

Monopolization and state capitalism after neo-liberalism

First, as we have demonstrated above, the current slump of the capitalist world economy has gigantic dimensions. This can only mean, and early reports from many countries confirm this, that there will be widespread bankruptcy of many small and medium capitalists as well as of petty bourgeois layers of small business men and women. This process takes place not only in the “free market” countries like the U.S. or Western Europe but all over the world. According to the South China Morning Post, “*more than 460,000 Chinese firms closed permanently in the first quarter as the coronavirus pandemic pummeled the world’s second largest economy.*”⁷¹

This, in turn, means that the domination of the market by the large corporations will increase even further. In other words, an important outcome of this crisis will be a further leap in the monopolization of the capitalist world economy. Hence, it will be an even smaller number of monopolies from the imperialist states which will control the world market and appropriate an extra-profit.

This has important economic consequences. One of them is that these monopolies will be in an even stronger position to manipulate markets and prices.

Furthermore, there are also important political consequences. Crisis, agony and annihilation of large sectors of small capitalists and petty bourgeois layers also means that the ruling elite of the bourgeois system – the monopoly capitalists with their affiliated circles of politicians and generals – loses a crucial layer of the capitalist society on which it could rest its rule until now. Such desperate smaller capitalist and petty-bourgeois layers will inevitably radicalize and turn either to the right or to the left. If the vanguard succeeds in leading the working class into the battlefield, it can offer a leadership to such layers. If not, these sectors will rather turn to religious obscurantism or fascism.

Secondly, it is evident that the current gigantic collapse inevitably impels the capitalist state to massively intervene in economic life. We can already observe huge economic aid programs as outlined in the previous chapter. However, it is highly likely that we will not see simply a replay of the limited character of the state-capitalist intervention as it was the case in the 2008-09 Great Recession. The reason is that the economic collapse this time is much more severe. The Third Depression will inevitably result in the impending bankruptcy of many banks and corporations. Hence, the capitalist state will intervene massively,

71 Sidney Leng: Coronavirus: nearly half a million Chinese companies close in first quarter as pandemic batters economy, South China Morning Post, 6 April 2020 <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3078581/coronavirus-nearly-half-million-chinese-companies-close-first>

either take over such enterprises or enforce fusions with others.

Furthermore, given the collapse of globalization, the rivalry between states – and hence the economic role of states – will also increase. This relates to tariffs, aids for exports, regulations to limit foreign competition etc. To all these, one has to add the specific political nature of the current crisis (pandemic, rivalry between states). This will also reinforce the increasing economic role of the capitalist state. Even bourgeois mainstream thinkers like Richard Haass are aware of such developments: *“Global trade will partly recover, but more of it will be managed by governments rather than markets.”*⁷²

All this demonstrates – and has been already recognized by intelligent observers from the bourgeois camp – the political and economic bankruptcy of neoliberalism. Sure, left-liberals and Keynesians have always proclaimed that the neoliberal model results in the ruin of capitalism and, hence, they advocated state-capitalist reforms in order to avoid such a collapse. Naturally, such thinkers see themselves fully confirmed by the current events. Jonathan Watts, *The Guardian’s* global environment editor, wrote: *“The coronavirus pandemic has brought urgency to the defining political question of our age: how to distribute risk. As with the climate crisis, neoliberal capitalism is proving particularly ill-suited to this. (...) It is entirely possible that the effects of this pandemic could be one of the most catastrophic failures of free-market capitalism.”*⁷³

Paul Mason, a prominent progressive journalist in Britain supporting Labourism a la Corbyn, also views the current global crisis as a chance to impose a *“new, and very different, model of capitalism”*. In a recent commentary published on the website of *Al Jazeera*, he wrote:

“Left-wing economists, myself included, have been warning that, in the long term, stagnant growth and high debt were likely to lead to these three policies: States paying citizens a universal income as automation makes well-paid work precarious and scarce; central banks lending directly to the state to keep it afloat; and large-scale public ownership of major corporations to maintain vital services that cannot be run at a profit. On the rare occasions that such suggestions have ever been put to investors in the past, the response was usually a polite head-shake or, among people who witnessed the collapse of Soviet communism, outrage. It would kill capitalism, they said. But now, the unthinkable is here - all of it: Universal payments, state bailouts and the funding of state debts by central banks have all been adopted at a speed that has shocked even the usual advocates of these measures. (...) For me, these emergency measures have always been thinkable. Since 2015, I have argued we will be forced to adopt a new, and very different, model of capitalism; if not by the economic costs of supporting ageing populations, then

72 Richard Haass: The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It, Foreign Affairs, 7 April 2020 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-04-07/pandemic-will-accelerate-history-rather-reshape-it>

73 Jonathan Watts: Delay is deadly: what Covid-19 tells us about tackling the climate crisis, 24 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/24/covid-19-climate-crisis-governments-coronavirus>

*by the threat of climate chaos. But the COVID-19 crisis brings everything into the short term. The capitalism that emerges from this in the mid-2020s will have already paid out tens of billions of dollars in basic income payments; it will have seen airlines and hotel chains nationalised; and the government debts of the advanced economies, currently averaging 103 percent of their gross domestic product, will be way above that. We do not know how much higher, because we do not know yet how far GDP will fall.”*⁷⁴

However, the current collapse of global capitalism makes also a growing number of mainstream bourgeois thinkers aware that the neoliberal model is no longer adequate for running the capitalist system and that it needs a substantial dose of state capitalist regulation.

Marshall Auerback, a global portfolio strategist for decades, has published a series of articles in which he advocates a departure from globalization and neoliberalism and a turn to a stronger role of the state as well as of national industrial policy. He wrote recently: *“For now, we should start by reducing our supply-chain vulnerabilities by building into our systems more of what engineers call redundancy – different ways of doing the same things – so as to mitigate undue reliance on foreign suppliers for strategically important industries. We need to mobilize national resources in a manner akin to the way a country does during wartime or during massive economic dislocation (such as the Great Depression) – comprehensive government-led actions (which runs in the face of much of today’s prevailing and increasingly outdated economic and political theology). In other words, the revival of a coherent national industrial policy. To save the global economy, paradoxically, we need less of it. Not only does the private/public sector balance have to shift in favor of the latter, but so too does the multinational/national matrix in manufacturing. Otherwise, Covid-19 will simply represent yet another in a chain of catastrophes for global capitalism, rather than an opportunity to rethink our entire model of economic development.”*⁷⁵

In another recently published article, Auerback outlines such a protectionist, state capitalist policy in more detail and argues that modern technologies could help implementing such a shift: *“This pandemic continues to unfold, but it will serve as the D-Day equivalent of a new predominating economic model for the world, and which in many ways was beginning to take shape before Covid-19. At its core, developed and mixed-market economies will factor in the health risk and growing military cost of sustaining international supply chains against investing in high-tech production closer to their markets, and increasingly export their goods to the rest of the world. Dozens of economies that developed in the past 50 years by enmeshing themselves in the international supply chain on the basis of their labor price advantage will find themselves increasingly cut out of the new process. The contest for global power*

74 Paul Mason: Will coronavirus signal the end of capitalism? The peasants’ revolt after the 14th-century plague saw off feudalism. After COVID-19, will it be the turn of capitalism? 3 April 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/coronavirus-signal-capitalism-200330092216678.html>

75 Marshall Auerback: Covid-19 reveals the cracks in globalization, 11 March 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/03/covid-19-reveals-the-cracks-in-globalization/>

will increasingly pivot to the extraction and refinement of minerals and component materials that are critical to sustaining the high-tech economy model, away from carbon energy resources. We will be hearing much more about “national stockpiling” and “strategic reserves” beyond oil in the months and years ahead. (...)

The collective strength of these technologies [like Artificial Intelligence, non-carbon energy sources, nanotechnology, etc., Ed.] will diminish the appeal of finding cheaper labor outside a country’s borders or common market – and the costs they entail. Countries that are advanced along these lines and have access to the minerals required to engage in this form of production will prosper, plugging into their existing consumer market and building up a head of steam that will eventually lead to a new chain of international exports and imports. These trend lines will accelerate the decline of brick-and-mortar retail and service industries. (...)

Much of Europe and Asian countries like China, South Korea and Japan are poised for the transition. Based on their traditions of rigid state-driven capitalism, these nations instinctively grasp how state capacity and direction can help drive further industrial development. It remains to be seen if the US is fully capable of it. That is unlikely, if the prevailing neoliberal ideology persists (...)

Offshoring left the US unprepared for Covid-19. It has also occasioned a widespread reassessment of globalization: What was once seen as the heretical refuge of economic nationalists has now become respectable again. Even without this pandemic, the foundations of America’s economic model were failing and becoming rapidly obsolete. The question is: As the world moves to a post-carbon future, can the US economy take away the primacy of rent-extracting sectors like finance, insurance and real estate; Hollywood films, smartphone apps, or increasingly irrelevant sectors like oil and natural gas exports, and join the leaders of the pack? Or is Covid-19 merely the pandemic that presages a more terminal disease?”⁷⁶

It is worth pointing out that there have been bourgeois thinkers who recognized the need for a state capitalist alternative to the neoliberal model of capitalism already before the onset of the current crisis. Christopher Joye, an Australian portfolio manager who has previously worked at Goldman Sachs as well as a government advisor, wrote in September 2019: “Conventional capitalism that has powered prosperity for more than half a century by respecting market signals no longer exists. While it may not be socialism, it is certainly statism. And since central banks and treasuries have got into the business of directly managing private market prices, they have never been able to get out. It is way too tempting to try to control your destiny rather than leaving it to the whims of capricious investors. Just ask Xi Jinping. Ironically given the current global trade turmoil, the West and China have never had more in common in terms of the economic policies they espouse.”⁷⁷

We have quoted extensively several bourgeois thinkers because it is crucial

⁷⁶ Marshall Auerback and Jan Ritch-Frel: Pandemic opens curtains on next economic model, 4 April 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/pandemic-opens-curtains-on-next-economic-model/>

⁷⁷ Christopher Joye: Conventional capitalism is dead, Sep 20, 2019, <https://www.afr.com/wealth/personal-finance/conventional-capitalism-is-dead-20190920-p52t7w>

for Marxists to understand the current discussion and re-orientation which is taking place within the circles of the ruling classes. The RCIT has always criticized a major error by many leftist groups and theoreticians who consider neoliberalism as the only or as the most reactionary form of capitalism. Both assumptions have been wrong and this becomes now even more evident. This has been evident throughout the history of capitalism in the 20th century. There have been various forms of etatism in the 1930s, i.e. state-capitalist regulation in Nordic countries as well as under fascist regimes in Italy and Germany. Later, from the 1950s to the 1970s, capitalist economies in Western Europe as well as other countries had a significant sector of state enterprises, welfare state as well as state programs. State capitalist regulation also played a significant role in East Asian countries which experienced rapid economic growth since the 1950s. Some were pro-US military dictatorship (like South Korea and Taiwan), others kept some form of bourgeois democracy (Japan).

While such kind of state capitalist regulation has been substantially reduced in many countries since the 1980s, it staged a comeback in the former Stalinist countries where capitalism was restored after 1989-91. This has been particularly the case in countries like China (as well as Vietnam) and, to a lesser degree, in Russia and some Central Asian republics. In fact, the most powerful and successful of these states, China, became a new imperialist Great Power which challenges the U.S. as the long-time hegemon.

Furthermore, we have also seen in the past that in periods of extreme political crisis, the ruling class was prepared to turn towards state-capitalist regulation. This has been the case, for example, during World War One in 1914-18 when the necessity to advance the war efforts made it imperative to concentrate and regulate all economic resources of the country. This has been sometimes called “*war socialism*”. By the way, the reformist majority of the workers movement at that time hailed these developments as “*a step towards socialism*” and used this as a pretext for their social-chauvinist defense of the imperialist fatherland.

China as a model?

Various reformists and Stalinists have claimed that neoliberalism has been the preferred model of the Western bourgeoisie because it would – in contrast to the “Chinese model” – serve best the accumulation of wealth for the capitalists. As the RCIT has pointed out repeatedly this has been not true and contradicts all available facts – both from Western as well as official Chinese sources. At this point we limit ourselves to demonstrate this thesis with a few facts but readers can find many more examples in various documents which we published on this issue in the last years.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See on this, in addition to the above mentioned book by Michael Pröbsting “*Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry*”, several articles by the same author. The latest is: China passes the US on Global Business Ranking for the first time. New data on global corporations reflects China’s

In the past decade the Stalinist-capitalist regime has enabled a process of extraordinary rapid capital accumulation. As a result, social inequality and the numbers of capitalist corporations as well as of super-rich billionaires increased dramatically. For example, according to the *World Inequality Report 2018*, the income share of the richest Top 1% of China's population has doubled between 1980 and 2016 from 7% to 14%. Comparing China with global developments, the report concluded that *"the share of total national income accounted for by just that nation's top 10% earners (top 10% income share) was 37% in Europe, 41% in China, 46% in Russia, 47% in US-Canada, and around 55% in sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, and India. In the Middle East, the world's most unequal region according to our estimates, the top 10% capture 61% of national income."*⁷⁹

This result does not only demolish the Stalinist myth about the supposed existence of "socialism" in China. It is also all the more astonishing if we bear in mind that less than three decades ago, capitalism even did not exist in China and Russia! Today, inequality in these two countries is basically higher than in the old capitalist states of Europe and nearly as much as in North America.

Confirming this trend is also the fact that in the last few years, China has even become the country with the largest (according to Chinese sources) or second-largest (according to Western sources) number of billionaires. The 2019 issue of the China-based *Hurun Report* states that *"China leads world for 4th year for billionaires with 658, 74 ahead of USA with 584."*⁸⁰

We see the same picture when we look at the leading capitalist monopolies on the world market. According to 2019 issue of the *Fortune Global 500*, a global ranking list issued by the U.S. business magazine *Fortune*, China has now reached parity with the long-time hegemon – the U.S. (See Table 4)

rise as an imperialist Great Power, 23 July 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/china-passes-the-us-on-global-business-ranking-for-first-time/>

79 Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman: *World Inequality Report 2018*, p. 9

80 Loong Palace: *Hurun Global Rich List 2019*, 2019-02-26, <http://www.hurun.net/EN/Article/Details?num=24DD41EE3B19>. We have discussed the issue of China's super-rich in a number of articles; see e.g. by the author of these lines *China's Billionaire Lawmakers*. A telling comparison of extremely wealthy Chinese lawmakers with their peers in the US Congress, 9 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-s-billionaire-lawmakers/>; Michael Pröbsting *China: A Paradise for Billionaires*. The latest UBS/PwC Report about the Global Super-Rich Delivers another Crushing Blow to the Stalinist Myth of China's "Socialism", 27.10.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-is-a-paradise-for-billionaires/>; *The Global Super-Rich Get Even Richer*. UBS/PwC Publish their latest Report about the World's Billionaires, 27.10.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/the-global-super-rich-get-even-richer/>

Table 4. List of Top 10 Countries with most Global 500 Companies ⁸¹

<i>Country</i>	<i>Companies</i>	<i>Share (in %)</i>
China (incl. Taiwan)	119 (129)	23.8% (25.8%)
United States	121	24.2%
Japan	52	10.4%
France	31	6.2%
Germany	29	5.8%
United Kingdom	17	3.4%
South Korea	16	3.2%
Switzerland	14	2.8%
Canada	13	2.6%
Netherlands	12	2.4%

Another ranking list about the world's 2000 largest corporations – the so-called *Forbes Global 2000* – reveals the same picture. In Table 5 we can see the dramatic rise of China's corporations in relation to other monopolies in the last two decades. From the year 2003 to the year 2017, we see that while the US remains the strongest power, its share has declined substantially from 776 corporations (38.8%) to 565 (28.2%). At the same time, China's share grew dramatically and it has now become the number two among the Great Powers.

Table 5. National Composition of the World's 2000 Largest Corporations, 2003 and 2017 (*Forbes Global 2000 List*) ⁸²

	2003		2017	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Share</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Share</i>
USA	776	38.8%	565	28.2%
China	13	0.6%	263	13.1%
Japan	331	16.5%	229	11.4%
Britain	132	6.6%	91	4.5%
France	67	3.3%	59	2.9%
Canada	50	2.5%	58	2.9%
Germany	64	3.2%	51	2.5%

In summary, the Chinese model of state capitalism is not at all “socialist”, on the contrary, it strongly serves the interests of a rising imperialist monopoly bourgeoisie. China's rise in the past two decades, and in particular its performance during the current COVID-19 crisis, makes it increasingly a model for other capitalist governments including in Western Europe. By this we do not wish to suggest that the European imperialist governments want to, or even

81 Geoff Colvin: It's China's World. China has now reached parity with the U.S. on the 2019 Fortune Global 500—a signifier of the profound rivalries reshaping business today, July 22, 2019 <https://fortune.com/longform/fortune-global-500-china-companies>

82 Forbes Global 2000 List (2017), <https://www.forbes.com/global2000/list/45/#tab:overall>

could, copy the “Chinese model”. This is obviously not possible given the different historical backgrounds and relations of class forces in these two different parts of the world. Albeit, we need to point out, this has also been not true for the model of neoliberalism. There existed never the same type of neoliberal regime in the U.S., Britain, France or Germany. However, what seems certain to us is that an increasing number of bourgeois governments will, under the pressure of the deep crisis and under the impression of the “Chinese model”, resort increasingly to implement substantially more elements of state capitalist policy as well as of state bonapartism.

It might be useful to point out that such developments are nothing new for Marxists. In fact, Lenin analyzed already a century ago that the transformation of capitalism in its final stage – the epoch of imperialism – also implies the “*process of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism.*”⁸³ While the course of the 20th century demonstrated that the concrete relationship of state and monopolies can and actually does change depending on global and national developments, the close collaboration and interweaving of capitalist state and monopolies has remained a key characteristic of this system. This is even more the case in periods like the current one when capitalism is in a state of deep crisis and decay.

A decisive shift towards chauvinist state bonapartism

Thirdly, and related to the two above mentioned developments, we will see a massive shift towards *chauvinist state bonapartism* – as we have called this phenomenon in our Manifesto on the COVID-19 crisis. This category characterizes two interrelated features: first, a substantial build-up of the state repression apparatus and a shift to strengthen the executive powers of the top bodies of the capitalist state; and, secondly, a turn to nationalism and chauvinism in particular between the imperialist Great Powers.

To begin with the later, one has to take into account that the accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers has already resulted inevitable in a substantial increase of chauvinism. This will increase even more against the backdrop of the Third Depression. We see already such developments as the U.S. and China escalate their accusations against each other about which side is responsible for the COVID-19 crisis. Trump and the White House repeatedly speak about the “*Chinese Virus*” and Beijing has suggested that “*it might be the US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan*”.⁸⁴

However, the rise of chauvinism is not limited to the U.S. and China. The in-

83 V. I. Lenin: The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution (1917); in: LCW Vol. 25, p.387

84 JosephStepansky: Trump, coronavirus and the politics of a pandemic, 14 March 2020 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/trump-coronavirus-politics-pandemic-200313174546799.html>

creasing relevance of borders and the attempt of each ruling class to consolidate its power at home in such a difficult period can only result in more patriotism and nationalism. This development will remain in place given the crisis-ridden character of the coming period.

The same is the case with the massive built-up of the repression apparatus. In order to control the observance of the global lockdown and numerous other restrictions, governments all over the world are sending many police on the streets. In numerous semi-colonial countries they also use the army to suppress any resistance.⁸⁵ However, as a new development, Western imperialist governments in Europe and North America are also deploying the military for such domestic operations. In Spain, France, Italy and other European countries tens of thousands of soldiers have taken over tasks from civilians. A conference of the EU's defense ministers on 6 April already discussed the coordination of the armies' activities.⁸⁶

Our warning of the increasing militarization of bourgeois democracy is certainly no exaggerated scaremongering. An influential bourgeois think tank in

85 See on this e.g. Mark MacKinnon, Nathan Vanderklippe: How the coronavirus pandemic is making strongmen stronger, from Hungary to Serbia to the Philippines, 6 April 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-how-the-coronavirus-pandemic-is-making-strongmen-stronger-from/>; Sam Hamad: Coronavirus in service of authoritarianism, 25 March, 2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2020/3/25/coronavirus-in-service-of-authoritarianism>; Luke Baker, Matthew Tostevin, Devjyot Ghoshal: In global war on coronavirus, some fear civil rights are collateral damage, April 10, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-rights/in-global-war-on-coronavirus-some-fear-civil-rights-are-collateral-damage-idUSKCN21S1CZ>; Stanis Bujakera, Ayenat Mersie: In parts of Africa, police are accused of excess force amid coronavirus lockdowns, April 10, 2020 / <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-africa-police/in-parts-of-africa-police-are-accused-of-excess-force-amid-coronavirus-lockdowns-idUSKCN21S0M9>; Richard Javad Heydarian: The wrong way to do a lockdown in the Philippines, 8 April 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/the-wrong-way-to-do-a-lockdown-in-the-philippines/>; Samreen Mushtaq, Mudasir Amin: Kashmir: Coronavirus is a new tool for India to oppress us, 7 April 2020 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/coronavirus-kashmir-india-responds-more-violence>

86 *"Our armed forces at the frontline of COVID-19 fight. (...) EU Ministers of defence today held a video conference, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. Ministers discussed the defence implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing in particular on military assistance in the fight against the crisis, and the situation in the EU's military and civilian missions and operations in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Defence ministers shared examples of how their armed forces have contributed to the efforts to counter the Covid-19 crisis by providing transport and logistic support, building hospitals in record time, deploying their medical staff, and supporting the police and other national services. In this context it was decided to explore setting up a task force led by the EU Military Staff to better exchange information and share best practices among EU member states."* (Video conference of foreign affairs ministers (defence), 6 April 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2020/04/06/>; Video conference of Defence Ministers: Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference, Brussels, 06/04/2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/77151/video-conference-defence-ministers-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell_en)

the U.S., the *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, outlines in a risk assessment document three possible scenarios how the COVID-19 crisis could develop. In the worst-case scenario they warn of dramatic consequences and conclude: “As death rates rise and the economic crisis deepens, widespread, violent disorder intensifies, requiring a significant deployment of the U.S. military.”⁸⁷ This reflects that a civil war as a consequence of the current crisis is already discussed in ruling circles as a realistic option!

These developments are combined with a massive increase of the surveillance of the population. Many governments are currently tracking the movements of people via telecommunication. China is a model for advancing modern technologies like Artificial Intelligence which help to monitor the activities of the population. Western governments are working hard to catch up. The same development takes place with the deployment of drones and small mobile robots on the streets for such domestic surveillance measures.⁸⁸ (More on this in the next sub-chapter.) As we stated in our Manifesto, “with one stroke, “Big Brother” is here, openly and without any attempt by the capitalist state to conceal it. The massive surveillance techniques will soon be the new normal worldwide.”

Finally, we also see a process of strengthening the executive powers of the top bodies of the capitalist state at the cost of the parliament and other institutions of bourgeois democracy. It is in times of political crisis that the real nature of bourgeois democracy is more clearly revealed. Marxists always emphasized that the bourgeois state – even in its “democratic” form – represents the dictatorship of the capitalist class. Lenin’s statement expressed in his *Theses* for the First Congress of the Communist International in 1919 is still valid: „*In explaining the class nature of bourgeois civilisation, bourgeois democracy and the bourgeois parliamentary system, all socialists have expressed the idea formulated with the greatest scientific precision by Marx and Engels, namely, that the most democratic bourgeois republic is no more than a machine for the suppression of the working class by the bourgeoisie, for the suppression of the working people by a handful of capitalists.*”⁸⁹

It is worth pointing out that intelligent thinkers from the bourgeois camp have also been aware of such nature of bourgeois democracy. Carl Schmitt, a famous right-wing conservative political theoretician in Germany, once said aptly: “Sovereign is he who decides on the exceptional case.”⁹⁰

We note, at this point, that such a transformation of the political regime make figures like Trump, Johnson or Bolsonaro rather dysfunctional. Such people are

87 J. Stephen Morrison: Which Covid-19 Future Will We Choose? Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1 April 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/which-covid-19-future-will-we-choose>

88 See e.g. Rebecca Fannin: The rush to deploy robots in China amid the coronavirus outbreak, March 2 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/02/the-rush-to-deploy-robots-in-china-amid-the-coronavirus-outbreak.html>

89 V. I. Lenin: *Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, in: LCW Vol. 28, p. 458

90 Carl Schmitt: *Political Theology* (1922), Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1985, p. 5

a combination of reactionary clowns and adventurists who lack any ability for strategic thinking. They are incapable of representing and leading the state as the “*ideal total capitalist*” (Marx) but rather wage a constant and disruptive war against large sectors of the state apparatus. It seems unlikely that such figures can successfully lead the capitalist state in such challenging and tumultuous periods like those ahead of us.

We are aware that the current state of emergency with a comprehensive lockdown in large parts of the world – a “*temporary-but-indefinite wartimelike national bunkering*” as the American journalist David Wallace-Wells wrote in the *New York Magazine* ⁹¹ – is an extreme situation which will not and can not last very long. ⁹²

However it is unclear how long the current state of emergency with a global lockdown will last. Some geopolitical analysts like Bahauddin Foizee suggest keeping these measures for a very long period: “*Unless the virus completely stops spreading among the human population or a vaccine is available for widespread use, it would be unwise to withdraw – completely or even partially – mandatory lockdowns.*” ⁹³

Anyway, it is clear that important elements of such state of emergency and control measures over the population will remain in place for a long period – all of this under the cover of containing and preventing a pandemic.

In fact, we see already the ruling classes preparing the population for the “*necessity*” to continue the surveillance of the population indefinitely. This is all the more possible since the decay of capitalism does not only mean an economic crisis but rather a comprehensive crisis of capitalist civilization. ⁹⁴ Hence we see climate change and massive ecological destruction with devastating consequences for humanity. Without a radical political and economic change, we will face the beginning of the end of human life on earth. We note in passing

91 There Is No Plan for the End of the Coronavirus Crisis

By David Wallace-Wells 2020-04-05, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/04/there-is-no-plan-for-the-end-of-the-coronavirus-crisis.html>

92 At this point we want to draw attention to the particular cruel and cynical version of lockdown policy as it is imposed by the Israeli Apartheid state against the Palestinians. The Israeli governments told Palestinian migrant workers that if they want to keep their jobs in Israel they must stay in Israel for two months without returning to their families. The employers had to find them a place to sleep. The employers in many cases put 20 of them into a single room – in violation of the Israeli Ministry of Health’s own social distancing guidance. Unsurprisingly, most of them escaped to the West Bank. Mounir Kleibo, the representative for the United Nations’ International Labour Organization for the occupied Palestinian territories, denounced these conditions: “*[They are] not appropriate for human habitation,*” said Kleibo. “*There is no hygiene, no sanitation. God forbid someone gets the virus, it’s frightening the speed it will spread among these workers.*” (<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/palestinian-labourers-fear-loss-income-coronavirus-200328123228881.html>)

93 Bahauddin Foizee: Lockdowns to fight virus should be stricter, longer, 3 April 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/lockdowns-to-fight-virus-should-be-stricter-longer/>

94 See on this e.g. chapter II in RCIT: World Perspectives 2016: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase, 23 January 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/>

that there are strong indications that the creation of the Corona Virus has been an indirect result of the expanding destruction of the biosphere for animals.⁹⁵

Some scientist warned already several years ago about the possibility of pandemics like the current one: *“While outbreaks represent an increase in the number of disease cases beyond expectations for a given population, emerging human infectious diseases are further characterized by novelty: for example, diseases that have undergone recent evolutionary change, entered the human population for the first time, or have been newly discovered. The number of outbreaks, like the number of emerging infectious diseases, appears to be increasing with time in the human population both in total number and richness of causal diseases.”*⁹⁶

In past weeks, researchers have warned that pandemics will remain a growing danger for humanity given the ecological consequences of the capitalist mode of production.

*“Ecologists are saying that Covid-19 is just the tip of the iceberg, the beginning of mass pandemics caused by increasing habitat and biodiversity loss due to human encroachment and climate change. Indeed, if we don’t redress climate change and environmental collapse soon, the next coronavirus pandemics will likely make life on Earth even more precarious.”*⁹⁷

*“Research suggests that outbreaks of animal-borne and other infectious diseases such as Ebola, Sars, bird flu and now Covid-19, caused by a novel coronavirus, are on the rise. Pathogens are crossing from animals to humans, and many are able to spread quickly to new places. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that three-quarters of new or emerging diseases that infect humans originate in animals.”*⁹⁸

In other words, the ruling class can and will use the threat of pandemic as justification for an indefinite period of expansion of the repression apparatus, surveillance of the population and state of emergency.

In summary, we currently see the formation of *chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes* – of an *“all-powerful state”*, to put it in the words of a Bloomberg commentator.⁹⁹ These developments confirm Lenin’s thesis that *“imperialism is the*

95 See on this e.g. Rob Wallace: *Big Farms Make Big Flu*. Dispatches on Infectious Disease, Agribusiness, and the Nature of Science, Monthly Review Press, New York 2016

96 Smith KF, Goldberg M, Rosenthal S, Carlson L, Chen J, Chen C, Ramachandran S. 2014 Global rise in human infectious disease outbreaks. *J. R. Soc. Interface* 11: 20140950., <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2014.0950>, p. 5

97 Asoka Bandarage: *Mindfulness, social action in Covid-19 crisis*, April 6, 2020 <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/mindfulness-social-action-in-covid-19-crisis/>

98 John Vidal: ‘Tip of the iceberg’: is our destruction of nature responsible for Covid-19? 18 Mar 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/tip-of-the-iceberg-is-our-destruction-of-nature-responsible-for-covid-19-aoe>

99 Pankaj Mishra: *Coronavirus Will Revive an All-Powerful State*. Much maligned in recent years, big government will come back—and with it, the potential for both greater good and evil, 17. März 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-03-17/coronavirus-will-revive-an-all-powerful-state>

negation of democracy"¹⁰⁰ The increasing role of the bourgeois state machinery – a general feature of the imperialist epoch – becomes particularly relevant in a period of acute crisis and decay of capitalism as we already pointed out in the past.¹⁰¹

In such periods we see *"an extraordinary strengthening of the "state machine" and an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries."*¹⁰² The result is the creation of a powerful machinery which Nikolai Bukharin, a leading theoretician of the Bolshevik Party, characterized as *"the New Leviathan, beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes looks like a child's toy."*¹⁰³ Hence, we repeat the conclusion in our Manifesto that *"such an imperialist Leviathan is now being built-up by the ruling class in full force – under the pretext of fighting a pandemic. The era of relatively extensive bourgeois democracy in the imperialist states will soon be over."*

The monopoly bourgeoisie can establish bonapartist forms of rule by utilizing existing institutions which have already existed within the parliamentary system. The role of the Presidency, of the army, police and judiciary, various laws for the state of emergency – all these mechanisms simplify the task of the ruling class to transform the current political system and to build-up a chauvinist state bonapartist machinery. Trotsky's observation concerning France in the 1930s has not lost its relevance: *"Every bourgeois democracy bears the features of Bonapartism."*¹⁰⁴

What will be the "new normality"?

As already mentioned, it is not possible to project a concrete picture of the bourgeois society after the end of the total lockdown. However, it is possible and useful to outline an overview of the concepts of the ruling circles what they plan to change in order to increase their control over the population. In the following we will present several quotes which show the radical changes which

100 V.I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (1916); in: LCW Vol. 23, p. 43

101 See e.g. the RCIT's *Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*, adopted in 2012: *"On the top of the – by increasingly sharp contradictions marked – class society rises, like an octopus, a monstrous state apparatus, which manages in the interests of the capitalist class its political business and oppresses the proletariat (the working class) and the popular masses. This state machine - a true Leviathan of the bourgeoisie (a beast of the ruling class) - is merged with capital in many ways."* (p. 9, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>) See also the pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting: *The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today*, August 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/democracy-vs-imperialism/>

102 V. I. Lenin: *The State and Revolution*, p. 415

103 Nikolai Bukharin: *Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State* (1915), in: Robert V. Daniel: *A Documentary History of Communism*, Vol. 1, Vintage Russian Library, Vintage Books, New York 1960, p. 85, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1915/state.htm>

104 Leon Trotsky: *Again on the question of Bonapartism. Bourgeois Bonapartism and Soviet Bonapartism* (1935), in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* (Edition 2002), p.288

are currently planned and prepared by the ruling classes all over the world including in the old bourgeois democracies of the West.

Greg C. Bruno, a former member of the influential *American Council on Foreign Relations* (of which the above mentioned Richard Haass has been president since 2003), praises reactionary monarchies like the United Arab Emirates as models by which Western democracies should be guided.

*“Responding to the threat posed by the coronavirus may require atypical, even unconstitutional, solutions, from blanket digital surveillance to the conscripting of health workers. (...) In the post-Covid-19 era, democracies could borrow authoritarian tactics without abandoning their liberal values. (...). We already see a version of this in places like the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Singapore. These are not free-wheeling liberal-democratic societies in the Western mold. Yet citizens enjoy a high degree of intellectual and cultural openness, safety and personal freedom.”*¹⁰⁵

A report of the Associated Press gives a very informative insight in the nature of the surveillance techniques which are already in place in China (and which fascinate so many capitalist governments around the world).

“Since the coronavirus outbreak, life in China is ruled by a green symbol on a smartphone screen. Green is the “health code” that says a user is symptom-free and it’s required to board a subway, check into a hotel or just enter Wuhan, the central city of 11 million people where the pandemic began in December. The system is made possible by the Chinese public’s almost universal adoption of smartphones and the ruling Communist Party’s embrace of “Big Data” to extend its surveillance and control over society. Walking into a Wuhan subway station Wednesday, Wu Shenghong, a manager for a clothing manufacturer, used her smartphone to scan a barcode on a poster that triggered her health code app. A green code and part of her identity card number appeared on the screen. A guard wearing a mask and goggles waved her through. If the code had been red, that would tell the guard that Wu was confirmed to be infected or had a fever or other symptoms and was awaiting a diagnosis. A yellow code would mean she had contact with an infected person but hadn’t finished a two-week quarantine, meaning she should be in a hospital or quarantined at home. (...) Intensive use of the health code is part of the efforts by authorities to revive China’s economy while preventing a spike in infections as workers stream back into factories, offices and shops. (...)

Other governments should consider adopting Chinese-style “digital contact tracing,” Oxford University researchers recommended in a report published Tuesday in the journal Science. The virus is spreading too rapidly for traditional methods to track infections “but could be controlled if this process was faster, more efficient and happened at scale,” the researchers wrote. Once aboard the subway, Wu and other commuters used their smartphones to scan a code that recorded the number of the car they rode in case authorities need to find them later. An attendant carried a banner reading “Please wear a mask throughout your trip. Do not get close to others. Scan the code before you get off the train.” Seats were marked with dots denoting where passengers were to sit to stay

¹⁰⁵ Greg C Bruno: No need for liberalism to surrender to authoritarianism, 7 April 2020 <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/no-need-for-liberalism-to-surrender-to-authoritarianism/>

far enough away from each other.

Visitors to shopping malls, offices buildings and other public places in Wuhan undergo a similar routine. They show their health codes and guards in masks and gloves check them for fever before they are allowed in. The health codes add to a steadily growing matrix of high-tech monitoring that tracks what China's citizens do in public, online and at work: Millions of video cameras blanket streets from major cities to small towns. Censors monitor activity on the internet and social media. State-owned telecom carriers can trace where mobile phone customers go. A vast, computerized system popularly known as social credit is intended to enforce obedience to official rules. People with too many demerits for violations ranging from committing felonies to littering can be blocked from buying plane tickets, getting loans, obtaining government jobs or leaving the country. (...)

The codes are issued through the popular WeChat messaging service of internet giant Tencent Ltd. and the Alipay electronic payments service of Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company. Some 900 million people use the system on WeChat, according to the newspaper Beijing Youth Daily and other outlets. No total for Alipay has been reported. (...) Regulations say people who try to travel with a red health code will be marked down in the social credit system. "Fraud, concealment and other behaviors" carry penalties that "will have a huge impact on their future life and work," a statement by the government of Heilongjiang province in the northeast said."¹⁰⁶

David P. Goldman, an American economist, also emphasizes the advantages of the Chinese surveillance technologies and explains that this is also a promising market for Western pharmaceuticals corporations.

"China stopped the epidemic by combining conventional public health measures with the largest application of information technology to public health in history, including locational tracking of likely carriers, identification of probable nodes of infection, continuous monitoring of the vital signs of a large proportion of its 1.4 billion people, and the use of smartphone apps to regulate the quarantine of individuals. Huawei has spent years positioning itself to be a dominant force in medical applications of information technology, with some competition from China's other tech giants, including Alibaba and Tencent. The Covid-19 pandemic gave China the opportunity to show what it can do, and the results are startling – so startling that every major European pharmaceuticals company is angling to be part of the perceived Next New Thing in healthcare.

China was able to marshal so many digital resources against Covid-19 because it has invested massively in big data, artificial intelligence and other information technology resources in the healthcare field over the past decade. These range from digitized health records – something that Google tried to do but abandoned due to American privacy laws – to smartphone attachments that read vital signs and take EKG's, smartphone apps that transmit these vital signs to the cloud in real time, DNA sequencing on a vast scale, remote surgery using virtual reality headsets over 5G mobile networks, and artificial intelligence applications to diagnostics and drug development.

106 Associated Press: Chinese smartphone health code rules post-virus life, 2 April 2020, <https://apnews.com/88f837f24461c6e40480c96b55a4b6db>

Chinese data scientists combined the vast amount of health information already available with locational data from smartphones and the results of widespread forensic Covid-19 testing to identify risks down to the level of individuals in a population of 1.4 billion people. In this sort of exercise the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Covid-19 test results are often inaccurate, but if the medical authorities receive real-time information about the body temperature, heart rate and blood oxygen levels of a very large sample of the population, they can interpret them with far greater accuracy.”¹⁰⁷

Yuval Noah Harari, a liberal Israeli historian, outlines a highly interesting description of the incredible advances of surveillance technologies which and their potential threats. *“Hitherto, when your finger touched the screen of your smartphone and clicked on a link, the government wanted to know what exactly your finger was clicking on. But with coronavirus, the focus of interest shifts. Now the government wants to know the temperature of your finger and the blood-pressure under its skin.*

One of the problems we face in working out where we stand on surveillance is that none of us know exactly how we are being surveilled, and what the coming years might bring. Surveillance technology is developing at breakneck speed, and what seemed science-fiction 10 years ago is today old news. As a thought experiment, consider a hypothetical government that demands that every citizen wears a biometric bracelet that monitors body temperature and heart-rate 24 hours a day. The resulting data is hoarded and analysed by government algorithms. The algorithms will know that you are sick even before you know it, and they will also know where you have been, and who you have met. The chains of infection could be drastically shortened, and even cut altogether. Such a system could arguably stop the epidemic in its tracks within days. Sounds wonderful, right?

The downside is, of course, that this would give legitimacy to a terrifying new surveillance system. If you know, for example, that I clicked on a Fox News link rather than a CNN link, that can teach you something about my political views and perhaps even my personality. But if you can monitor what happens to my body temperature, blood pressure and heart-rate as I watch the video clip, you can learn what makes me laugh, what makes me cry, and what makes me really, really angry.

It is crucial to remember that anger, joy, boredom and love are biological phenomena just like fever and a cough. The same technology that identifies coughs could also identify laughs. If corporations and governments start harvesting our biometric data en masse, they can get to know us far better than we know ourselves, and they can then not just predict our feelings but also manipulate our feelings and sell us anything they want — be it a product or a politician. Biometric monitoring would make Cambridge Analytica’s data hacking tactics look like something from the Stone Age. Imagine North Korea in 2030, when every citizen has to wear a biometric bracelet 24 hours a day. If you listen to a speech by the Great Leader and the bracelet picks up the tell-tale signs of anger, you are done for.

You could, of course, make the case for biometric surveillance as a temporary measure

¹⁰⁷ David P. Goldman: Covid-19: Focus on what China did right, not wrong, 3 April 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/covid-19-focus-on-what-china-did-right-not-wrong/>

taken during a state of emergency. It would go away once the emergency is over. But temporary measures have a nasty habit of outlasting emergencies, especially as there is always a new emergency lurking on the horizon. My home country of Israel, for example, declared a state of emergency during its 1948 War of Independence, which justified a range of temporary measures from press censorship and land confiscation to special regulations for making pudding (I kid you not). The War of Independence has long been won, but Israel never declared the emergency over, and has failed to abolish many of the “temporary” measures of 1948 (...).

Even when infections from coronavirus are down to zero, some data-hungry governments could argue they needed to keep the biometric surveillance systems in place because they fear a second wave of coronavirus, or because there is a new Ebola strain evolving in central Africa, or because...you get the idea. A big battle has been raging in recent years over our privacy. The coronavirus crisis could be the battle’s tipping point. For when people are given a choice between privacy and health, they will usually choose health.”¹⁰⁸

It is telling that even Bloomberg, a blatant mouthpiece of the monopoly capitalists, is worried about such developments.

“An Israeli tech company that specializes in counterterrorism spyware is working with a dozen countries to slow the spread of an invisible enemy known as Covid-19. In China, authorities have deployed facial-recognition software and location tracking in their fight against the coronavirus. And a U.S. big data company with connections to intelligence agencies is talking to governments about how it can help. (...) Unfortunately, emergency powers quickly become normal operating procedures,” says Richard Brooks, a computer engineering professor at Clemson University in South Carolina whose research has focused on how human rights activists in authoritarian countries can avoid surveillance. “If the ability to track social contacts exists to stop a contagion, I can guarantee you it will be used to track the spread of dissent. (...)”

In China, where surveillance technology has been integrated with tough policing, the government promised to increase privacy measures after criticism about the release of the identities of coronavirus patients. Hu Yong, a new media critic and professor at Peking University with 800,000 followers, said in a blog post that many of the public health surveillance tactics “violated the peoples’ basic human rights and were inherently illegitimate.” The government agreed to allow citizens to give their consent for biometric data collection—but not until later this year. (...)

Concerns about government overreach have also been raised in Hong Kong, where police are still cracking down on anti-government protesters. After authorities imposed new social distancing regulations on March 27, police began entering restaurants to make sure owners were keeping tables 1.5 meters apart and allowing only four people per table. At one restaurant owned by the son of a prominent dissident, they took the names and IDs of patrons, Apple Daily reported. The government has said such enforcement measures are necessary to stem the virus. We always worry a pandemic would

108 Yuval Noah Harari: The World after Coronavirus, Financial Times, 20 March 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>

lead to people accepting a surveillance authoritarian society," says civic activist Galileo Cheng, who warned in a Twitter post that police would use social distancing regulations to target pro-democracy restaurants. "Now we are in Phase One of implementing Draconian laws."¹⁰⁹

True, we don't know and we can't know which measures the ruling classes will deploy in the coming months and years. Furthermore, this will also depend of the resistance of the proletariat and the popular classes against the reactionary assault. However, we think it is clear and evident that the bourgeoisie wants to transform its state apparatus towards chauvinist state bonapartism.

A Preventive Counter-Revolution

As we already indicated above in our brief chronology of how the ruling classes arrived to their decision for a mass lockdown, this development has the character of a *preventive counter-revolution*. The ruling classes launched this wave of attacks in the midst of a period of mass struggles in many countries all over the world. But they did so *before* these uprisings transformed into full-blown revolutions.

We explained already in the previous chapter that the ruling class turned to state of emergency and state bonapartism primarily not because of the pandemic but for political calculations. This has been also indirectly indicated by various bourgeois politicians and observers. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres explicitly mentioned the danger of "*enhanced instability, unrest, and conflict*".

"For UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the extraordinary upheaval spurred by the virus presents a real danger to the relative peace the world has seen over the last few decades. The disease "represents a threat to everybody in the world and... an economic impact that will bring a recession that probably has no parallel in the recent past," he said. "The combination of the two facts and the risk that it contributes to enhanced instability, enhanced unrest, and enhanced conflict are things that make us believe that this is the most challenging crisis we have faced since the Second World War."¹¹⁰

Such considerations from the viewpoint of the ruling class are particularly well reflected in an article by Andreas Kluth. Kluth is a representative figure of thinking within the monopoly bourgeoisie as he is a member of *Bloomberg's* editorial board, and was previously editor in chief of Germany's leading capitalist paper *Handelsblatt Global* as well as a writer for the *Economist*. This attentive

¹⁰⁹ Bloomberg: Coronavirus Surveillance Helps, But the Programs Are Hard to Stop, 6. April 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-06/coronavirus-surveillance-helps-but-the-programs-are-hard-to-stop?srnd=premium-europe>

¹¹⁰ UN chief says coronavirus worst global crisis since World War II, 1 April 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200401-un-chief-says-coronavirus-worst-global-crisis-since-world-war-ii>

bourgeois observer confirms our analysis that the ruling circles are fully aware of the dramatic rise in class struggles in period before the COVID-19 crisis as well as of the explosive consequences of this crisis.

“The most misleading cliché about the coronavirus is that it treats us all the same. It doesn’t, neither medically nor economically, socially or psychologically. In particular, Covid-19 exacerbates preexisting conditions of inequality wherever it arrives. Before long, this will cause social turmoil, up to and including uprisings and revolutions.

Social unrest had already been increasing around the world before SARS-CoV-2 began its journey. According to one count, there have been about 100 large anti-government protests since 2017, from the gilets jaunes riots in a rich country like France to demonstrations against strongmen in poor countries such as Sudan and Bolivia. About 20 of these uprisings toppled leaders, while several were suppressed by brutal crackdowns and many others went back to simmering until the next outbreak.

*The immediate effect of Covid-19 is to dampen most forms of unrest, as both democratic and authoritarian governments force their populations into lockdowns, which keep people from taking to the streets or gathering in groups. But behind the doors of quarantined households, in the lengthening lines of soup kitchens, in prisons and slums and refugee camps — wherever people were hungry, sick and worried even before the outbreak — tragedy and trauma are building up. One way or another, these pressures will erupt.”*¹¹¹

And another bourgeois economist expressed a similar understanding of the current dangers for the capitalist system: *“The coronavirus, which was first reported in Wuhan, China, has now spread to over 170 countries due to the mass movement of people across borders. The ensuing panic has led to the spread of misinformation and, in some case, the beginnings of a breakdown in social order, with the weaknesses of Western countries clear for all to see. For the governments of countries in which populations are susceptible to misinformation and panic, and which may face shortages, the threat to national stability is very real. Though the virus is discriminatory in nature, effecting mainly the very sick and elderly, it has put the world on notice. We have to acknowledge our system is fragile and too prone to risk.”*¹¹²

In a recently published article we drew attention to a new study of a bourgeois think tank which presented a statistical overview of the development of mass protests in the past decade. They concluded that mass protests *“are in fact part of a decade-long trend line affecting every major populated region of the world.”* While they recognize that the Arab Revolution was the trigger of the global wave of mass protests in the past decade they emphasize that we are dealing

111 Andreas Kluth: This Pandemic Will Lead to Social Revolutions. As the coronavirus sweeps the world, it hits the poor much harder than the better off. One consequence will be social unrest, even revolutions, Bloomberg, 11. April 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-04-11/coronavirus-this-pandemic-will-lead-to-social-revolutions?srnd=premium-europe>

112 S. George Marano: Lessons from coronavirus pandemic will show that our economic models are deeply flawed, 1 Apr, 2020 <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3077879/lessons-coronavirus-pandemic-will-show-our-economic-models-are>

not with a regional but with a *global* phenomenon: “Viewed in this broader context, the events of the Arab Spring were not an isolated phenomenon but rather an especially acute manifestation of a broadly increasing global trend.” The authors of this study also compared the last decade with earlier developments in the past half century and arrived at the conclusion that we have experienced in recent history a much more significant wave of uprisings than before. They wrote: “The size and frequency of recent protests eclipse historical examples of eras of mass protest, such as the late-1960s, late-1980s, and early-1990s.”¹¹³

We think that it is of utmost importance for Marxists to understand this contradictory development. Last year we experienced the biggest upswing of mass struggles in modern history (at least since 1945). Hence, the ruling classes around the world were deeply worried. But given the lack of revolutionary leadership, these protests had not reached the stage of actual armed insurrection yet where the masses tried to take power. The masses still had various illusions about a way forward without an armed insurrection. In an essay on this global wave of mass struggle we emphasized that “the popular masses enter the battle field with a backward consciousness” and still have many “naïve hopes”.¹¹⁴

Given the massive character and global spread of the recent wave of popular uprisings, we can say that while the shift towards state bonapartism represents a turn to a much more aggressive and authoritarian form of rule, it also contains at the same time a defensive, preventive character.

Being fully aware of the limitations of historical analogies, we think it might be useful to refer to two thoughts of Lenin which seem to us as relevant in the current situation. Shortly after the Stolypin coup on 3rd June 1907 the leader of the Bolshevik party characterized the situation in Russia as follows: “the state of things in Russia is one of barely restrained insurrection.”¹¹⁵ To a certain degree, this seems to us also to be a useful description of the current state of the global class struggle.

And to refer to another analogy which might be useful taking into account for an understanding of the present world political situation. In July 1917 the Kerensky government in Russia launched a bonapartist coup in response to a spontaneous uprising of the workers and soldiers in Petrograd. This successful counterrevolution resulted in the creation of a bourgeois bonapartist regime. Lenin gave the following characterization to this new regime. “Bonapartism is a form of government which grows out of the counter-revolutionary nature of the

113 Michael Pröbsting: A Powerful Confirmation. A bourgeois study on the revolutionary character of the current historic period, 12 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/confirmation-of-revolutionary-character-of-historic-period/>. The study we were referring to is: Samuel Brannen, Christian Stirling Haig, Katherine Schmidt: The Age of Mass Protests, Understanding an Escalating Global Trend, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C., March 2020

114 Michael Pröbsting: Are We Nearing a New “68 Moment”?

115 V. I. Lenin: Debate on Extension of Duma’s Budgetary Powers (1908), in: LCW Vol. 13, p. 438

*bourgeoisie, in the conditions of democratic changes and a democratic revolution.”*¹¹⁶ Again, it seems to us that there is a certain similarity of this characterization with the current situation.

This relates also the peculiar nature of the current development. What is so extraordinary about the present situation is that it has been triggered (not caused) by an *extraordinary massive political intervention of the capitalist state*. While this has not been done in coordination, such intervention by the state was first implemented by one of the two dominating imperialist Great Powers, then by Western European governments and than the rest of the world joined. It was a global chain reaction starting in China and within a few weeks catching the whole world.

If we leave aside the two world wars, the current development is certainly the *most globalized world political situation*, i.e. a situation where the developments on different continents are more directly and visible related with each other than any other situation in modern history.

Hence, while the economic slump was not caused by the COVID-19 crisis, it was certainly deepened and escalated by it. For that reason the ruling classes try to explain the crisis not by its real causes – over-accumulation of capital and fall of profit – but rather by the Corona Virus. However, for the same reasons, this economic crisis has a *much more political character* than recessions before. And for this reason mass hatred will be easier directed against the bourgeois governments as those responsible for the slump (instead of anonymous “market forces”).

Do we overestimate the relevance of the counterrevolutionary offensive?

At this point we would like to deal with a criticism which comrades from an Argentinean organization have put forward against the assessment of the RCIT. In a statement on the COVID-19 crisis the *Reagrupamiento Hacia el PST* wrote: “It is totally wrong – as some leftist currents are arguing under the impression of armies intervening in the streets and the policies of mass lockdowns – to speak of the fact that we are under a “world counterrevolutionary offensive” and that the relationship of forces between the classes is changing in the world and in our country. This is a completely wrong analysis. The whole last year was marked by a revolutionary wave from Hong Kong to Catalonia, passing through Ecuador, Chile, Puerto Rico, and from Iraq and Iran to Haiti. These revolutions made their way by hitting hard the capitalist governments and their plans. The impact of the pandemic produced a moment of confusion for the masses that do not have an international leadership that can coordinate and organize the fight against capitalism. But what the capitalist governments have done are maneuvers supported in a first moment of confusion, just as it happens in our coun-

¹¹⁶ V. I. Lenin: They do not see the Wood for the Trees (1917), in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 259

try. *There is neither here nor in the world a defeat for the masses, quite the contrary.*"¹¹⁷

We strongly welcome that these comrades – in contrast to the social-bonapartist Lockdown Left – reject any opportunist capitulation to the reactionary offensive of the bourgeois governments. Like the RCIT, they denounce the capitalist policy of global lockdown and militarization. Hence, we share important common ground with these comrades and are all the more willing to take their criticism seriously.

However, we think that the criticism of the comrades is not justified. Let us first recapitulate what the RCIT stated on this issue in its Manifesto: *“As we said above, the global COVID-19 crisis is a major turning point in the world situation. It has already resulted in a massive decline of the class struggles and popular uprisings which started in 2019. This does not mean an end of such struggles as various bold demonstrations of workers and youth in Chile, Iraq, Algeria, France and Hong Kong showed. The ongoing heroic liberation struggle of the Syrian people in Idlib against the Russian-Iranian-Assadist occupation forces is another example. But in general we have seen a massive decrease of these protests in the past weeks as the all-powerful capitalist state Leviathan is building up its forces. This means that the pre-revolutionary world situation has ended for now and a global counter-revolutionary situation has opened up.”*

In our opinion it is impossible to deny these fundamental facts. In Chile, Iraq, France, Hong Kong etc. the mass demonstrations have massively declined and, at least for now, mostly disappeared. This in itself is a serious setback after a period of several months which saw regular mass protests every week in all of these countries.

In our opinion it would be a mistake for revolutionaries to ignore the nature of this preventive counterrevolution. According to the latest study of the ILO almost 2.7 billion workers – around 81% of the global labor force – are currently affected by full or partial lockdown measures. They represent 87% of the workforce of upper-middle-income countries and 70% of the workforce in high-income countries.¹¹⁸

The current situation contains, as the comrades say and as we have also said several times, an important element of confusion of the masses as a result of the fear and paralyzes which the bourgeois governments and their media all over the world are spreading. But the counterrevolution is marked *not only* by this! In addition, it is also characterized by an *extraordinary mobilization of the state apparatus* – state of emergency, police and military on the streets, exceptional powers for the regimes etc. In short, it is characterized by massive, unprecedented and global shift towards *chauvinist state bonapartism* as we emphasized

117 Reagrupamiento Hacia el PST: LOS TRABAJADORES Y EL PUEBLO DEBEMOS TOMAR EN NUESTRAS PROPIAS MANOS LA LUCHA CONTRA EL CORONAVIRUS, March 2020, <https://revolucion56.webnode.es/coronavirus/> (our translation)

118 ILO Monitor 2nd edition: COVID-19 and the world of work, 7 April 2020, p. 2; see also ILO: COVID-19 causes devastating losses in working hours and employment, Press release, 7 April 2020, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_740893/lang-en/index.htm

above and other documents.

Such a serious mobilization of counter-revolutionary forces is not accidental. It reflects the serious crisis of the bourgeois order. It is exactly because of the decay of the capitalist system – expressed in the worst slump since 1929, accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers, a global wave of class struggles, etc. – that the ruling classes in the imperialist Western countries have no alternative but to leave the terrain of relatively extended bourgeois democracy and to turn towards state bonapartism (without completely liquidating bourgeois democracy).

Recognizing this development has nothing to do with “pessimism” but with a realistic assessment of the relation of forces and of the tasks of the workers vanguard. It means that revolutionaries have to prepare for a period where significant aspects of their work have to be done under conditions of illegality. Furthermore, revolutionaries have to politically prepare the vanguard for the struggle against such state bonapartist regimes. This will include understanding the importance of democratic demands, explaining to need to prepare for a popular insurrection etc.

It might be the case that the comrades fear that we pessimistically predict a “long dark period” of counter-revolution with no possibilities for class struggle. However, this is neither what we say nor what we mean. In fact, the RCIT says exactly the opposite. In our Manifesto we wrote: *“Of course, there are different types of counter-revolutionary situations. There can be a situation where the bourgeoisie smashes the workers and popular organizations and destroys whole layers of militants. Such was the case, for example, in Russia after the Stolypin coup in June 1907, in Germany 1933, in Chile 1973 or in Egypt after the military coup on 3 July 2013. These were counter-revolutionary attacks resulting in strategic or even historic defeats of the working class. The current situation is very different. What we see is a major counter-revolutionary offensive which confuses large sectors of the workers and popular movements since it is masked as a response to a pandemic. It is characterized by a massive strengthening of the repressive state apparatus as well as a temporary decline of the global wave of the mass struggles. Hence, it is highly likely that this is a temporary setback of the class struggle resulting in the accumulation of massive contradictions which will sooner or later result in massive political explosions. It is not possible to predict how long this situation will last. It might be a matter of only a few months. However, what is clear is that the counter-revolutionary offensive of the ruling classes will create explosive political contradictions. Sooner or later, it will be difficult for the state-bonapartist regimes to justify their massive attacks on democratic rights. It will become soon obvious that while they give billions of dollars to the big capitalists, many workers face unemployment and wage cuts. Some strikes in Italy or people under lockdown clapping and singing on the balconies are examples of promising albeit limited developments. Likewise, a massive increase of global tensions between the Great Powers is inevitable. In other words, the global counter-revolutionary offensive can only temporarily cover up the accelerating political and economic contradictions*

between the classes and the states. Sooner or later, this will result inevitable in new and massive political explosions, probably in the form of major domestic crisis, wars as well as revolutionary uprisings – in the Global South as well as in the imperialist states of the West and the East.”

We think that this assessment remains fully valid. As we said, the history of class struggle knows various types of counter-revolutionary situations. When Kerensky established a bourgeois bonapartist regime after the defeat of the *July Days* in 1917 in Petrograd, there also existed a counter-revolutionary situation. However, as it is well known, this situation lasted not very long and in October the Bolsheviks already managed to take power!

In summary, there is no doubt that the current counter-revolutionary offensive can only temporarily suppress the popular hatred against the prevailing order. The past wave of uprising – before the pandemic – was characterized by “naive hopes”. However, the current events – the combination of economic catastrophe, pandemic and state bonapartism – will inevitable radicalize the masses sooner or later. A number of illusions will be destroyed and the desperation will increase. The capitalist classes themselves seem to realize this and try to establish a “new normality”, i.e. the rise of the new Leviathan. It is the task of us revolutionaries to give the mass struggles to come a perspective and to lead them to victory against this capitalist monster.

III. Fundamental principles of revolutionary strategy in the new Leviathan Era

As we did already state in the introduction above, we consider this book not as an academic exercise, not as a purpose in itself, but as a contribution to clarify the analysis and the perspectives for the class struggle against the counter-revolutionary offensive under the cover of the COVID-19 crisis. Trotsky's dictum is more relevant than ever: „Marxism is, in its very essence, a set of directives for revolutionary action.“¹¹⁹ Hence, it is urgent to discuss the consequences of the Marxist analysis for the revolutionary struggle in the current period.

There can be no doubt that the current triple crisis poses extraordinary challenges for revolutionaries. The working class and the oppressed face the consequences of the worst economic slump since 1929. At the same time the repression apparatus of the bourgeois state is mobilized, people are forced to stay at home because of a global lockdown and public assemblies and demonstrations are banned in numerous countries all over the world. And, in parallel, people live under the fear of the Corona Virus pandemic. No doubt, this is a political tsunami of capitalist counter-revolution!

It is a paramount task of revolutionaries to develop a strategy in order to combat this reactionary assault. For this we have to begin with identifying the central axis of the counterrevolutionary line so that we can elaborate the central axis of the revolutionary line.

A political counterrevolution requires a political strategy by the Marxists

As we explained in the previous chapters the three catastrophes – Third Depression, Leviathan and pandemic – are related with each other. Each of these areas requires a programmatic response of Marxists. Hence, a revolutionary action program must comprise economic, political and health demands.

Revolutionaries therefore have to put forward a set of demands in order to fight capitalist incompetence and class bigotry in the struggle against the pandemic. As we have outlined in our Health Action Program (see Appendix), such a set of demands has to focus on free mass testing, quarantine for those infected and free access to hospitals for severe cases, the expansion of the public health sector under workers control, an international program of cooperation in order

119 Leon Trotsky: *Once Again, Whither France?* Part I (1935), Monad Press, New Your 1979, pp. 70-71, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/whitherfrance/ch01.htm>; see also Friedrich Engels: Letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 29 November 1886, in: MECW Vol. 47, p. 532

to develop a vaccine, for expropriation of the pharmaceutical industry under workers control, etc.¹²⁰

Likewise, the struggle against the dramatic economic attacks must have at its center a set of demands against sacking, the worsening of the labor conditions and wage cuts, for the expropriation of corporations under workers control, for a public employment program financed by taxes on the super-rich, etc.

And the struggle against the assault on democratic rights requires a set of demands against the lockdown, against the suppression of the right to assemble and demonstrate, against the emergency powers for police and army, against the build-up of surveillance, etc.

In short, the triple catastrophes require revolutionaries to elaborate a strategy which deals with all these three areas – economic, political and health demands. However, we think it is possible and indeed necessary to identify the internal configuration of these three areas in order to map out a correct perspective. And as we have pointed out above it is the *political* counterrevolution – the shift towards chauvinist state bonapartism – which represents the most important line of attack of the ruling classes around the globe.

The political, anti-democratic attacks suppress the possibility for the working class and the popular masses to assemble, to unite and to fight for their rights. True, in those areas where work places are not closed, workers can – and have done in some cases – protest and strike. But any large-scale organizing and fighting is banned by the current anti-democratic attacks. Hence, these political attacks massively reduce the ability of the workers and oppressed to fight against rising unemployment and wage cuts as well as to fight for a better health care program. Any serious struggle of the popular masses on social or health issues will immediately clash with the political laws suppressing fundamental democratic rights. It is therefore impossible to raise any serious demand in the economic or health field *without simultaneously* also raising political, democratic demands which challenge the reactionary Leviathan.

In fact, it is a crucial characteristic of most reformist and centrist forces that they fail to elaborate such an approach in their programs for the current crisis. They list a series of demands – starting from better health protection to opposing wage cuts and sacking. Naturally, each and every demand is progressive and necessary. However, in most of these programs the most essential issue is missing: the demands for an end of the lockdown, for the right to assemble and demonstrate and against all aspects of the police and surveillance state.

But this elementary defect transforms such programs into pathetic begging letters to the capitalists and their governments! How shall the working class be able to force the capitalists in times of crisis to make any concession *without mass struggles*?! Shall they “fight” via online petitions?! It is embarrassing that

120 RCIT: A Revolutionary Action Program to fight COVID-19! Workers and Oppressed: Don't trust the State of the Rich and Powerful! Trust only Yourselves! April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/health-program-covid19>

we have to explain such an elementary truth but, sadly, most of the reformist and centrist left seem to have forgotten this! Such a reformist strategy of “fighting” without the masses is worse than a “mutiny on their knees” – it is rather a “rebellion while lying on their stomach”!

Lenin once observed that shocking historic events – he expressed this thought in the years of World War I – can result in profound confusion and depression in the consciousness of socialists. *“But it is quite another [thing, Ed.] to allow the war to oppress your thinking, to stop thinking and analysing under the weight of the terrible impressions and tormenting consequences or features of the war.”* Such “oppression of thinking” can result in failure to understand the role of the democratic struggle within the Marxist strategy. *„Though Kievsky does not realise it, that is the real source of all his mishaps. That is his basic logical error which, precisely because it is basic and is not realised by the author, “explodes” at every step like a punctured bicycle tire. It “bursts out” now on the question of defending the fatherland, now on the question of divorce, now in the phrase about “rights”, in this remarkable phrase (remarkable for its utter contempt for “rights” and its utter failure to understand the issue): we shall discuss not rights, but the destruction of age-old slavery! To say that is to show a lack of understanding of the relationship between capitalism and democracy, between socialism and democracy.”*¹²¹

Such a failure to understand the importance of the democratic program is a central characteristic of the colossal failure of most leftists in the current period. But as a matter of fact, it is impossible for Marxists to promote the class struggle in the current conditions *without* putting the struggle against the Leviathanian counterrevolution – i.e. *without* putting a political, democratic struggle – in the center of propaganda and agitation. Failing to implement a political, anti-Leviathan struggle against the lockdown policy effectively means to support a policy of *class truce*. Those who do not openly challenge the political oppression by the capitalist state in the current phase effectively accept the present banning of public protests. Those who accept the present banning of public protests effectively agree to a policy of class truce, i.e. the policy of reformist capitulation.

121 V.I. Lenin: Reply to P. Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov) (1916); in: LCW 23, p. 22 resp. p. 24 (Emphasis in the Original)

The policy of class truce in times of pandemic weakens our struggle in defense of public health

This leads us to the next, closely related question. Many open or disguised leftist supporters of the lockdown policy claim that their acceptance of the suppression of democratic rights is only temporary. They promise that they will fight for these rights in the “Post-COVID-19” period, i.e. when the specific conditions of the current pandemic are over. Surely, in some cases such arguments are only a pretext for opportunistic capitulation, in other cases they are an honest reflection of political confusion. With capitulationists one does not need to discuss but rather to fight. However, with comrades who are confused by the all of the sudden and paralyzing global events we want to discuss and hopefully convince them.

We consider such a policy of temporary suspension of mass struggles as dangerous and self-disarming. First, it is beyond doubt that defending democratic rights can and must go hand in hand with precautions measures (washing hands and other standard hygienic measures; wearing masks – albeit we note that the WHO considered this not as necessary except if you are ill; keeping a certain distance between each other, etc.).

Second it is ridiculous to join the bandwagon of bourgeois hysteria that going on the streets would kill you. A few days ago scientists published the results of a study about the consequences of the Corona Virus. This study was conducted in the German town of Gangelt in Nordrhein-Westfalen. This is a kind of “German Wuhan” as it is the region with the highest infection in Germany at the time of writing (about 15% of the population). The study reports that the lethality (*case fatality rate*) based on the total number of infected individuals is 0.37%.¹²²

Third, as we have said repeatedly, we can not know exactly how dangerous this virus is and how many people will die. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that the H1N1 pandemic (“Swine Flu”) in 2009 resulted in globally 284,000 death. The WHO estimates that 250,000 to 500,000 people die of seasonal flu annually.¹²³ Some say that the COVID-19 pandemic could be worse. May be, we don’t know and can’t know. But the issue of opposing steps towards dictatorship and defending democratic rights does not

¹²² Dr. Hendrik Streeck: Preliminary result and conclusions of the COVID-19 case cluster study (Gangelt Municipality), 9 April 2020. The study can be downloaded in German and English language at this link: <https://www.land.nrw.de/pressemitteilung/uebergabe-erster-zwischenergebnisse-des-forschungsprojekts-covid-19-case-cluster-0>; see also KURIER: Coronavirus: 14 Prozent der Bewohner der deutschen Stadt Gangelt sind immune, 9 April 2020, <https://kurier.at/wissen/gesundheit/coronavirus-14-prozent-der-bewohner-der-deutschen-stadt-gangelt-sind-immun/400808312>

¹²³ Robert Roos: CDC estimate of global H1N1 pandemic deaths: 284,000, 27 June 2012, <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2012/06/cdc-estimate-global-h1n1-pandemic-deaths-284000>

depend on the severity of a pandemic. No one in the world dared to question democracy when 200, 300 or 500 thousand people died in the past because of various pandemic. Why should any socialist or any democrat take a different approach in 2020 when we face the COVID-19 crisis?! Is it admissible to deend democracy when 500,000 people die in a pandemic but to support a bourgeois dictatorship when double or three times as many could die?! Likewise we ask if it is admissible for revolutionaries to championing democratic rights when a pandemic kills many people in Africa but to become supporters of bourgeois state of emergency regimes when such a pandemic arrives in Europe and North America?! Does this not reflect an aristocratic-chauvinist hypocrisy?! One is not a Marxist, not a socialist, not even a democrat if he or she does not know the right answer to these questions!

Fourth, suspension of class struggle in times of a pandemic will not improve but rather worsen the conditions to defend the living conditions and indeed to save the lives of people. The capitalist class utilizes the current lockdown in order to expand the authoritarian state apparatus, to close shops and to sack workers, and to prepare draconic austerity programs. All this will inevitable undermine the public health sector. And it will undermine the material and hygienic living conditions of people. Hence, the longer the capitalist class remains in power, the more time it has to advance its reactionary programs, the more dangerous become the living and health conditions for the popular masses.

Fifth, the idea that class truce would improve the conditions to fight the pandemic reveals a totally misplaced confidence in the ruling class. Why should the ruling capitalist class be more competent to fight the pandemic than the working class and the rural and urban poor could do to with the help of progressive scientists?! No, there should be no doubt that the struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic can and must go hand in hand with the revolutionary democratic struggle against the emerging reactionary state bonapartism!

Adventurism or systematic preparation?

We are aware that demagogic opponents of revolutionary Marxism will object that our policy is adventurist and ultra-left because the masses don't want to fight now on the streets. This is a silly argument in every respect. First, the decisive question is what revolutionaries *say* to the vanguard and the masses. Do they explain that the lockdown policy is reactionary, that the workers and oppressed should not trust the bourgeois state, that they should organize and prepare to fight to bring down the chauvinist bonapartist state? Or should they support the lockdown, should they accept is as unfortunate but necessary, should they remain silent on this issue? This is the decisive question in the present period! The RCIT has emphasized from the very beginning that one can only act in a revolutionary way if one enlightens the masses about the real nature of the reactionary offensive of the ruling classes and explains to them

that they should oppose the lockdown policy. Only a concrete assessment of the consciousness of the masses will show if the time has come to call for the struggle on the streets. But what has to be done now is to *explain* the masses that they need to fight on the streets against the lockdown policy because otherwise they will suffer *one setback after the other*.

Our approach is the same which Lenin and the Bolsheviks took in the early phase of World War I when they were criticized for their uncompromising revolutionary line calling for the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. Lenin emphasized such necessity to openly state what is necessary for the proletariat to do irrespectively if it can be implemented immediately or not in an article on the first Zimmerwald conference in 1915: *„The question as to how rapidly, in which way and in which particular forms, the proletariat of the various countries are capable of taking revolutionary action was not raised at the Conference and could not have been. The conditions for this are not yet ripe. For the present it is our task to jointly propagandise the correct tactics and leave it to events to indicate the tempo of the movement, and the modifications in the mainstream (according to nation, locality and trade). If the French proletariat has been demoralised by anarchist phrases, it has been demoralised by Millerandism too, and it is not our business to increase this demoralisation by leaving things unsaid in the manifesto.“*¹²⁴

And in the famous pamphlet of the Bolsheviks *“Socialism and War”* they stated likewise: *“This task finds correct expression only in the slogan: convert the imperialist war into a civil war; all consistently waged class struggles in wartime and all seriously conducted “mass-action” tactics inevitably lead to this. It is impossible to foretell whether a powerful revolutionary movement will flare-up in connection with, during or after the first or the second imperialist war of the Great Powers; in any case it is our bounden duty to work systematically and unswervingly in this direction.“*¹²⁵

Furthermore we want to emphasize that the political conditions in the countries all over the world develop unevenly. In some countries the masses will rise up earlier than in others. In the Chinese province Hubei (with Wuhan as its capital), in Nigeria, Colombia, Bolivia, Panama and other countries we have already seen spontaneous riots of sectors of the masses against the lockdown and against the reactionary state forces. We have even seen violent clashes in Brussels after the police killed a 19-year old youth because he breached the lockdown rules.¹²⁶ It is evident that the draconic lockdown policy can only temporarily suppress the mass anger and will sooner or later result in political explosions. The task of revolutionaries is to prepare the vanguard and the masses for what is to come inevitably sooner or later!

124 V. I. Lenin: Revolutionary Marxists at the International Socialist Conference, September 5- 8, 1915, in: LCW 21, p. 391

125 V. I. Lenin and G. Zinoviev: Socialism and War. The Attitude of the R.S.D.L.P. toward the War (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 313

126 AFP : Dozens detained as rioting hits locked-down Brussels, 12 April 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/dozens-detained-as-rioting-hits-locked-down-brussels>

Breaking up the chauvinist bonapartist state machinery

The central necessity of the political struggle against the chauvinist bonapartist state machinery – the new Leviathan – is also related to the fundamental assessment of the state by Marxists. In order to understand this more precisely one needs to briefly recapitulate the Marxist analysis of the capitalist state.

It is a widespread misunderstanding by many so-called Marxists to imagine that capitalism is the basically the economic sphere and then there is the state as a kind of unconnected political appendix. We have always emphasized that in fact the opposite is the case.

Capitalism is a political and economic unity of (class-)opposites. It can only be understood as a totality of economic relations of production and the political, social and ideological superstructure. These different levels are mutually dependent and can only exist in reciprocal dependence. It is no accident that Marx, and we after him, speaks of *political economy*, and not simply economics. There would be no extraction of surplus value in the workplaces if the bourgeois state apparatus did not guarantee the corresponding legal relations, enforcing these with violence when necessary. The imperialist bourgeoisie could not achieve its goals on the world market if there were no states to safeguard them worldwide politically and militarily, if need be, by tariffs, loan guarantees, diplomacy or even war if necessary. Furthermore, maintaining the contradictory equilibrium of a society consumed by class conflict would be unthinkable without a finely-woven ideological web to bind the oppressed classes and strata to the ruling bourgeoisie and to ensure that the former come to terms, to a certain extent, with exploitation and oppression. Hence the role of school, university and media.

It is clear then that capital, and thus capitalism, can only exist through inter-related and thereby social labour. Thus, capital can only exist if the exchange of commodities and the production of surplus value by capital are socially organized and regulated – hence the importance of state, legal relations, society, etc. Furthermore, capital can only exist if the value-producing commodity, labour power, is constantly produced and reproduced – recuperated through social activities (leisure, family, etc) and replaced with new labor power through the bearing and raising of children. All this, again, requires the regulating and intervening activity of the state.

From this follows, theoretically formulated, that capitalism presupposes not only the production and reproduction of commodities and capital, but also – from natural necessity – the production and reproduction of the basic social conditions which make the former possible. The Bolshevik theoretician Nikolai Bukharin noted aptly in 1920: *“The process of reproduction is not only a process of reproducing the material elements of production, but also one which reproduces the very relations of production. Expanded reproduction means expanded reproduction of existing relations of production; their scope and extent becomes greater; the existing*

mode of production is 'spread' with the internal reorganization of its component parts. The reproduction of the capitalist relations of production is a reproduction of their substance..."¹²⁷

From this follows that the social function of the capitalist state is not a "neutral activity" but rather a *subordinated function* of its role as a "machinery of class domination", as Marx put it in his first draft of "*The Civil War in France*".¹²⁸

In *Theses* written for the Zimmerwald movement during World War I, the delegation of the Russian Bolsheviks stated aptly: "*The 'essence' of the state is not its centralization in itself but its social function of oppression, like the 'essence' of capital is not the function of the production means but in a specific relationship between human beings.*"¹²⁹

This is why the central character of the state is to secure the domination of one class over the other as Lenin said: „*The state is a special organisation of force: it is an organisation of violence for the suppression of some class.*“¹³⁰ Such a state defends the interests of the monopoly bourgeoisie both against its domestic enemies (i.e. the working class and the popular masses) as well as against its foreign enemies (Great Power rivals as well as oppressed people in the Global South). Nikolai Bukharin category of an "*imperialist robber state*" is a quiet apt characterization for this machinery.¹³¹

As we have outlined in this book, the current triple catastrophe of capitalism results in a global shift towards chauvinist state bonapartism. This means that the essential feature of the capitalist state as "*an organisation of violence for the suppression of some class*" will become even more outstanding.

Capitalism in the new era – which is characterized by a catastrophic economic crisis and a dramatic acceleration of the contradictions between classes as well as between states – can not work *without* such a chauvinist bonapartist state machinery. Hence, the struggle against this machinery must be put in the centre of the political strategy of any revolutionary organization. In other words, if capitalism can not exist without „*the mailed fist of state power*“,¹³² revolutionaries must focus on smashing this reactionary fist of oppression!

When the RCIT says that the revolutionary strategy must have a focus on breaking up the chauvinist bonapartist state apparatus, this does not mean that

127 Nikolai Bukharin: *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period* (1920); Edited with an Introduction by Kenneth J. Tarbuck, Routledge, New York 1979, pp. 83-84

128 Karl Marx: *Drafts of The Civil War in France*, in: MECW, Vol. 24, p. 486

129 *Thesen über die sozialistische Revolution und die Aufgaben des Proletariats während seiner Diktatur in Rußland* (1918), in: Angelica Balabanoff: *Die Zimmerwalder Bewegung 1914-1919* (1928), Frankfurt 1969, p. 152 (our translation). Judging by its style, we believe that these *Theses* have been drafted most likely by Bukharin.

130 V. I. Lenin: *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*; in: CW Vol. 25, p. 407

131 Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenji Preobrashensky: *A. B. C. of Communism*, Vol. I, The Marxian Educational Society, Detroit 1921, p. 124

132 Nikolai Bukharin: *Imperialism and World Economy* (1915), Martin Lawrence Limited, London, p. 124

such strategy can be *reduced* to this. As before, a program can be only considered as revolutionary if it contains *all essential elements* of the Transitional Program – like the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the nationalization of banks and corporations under workers control, the overthrow of the capitalist state by an armed uprising of the workers and popular masses and its replacement by a workers and popular government based on action councils of the masses, etc.

But the global counter-revolutionary offensive adds – or let us say emphasizes – a specific, additional element within such a transitional program for the current period: the revolutionary struggle for democracy and for the smashing of the chauvinist bonapartist state machinery. In summary, the struggle against chauvinist state bonapartism does not and can not equal or even replace the struggle for the socialist revolution. But it impossible to move towards the socialist revolution *without* putting the struggle against chauvinist state bonapartism as a key element of the Marxist program!

The revolutionary democratic struggle: a key element of the Marxist strategy in the new era

The fundamental anti-democratic character of the current global counter-revolutionary offensive and the consequential importance of the struggle against the chauvinist state bonapartism point to the centrality of the democratic question in the new era which has opened up. While the latest developments have definitely given additional weight to the democratic question this does not come out of the blue. In fact, the current chauvinist state bonapartism represents a qualitative higher stage of an anti-democratic development which has already taken place since a number of years.

We have already pointed out this in the RCIT's program adopted in 2016: *“The struggle for democratic rights has become one of the most important issues in this age of capitalism in decay. In this context, the ruling classes inevitably violate and trample on democratic rights and strive to replace even limited bourgeois democracy by capitalist Bonapartism and dictatorship.”*¹³³

We have analyzed this development in more detail in a special pamphlet which we published in 2015.¹³⁴ At this point we will limit ourselves to summarize our most important conclusions and discuss their relevance for the current situation. In this work we stated: *“Our fundamental thesis is that in the period of capitalist decay the democratic issues obtain increasing importance for the class struggle not only in the semi-colonial countries but also in the imperialist metropolises in the 21st century. In one of the quotes cited above, Lenin stated that “imperialism is indisputably the ‘negation’ of democracy in general”. The experience of the past 120*

133 RCIT: Manifesto for Revolutionary Liberation (2016), p. 12, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-program-2016/>

134 Michael Pröbsting: The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today, August 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/democracy-vs-imperialism/>

years has shown that while Lenin's thesis is fundamentally correct for the whole epoch of imperialism, it is obviously not true to the same degree in all different periods within this epoch."

We elaborated that for a number of reasons, the period after World War II was certainly one in which bourgeois democracy was established in most imperialist countries. *"However, with the beginning of the new historic period of capitalist crisis in 2008/09 a qualitative change has emerged. Naturally, this transformation did not occur suddenly but was a result of preceding developments. First the capitalist crisis has qualitatively deepened and, hence, the bourgeoisie's scope for concessions has dramatically decreased."* As examples for this tendency we pointed out the increasing relevance of migrants as part of the working class in the imperialist countries and the issue of chauvinism against them as well as against refugees. Other features which we named were the *"never-ending increase of surveillance of the population by the imperialist state, the growing violation of democratic rights, the increasing numbers of imperialist wars (Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Syria, etc.)"*. We concluded: *"Today this 'imperialist robber state' (...) becomes an increasingly aggressive tool of the ruling class both domestically as well as abroad."*

Hence, the RCIT emphasized already years ago that the historic period which opened in 2008 – a period of actual decay of capitalism – inevitable accelerated the anti-democratic offensive of the bourgeoisie. We identified also crucial elements of such attacks on democratic rights. While we did not – and could not – foresee the Corona Virus pandemic in 2020 – we warned about the increasing role of chauvinism and the bonapartist state. And we emphasized that that the democratic question is massively gaining weight in the liberation struggle of the workers and oppressed.

Our understanding of the relevance of the democratic question has been based on the approach of Lenin and Trotsky. The Marxist classics have always emphasized that the democratic question is a crucial element of the struggle for socialism. In a polemic against comrades who underestimated the relevance of the democratic question, Lenin wrote a few months before the beginning of the Russian Revolution in 1917: *"It fails to appreciate the significance of democracy. For socialism is impossible without democracy because: (1) the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for democracy; (2) victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy."*¹³⁵

From this follows the central place of the struggle for democratic rights within the revolutionary strategy: *"Capitalism in general, and imperialism in particular, turn democracy into an illusion—though at the same time capitalism engenders democratic aspirations in the masses, creates democratic institutions, aggravates the antagonism between imperialism's denial of democracy and the mass striving for democracy. Capitalism and imperialism can be overthrown only by economic revolution. They cannot be overthrown by democratic transformations, even the most "ideal". But*

135 V. I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (1916), in: LCW 23, p. 74

a proletariat not schooled in the struggle for democracy is incapable of performing an economic revolution."¹³⁶

Various critics have accused the RCIT that by putting emphasis on the democratic question we would undermine the class struggle and the socialist goal. We have always refused such nonsense. First, the democratic struggle is part of the class struggle and is not separated of it. Secondly, the struggle for democracy – if approached from a revolutionary angle and not from a reformist one – helps to develop and to sharpen the class consciousness of the proletariat. In order to achieve this, it is vital not to put forth the democratic question in a *reformist* way, not as an isolated appeal to the ruling class, but in a *revolutionary* way, i.e., as a slogan to mobilize the working class and the popular masses and which Marxists link to the revolutionary program.

As we have explained in past works, the main difference between revolutionary Marxists and opportunistic revisionists is certainly not the fact that they both raise democratic demands. Rather the difference is *how* they do so and the *limitations* which they set, or don't, for these demands. In our pamphlet mentioned above, we summarized our differences with the revisionists on this issue as follows:

"i) Revisionists don't raise the democratic slogans consistently (e.g., they do not support anti-imperialist struggles, migrants' rights, etc.)

ii) Revisionists don't raise democratic slogans in a revolutionary but rather in a reformist manner. In other words, they put forward such slogans as an appeal to the bourgeois state and focus on the parliamentary struggle instead of on mobilizing the working class and popular masses. They also don't denounce the un-reformable anti-democratic nature of the imperialist state and they don't work towards fighting against democratic illusions in this state.

iii) Revisionists limit themselves to such democratic demands instead of combining them with the goal of a proletarian revolution. Thus they usually create around such demands a separate democratic stage, mechanistically separating it from the class struggle with the result being that the working class is politically subordinate to the bourgeoisie."

Today, after the experience of the first phase of the COVID-19 crisis, we could add to this statement that such reformist and centrist forces are also capable of committing even worse treacherous crimes. In cases like the current lockdown assault of the ruling classes all over the world, they do not *"inconsistently raise the democratic slogans"* but rather openly support the anti-democratic counter-revolution!

Marxists have to be the staunchest advocates of the democratic rights, of the struggle for consistent democracy and in order to successfully wage such a battle, they must combine this struggle with the strategic task of socialist revolution via the armed insurrection of the working class and the oppressed. This was also the understanding of the Bolsheviks: *„The demand for the immediate*

136 V.I. Lenin: Reply to P. Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov) (1916); in: LCW 23, pp. 24-25

*liberation of the colonies that is put forward by all revolutionary Social-Democrats is also "impracticable" under capitalism without a series of revolutions. But from this it does not by any means follow that Social-Democracy should reject the immediate and most determined struggle for all these demands – such a rejection would only play into the hands of the bourgeoisie and reaction – but, on the contrary, it follows that these demands must be formulated and put through in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle for every fundamental democratic demand up to a direct proletarian onslaught on the bourgeoisie, i.e., up to the socialist revolution that expropriates the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution may flare up not only through some big strike, street demonstration or hunger riot or a military insurrection or colonial revolt, but also as a result of a political crisis such as the Dreyfus case or the Zabern incident, or in connection with a referendum on the secession of an oppressed nation, etc."*¹³⁷

In summary, the RCIT emphasizes that the democratic program, as a whole and in its essential parts, cannot be realized under capitalism but only after a socialist revolution when the working class has established its rule. Likewise we reiterate that the struggle for democratic demands must be led by the working class in order to win. When democratic mass movements are led by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces socialists must fight inside them and strive for the working class to act as an independent force. In this context it is crucial to advocate the formation of fighting organs of the masses – councils of action, self-defense units, soviets, etc. – in order to prepare the independence of the working class. Furthermore, socialists have to combine the struggle for immediate and democratic demands with systematic propaganda for key transitional slogans like the expropriation of the large enterprises under workers' control, the arming of the workers as well as the creation of a workers' government.

A successful implementation of these steps as well as of the entire democratic program presupposes the formation of a revolutionary workers' party which can gain the leadership of the working class in such struggles. Such a party must be characterized by strict proletarian internationalism so that it understands that solidarity with the working class and the oppressed in the South, in words and deeds, is a primary duty of workers in the imperialist metropolises. In order that such internationalism does not remain platonic lip service, such a party has to be part of the new Workers' International based on a revolutionary program.

In summary, the current COVID-19 crisis puts the issues of democracy, i.e. of the political form of capitalism, in the center. The democratic program can only be fully realized if the struggle against the political counterrevolution is combined with the struggle for power, i.e. for overthrowing the bourgeoisie

¹³⁷ V.I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 145

and smashing the capitalist state. Attacking the chauvinist bonapartist state apparatus opens the road to attack the capitalist state machinery as such. For all these reasons, an action program against the current triple crisis must link the economic and health demands with political, revolutionary-democratic slogans and put the later into the center.

Excuse: the relevance of the strategy of permanent revolution

The close and indispensable relationship between the democratic question and the struggle for socialist revolution demonstrates the actuality of a famous theoretical fundament of Marxism – the theory of permanent revolution as it was first expressed by Karl Marx and later further developed by Leon Trotsky. As we have pointed out in our works, the theory of *permanent revolution* is a central component of the Marxist program in the epoch of imperialism and as such it is relevant for each country of the world. Trotsky made it very clear that without this theory revolutionaries are incapable of understanding the character of the class struggle dynamic and therefore will not succeed in deriving from it the required strategic tasks. In a letter to an opponent, in 1931 he wrote:

*“But this theory [of permanent revolution, Ed.] gives us a unique and correct starting point in the internal dynamic of each contemporary national revolution and in its uninterrupted connection with the international revolution. In this theory the Bolshevik-Leninists have a fighting formula imbued with the content of the gigantic events of the last thirty years. On the basis of this formula, the Opposition is combating and will combat the reformists, the centrists and the national communists in a decisive manner. One of the most precious advantages of this formula is that it slices like a razor through the ideological ties with all kinds of revisionism of the epigones.”*¹³⁸

At this point we will briefly recapitulate the three central aspects of the theory of permanent revolution. The first aspect – and the issue around which the faction struggle between the Stalinist bureaucracy and Trotsky’s Left Opposition started in 1923 – is the need for the internationalization of the revolution. The Stalinists claimed that socialism – i.e., a society where productive forces are so developed that classes and the state are withering away – can be built in a single nation state. Trotsky, referring to the traditional position of both Lenin as well as himself, stated that this is impossible. Both Lenin and Trotsky explained that since all national economies are inextricably linked with the world economy and since imperialist Great Powers can not tolerate a victorious revolution in a single country, the working class in power must see the international spread of the revolution as its most important strategic task.

“The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national state.

¹³⁸ Leon Trotsky: Another Letter to Albert Treint (1931), Trotsky Writings 1930-31, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 319

*From this follows on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion, only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.”*¹³⁹

Secondly, Trotsky showed that the tasks in the proletarian liberation struggle – including the democratic tasks – cannot be implemented under any form of capitalist regime but only under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is particularly relevant (but not exclusively!) for backward countries where many democratic tasks – national independence, agrarian revolution, and democratic freedoms – remain unfulfilled. From this follows that the revolutionary class struggle must not strive for actualization in *separate stages of revolution* and must not be subordinated to any faction of the bourgeoisie, but rather must continue without interruption until the proletariat has conquered power and established its dictatorship.

*“No matter what the first episodic stages of the revolution may be in the individual countries, the realization of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletariat vanguard, organized in the Communist Party. This in turn means that the victory of the democratic revolution is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat which bases itself upon the alliance with the peasantry and solves first of all the tasks of the democratic revolution. (...) The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and, very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfillment of which is bound up with deep inroads into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution.”*¹⁴⁰

Finally, Trotsky stressed that the revolutionary struggle does not end with the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Quite the contrary, the working class must continuously drive the revolutionary process forward. It has to organize the class struggle – including the civil war and revolutionary wars – both internally against its domestic enemies as well as abroad against the imperialist powers.

“The conquest of power by the proletariat does not complete the revolution, but only opens it. Socialist construction is conceivable only on the foundation of the class struggle, on a national and international scale. This struggle, under the conditions of an overwhelming predominance of capitalist relationships on the world arena, must inevitably lead to explosions, that is, internally to civil wars and externally to revolutionary wars. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such, regardless of whether it is a backward country that is involved, which only yesterday accomplished its democratic revolution, or an old capitalist country which already has behind it a long

¹³⁹ Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 297

¹⁴⁰ Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), p. 277

*epoch of democracy and parliamentarism.”*¹⁴¹

The RCIT has repeatedly emphasized that the strategy of permanent revolution as not only relevant for countries of the South but also for the imperialist countries. It is a crucial failure of many revisionists – including many so-called “Trotskyists” – that they ignore this feature. The strategy of permanent revolution is the programmatic reverse side of the coin of the *Law of Uneven and Combined Development*. And since this law is relevant not only for the semi-colonial countries but also for the imperialist metropolises, permanent revolution constitutes a crucial strategy for the rich countries too.¹⁴²

While Trotsky wrote about the theory of permanent revolution mostly in the context of the revolutionary tasks in so-called “backward” countries – either backward imperialist countries like Russia before 1917 or colonial or semi-colonial countries – he was at the same time unambiguously clear that this theory also applies to advanced imperialist countries. In the early 1930s he pointed to the example of Germany in the times of the Weimar Republic – at that time one of the most advanced imperialist countries.

*“Now the problem of the permanent revolution unfolds before us on the arena of the Iberian peninsula. In Germany the theory of the permanent revolution, and that theory alone, stands counterposed to the theory of a ‘people’s revolution.’ On all these questions the Left Opposition has expressed itself quite categorically.”*¹⁴³

Equally, Trotsky saw the struggle against fascism in imperialist Italy as part of the program of permanent revolution: *„As to the problem of the anti-fascist revolution, the Italian question, more than any other, is intimately linked to the fundamental problems of world communism, that is, of the so-called theory of permanent revolution.”*¹⁴⁴

Likewise he referred to the strategy of permanent revolution in relation to the liberation struggle of the Black minority in the United States: *“Weisbord is correct in a certain sense that the ‘self-determination’ of the Negroes belongs to the question of the permanent revolution in America.”*¹⁴⁵

These few quotes already demonstrate that Trotsky considered the theory of permanent revolution as highly relevant for all countries in the world – including imperialist societies – even if he did not elaborate on this issue more in depth. We think that the recent developments have confirmed the RCIT’s thesis that the theory of permanent revolution is indeed highly relevant today

141 Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), p. 297

142 We have dealt in more detail with the theory of *Uneven and Combined Development* in Michael Pröbsting: *Capitalism Today and the Law of Uneven Development: The Marxist Tradition and its Application in the Present Historic Period*, in: *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, Volume 44, Issue 4, (2016), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03017605.2016.1236483>

143 Leon Trotsky: *A Letter to Albert Treint* (1931), *Trotsky Writings 1930-31*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 314

144 Leon Trotsky: *Problems of the Italian Revolution* (1930); in *Trotsky Writings 1930*, p.223

145 Leon Trotsky: *The Negro Question in America* (1933); in: *Leon Trotsky: On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, Merit Publishers, New York 1967, p. 25.

not only for semi-colonial but also for imperialist countries – for China and Russia as well as for Western Europe and North America. The only but decisive precondition for the revolutionary meaning of the democratic question is that it is approached from a revolutionary stance and not from a petty-bourgeois reformist.

No revolutionary strategy without internationalism in theory and practice!

The RCIT has pointed out repeatedly that it is impossible to have a correct understanding of the world situation and to draw the necessary conclusion without an *internationalist* approach. Marxists have always insisted that capitalism in general and monopoly capitalism (i.e. capitalism in the epoch of imperialism) in particular can only be grasped if it is understood as a political and economic *world* system. The political and economic relations in each country can never, from a Marxist point of view, be derived simply from internal factors. Imperialism does not constitute a set of national states and economies which are strung together. It is rather the case that the world economy and world politics are the decisive driving forces. They act as a melting pot for national factors, forming an independent totality raised above and imposed upon the national states. The uneven and combined development of world capitalism concurs with the given local peculiarities of a country and fuses with the specific national dynamic of the political and economic relations of that state.

From such a *world* view of capitalism follows that Marxists base themselves on a *world* view of the proletariat and, hence, a *world* view of the class struggle. This has profound consequences for the politics of the working class in general and in its democratic and anti-imperialist tactics in particular.

Such a view is in complete contradiction to the reformist theory of “*socialism in one country*” which was developed by the Stalinists and which they counterposed to the internationalist strategy developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks and later defended by Trotsky’s Fourth International. This Stalinist theory declared that socialism, i.e. a prosperous society with a higher living standard for the population than capitalism can provide, could be built in a single country without the victory of the working class in other countries. From this followed that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, and hence the politics of the Communist International, had to serve no longer the goal to internationalize the revolution, but rather to help building “socialism” in Stalin’s USSR.

Trotsky summarized the contrast between the two theories in his book on the permanent revolution in the following words: “*It is precisely here that we come up against the two mutually exclusive standpoints: the international revolutionary theory of the permanent revolution and the national-reformist theory of socialism in one country. Not only backward China, but in general no country in the world can build socialism within its own national limits: the ‘highly-developed productive forces which*

have grown beyond national boundaries resist this, just as do those forces which are insufficiently developed for nationalization. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain, for example, will encounter difficulties and contradictions, different in character, it is true, but perhaps not slighter than those that will confront the dictatorship of the proletariat in China. Surmounting these contradictions is possible in both cases only by way of the international revolution. This standpoint leaves no room for the question of the 'maturity' or 'immaturity' of China for the socialist transformation. What remains indisputable here is that the backwardness of China makes the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship extremely difficult. But we repeat: History is not made to order, and the Chinese proletariat has no choice."¹⁴⁶

As we have pointed out in the first chapter of this book, the current situation characterized by a major *global* counter-revolutionary offensive underlines particularly strongly the profound *international* nature of politics in modern capitalism. What does this mean for the revolutionary struggle?

First, as we have explained above, the struggle for socialism must also have an international character. This means that Marxists strongly oppose the Stalinist conception of "*building socialism in one country*". Instead they strive to internationalize the class struggle both before as well as after the successful revolution in a single country.¹⁴⁷

Secondly, a consistent internationalist understanding of the class struggle has also massive influence on the issues of program and party-building. "*Socialism in one country*" means to prioritize the class struggle in one's own country and to deprioritise the class struggle in other countries. Consequently, it also means to prioritize the building of a party in one's own country and to deprioritise the same in other countries. Furthermore, it usually goes also hand in hand with an ignorant or even social-chauvinist attitude towards national minorities and migrants in their own country. In short, "*Socialism in one country*" results in national-centeredness and national-reformism in the theoretical, programmatic and organizational field.

As a matter of fact, we see numerous organizations which are willing to act as revolutionaries but which are, unconsciously, infected with the ideas of "*socialism in one country*" since they put a strong priority on national work in contrast to international work. As a result they refuse to deal appropriately with issues of the international class struggle and the building of Revolutionary World Party.

Trotsky explained in 1928 in his critique of the Stalinist program that an international program is not only important for a world party but even for any national organization since national politics can not be understood without the international context: "*In our epoch, which is the epoch of imperialism, i.e., of world economy and world politics under the hegemony of finance capital, not a single com-*

146 Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 255

147 For more on this see Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* (in particular chapter XIII and XIV).

*minist party can establish its program by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of developments in its own country. This also holds entirely for the party that wields the state power within the boundaries of the U.S.S.R. On August 4, 1914, the death knell sounded for national programs for all time. The revolutionary party of the proletariat can base itself only upon an international program corresponding to the character of the present epoch, the epoch of the highest development and collapse of capitalism. An international communist program is in no case the sum total of national programs or an amalgam of their common features. The international program must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of world economy and of the world political system taken as a whole in all its connections and contradictions, that is, with the mutually antagonistic interdependence of its separate parts. In the present epoch, to a much larger extent than in the past, the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not vice versa. Herein lies the basic and primary difference between communist internationalism and all varieties of national socialism.”*¹⁴⁸

For the same reason a revolutionary organization can not built on the national terrain alone. It must be built simultaneously as an international organization. Trotsky replied to those revolutionaries who considered the building of an international organization as “premature” the following: “Your conception of internationalism appears to me erroneous. In the final analysis, you take the International as a sum of national sections or as a product of the mutual influence of national sections. This is, at least, a one-sided, undialectical and, therefore, wrong conception of the International. If the Communist Left throughout the world consisted of only five individuals, they would have nonetheless been obliged to build an international organization simultaneously with the building of one or more national organizations.

It is wrong to view a national organization as the foundation and the international as a roof. The interrelation here is of an entirely different type. Marx and Engels started the communist movement in 1847 with an international document and with the creation of an international organization. The same thing was repeated in the creation of the First International. The very same path was followed by the Zimmerwald Left in preparation for the Third International. Today this road is dictated far more imperiously than in the days of Marx. It is, of course, possible in the epoch of imperialism for a revolutionary proletarian tendency to arise in one or another country, but it cannot thrive and develop in one isolated country; on the very next day after its formation it must seek for or create international ties, an international platform, an international organization. Because a guarantee of the correctness of the national policy can be found only along this road. A tendency which remains shut-in nationally over a stretch of years, condemns itself irrevocably to degeneration.

You refuse to answer the question as to the character of your differences with the International Opposition on the grounds that an international principled document is lacking. I consider such an approach to the question as purely formal, lifeless, not political and not revolutionary. A platform or program is something that comes as a result of

148 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p.4

*extensive experiences from joint activities on the basis of a certain number of common ideas and methods. Your 1925 platform did not come into being on the very first day of your existence as a faction. The Russian Opposition created a platform in the fifth year of its struggle; and although this platform appeared two and a half years after yours did, it has also become outdated in many respects.”*¹⁴⁹

In summary, capitalism and imperialism exist and can only exist as a *world* system. The struggle against it must take the road of the international class struggle and its must aim for the creation of a *socialist world economy* and a *worldwide federation of workers and peasant republics*. Such a struggle requires a *world party*, i.e. an *international* organization and not *national-isolated* groups.

149 Leon Trotsky: To the Editorial Board of Prometeo (1930); in: Writings 1930, pp. 285-286

IV. Revolutionary tactics and slogans for the class struggles ahead

As we have explained in the previous chapters the current triple crisis of Third Depression, Leviathan and COVID-19 has resulted in a major global counter-revolutionary offensive by the ruling classes. We have explained that the *political line* of this counterrevolution is the key feature as it severely attacks and endangers the future ability of the working class and the oppressed to fight for their rights and their health.

From this follows that revolutionaries need to advocate tactics and slogans which are most suited to help the popular masses defending their conditions to exist and to fight. There is an excellent slogan which has started to spread as graffiti on walls: "*Corona is the Virus – Capitalism is the Pandemic*". Indeed, the main problem is not the Corona Virus but the capitalist system. It is the capitalist system which provokes mass impoverishment by its chronic economic crisis as well as wars. And, as it is well know, it is poverty and unhealthy living conditions which weaken the immune system of human beings and, hence, make them prone to diseases. It is the capitalist system which is responsible for the decades-long austerity policy resulting in cuts and closures in the public health service. It is the capitalist system in which a small elite of super-rich and powerful people dominate the popular masses and which lends emergency powers to police and army. In other words, the main danger for the workers and popular masses and the main threat for lives is not the Corona Virus but the continuing existence of capitalism.

For all these reasons the strategy and tactics of the class struggle must be elaborated from the point of view how can the workers and oppressed fight against the main dangers and against the main enemies – the ruling capitalist class – under the present conditions?

The current situation and its consequences for the class struggle

Let us start with a brief characterization of the consequences of the current situation for the conditions of the global class struggle. As we have already stated the RCIT considers the consequences of the current triple crisis for the perspectives of the workers and popular struggle as profound in the extreme. The economic slump is increasing unemployment with a single stroke by three, four or more times. The shift to state bonapartism will expand the powers of governments and build-up the police and surveillance state and hence severely undermine and reduce the democratic rights. And the Corona Virus pandemic is a serious health risk costing many lives and spreading fear around the world

(which the capitalist classes in nearly all countries utilize to cover their political and economic attacks).

These factors have contradictory consequences for the class struggle. On one hand they complicate the conditions of the workers and the popular masses to defend their rights. High unemployment and impoverishment means that workers can easily be fired by the capitalists and that the rural and urban poor have to struggle even more every day to make ends meet. An expanded repression apparatus, limitation of democratic rights, perfected high-technology surveillance methods, etc. will also worsen the conditions to organize and fight. And, likewise, the fear caused by the pandemic will make people cautious to meet others and to participate in mass activities.

However, this is only one side of the coin. The other side is that the very same triple crisis will sooner or later impel the masses to fight. The lockdown policy has immediate and dramatic effects on the living conditions of the popular masses as it increase hunger and poverty. There have been already first hunger riots (e.g. Colombia, Honduras, Panama, Zimbabwe, etc.) and more will follow inevitable. More generally, the triple crisis is opening an era of a profound and deep crisis of capitalism all over the world. As we have pointed out above, it is exactly *because* the ruling circles increasingly recognize the dramatic character of the current crisis that they tighten the repressive measures and expand the emergency powers of the capitalist state apparatus.

All this means that, as an immediate consequence, the COVID-19 crisis has caused a *global counterrevolutionary situation* – as we have outlined in our Manifesto. This is because in these weeks the political utilization of the Corona Virus allowed an enormous strengthening of the state's emergency powers and, in parallel, a massive reflux of all mass movements and struggles which shattered the bourgeois order since late 2019 in many countries – from Hong Kong to Chile.

However, as we also said in our Manifesto, *“the accumulation of massive contradictions will sooner or later result in massive political explosions. It is not possible to predict how long this situation will last. It might be a matter of only a few months. However, what is clear is that the counter-revolutionary offensive of the ruling classes will create explosive political contradictions. Sooner or later, it will be difficult for the state-bonapartist regimes to justify their massive attacks on democratic rights. It will become soon obvious that while they give billions of dollars to the big capitalists, many workers face unemployment and wage cuts. (...) Likewise, a massive increase of global tensions between the Great Powers is inevitable. In other words, the global counter-revolutionary offensive can only temporarily cover up the accelerating political and economic contradictions between the classes and the states. Sooner or later, this will result inevitable in new and massive political explosions, probably in the form of major domestic crisis, wars as well as revolutionary uprisings – in the Global South as well as in the imperialist states of the West and the East.”*

In other words, the current counterrevolutionary situation does not and can

not open a “long dark period”. The offensive of the ruling classes is incapable of providing any dynamics resulting in political and economic stability. Quite the contrary, these emergency measures can no more than temporarily covering gigantic contradictions and postponing their tremendous explosions. In short, the current reactionary offensive prepares future political explosions, i.e. it results in the *maturing of a major revolutionary crisis*.

Such political explosions are inevitable because the current stage of capitalism is one of decay. In this historic period – which began with the Great Recession in 2008 – the decline of capitalism is aggravating all political, economic and social contradictions. The crisis of civilization – climate change, ecological disasters, etc. – is worsening. Social inequality and misery is spreading and the antagonism between the capitalists on one side and the workers and poor on the other side becomes more and visible. Likewise, imperialist aggressions and wars in the Global South are increasing. The same is the case with the rivalry between the Great Powers – in particular the U.S. and China. All this resulted, as we already mentioned above, in a dramatic increase of class struggles in the past decade – not seen since 1945. Such basic lack of equilibrium on the world stage is the reason why the RCIT characterizes this historic period as “*revolutionary*.” We have arrived at such an assessment of this period already in January 2009 and, since then, we have elaborated our analysis in a number of documents.¹⁵⁰

150 See e.g. chapter 14 in Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/>. See also the annual *World Perspectives* documents which the RCIT has published in the past years: RCIT: *World Perspectives 2020: A Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries*, 8 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2020/>; RCIT: *World Perspectives 2019: Heading Towards a Volcanic Political Eruption. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries*, 2 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2019/>; Michael Pröbsting: *World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>; RCIT: *World Perspectives 2017: The Struggle against the Reactionary Offensive in the Era of Trumpism*, 18 December 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2017/>; RCIT: *World Perspectives 2016: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase*, 23 January 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/>; RCIT: *Perspectives for the Class Struggle in Light of the Deepening Crisis in the Imperialist World Economy and Politics*, 11 January 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-january-2015/>; RCIT: *Escalation of Inner-Imperialist Rivalry Marks the Opening of a New Phase of World Politics. Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation Adopted by the RCIT's International Executive Committee*, April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* (English-language Journal of the RCIT) No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-april-2014/>; RCIT: *Aggravation of Contradictions, Deepening of Crisis of Leadership. Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation Adopted by the RCIT's*

As we already indicated above, some intelligent bourgeois observers have also become increasingly aware of the explosive nature of the period ahead in the course of the current triple crisis. Here are a few more examples. Leading economists of the *International Monetary Fund* are warning about “social unrest” once the lockdowns are over. “New waves of social unrest could erupt in some countries if government measures to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic are seen as insufficient or unfairly favoring the wealthy, the IMF said in a new report on Wednesday. (...) While mass protests are unlikely with strict lockdowns in place, unrest could spike when the crisis appeared to be under control, Vitor Gaspar, director of the IMF’s fiscal affairs department, told Reuters in an interview. In India’s commercial capital of Mumbai, thousands of jobless migrant workers protested on Tuesday at a railway station, demanding to be allowed to return to their homes in the countryside, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended a lockdown of the population of 1.3 billion. (...) IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath said previous crises and disasters had fostered solidarity, but there could be a different outcome this time. “If the crisis is badly managed and it’s viewed as having been insufficient to help people, you could end up with social unrest,” she told Reuters.”¹⁵¹

Andreas Kluth from *Bloomberg* – a mouthpiece of the monopoly bourgeoisie – issues the same warning. “In this context, it would be naive to think that, once this medical emergency is over, either individual countries or the world can carry on as before. Anger and bitterness will find new outlets. Early harbingers include millions of Brazilians banging pots and pans from their windows to protest against their government, or Lebanese prisoners rioting in their overcrowded jails. In time, these passions could become new populist or radical movements, intent on sweeping aside whatever ancien regime they define as the enemy. The great pandemic of 2020 is therefore an ultimatum to those of us who reject populism. It demands that we think harder and more boldly, but still pragmatically, about the underlying problems we confront, including inequality. It’s a wake-up call to all who hope not just to survive the coronavirus, but to survive in a world worth living in.”¹⁵²

And Henry Kissinger, the long-time voice of American imperialism, also expresses the deep worries of the ruling elite in an article published by the *Wall*

International Executive Committee, 9.9.2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 15, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-september2013/>; RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists. Theses of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, March 2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 8, www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013

151 Andrea Shalal: Pandemic could trigger social unrest in some countries: IMF, 15 April 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-imf-worldbank-coronavirus-protests/pandemic-could-trigger-social-unrest-in-some-countries-imf-idUSKCN21X1RC>

152 Andreas Kluth: This Pandemic Will Lead to Social Revolutions. As the coronavirus sweeps the world, it hits the poor much harder than the better off. One consequence will be social unrest, even revolutions, *Bloomberg*, 11. April 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-04-11/coronavirus-this-pandemic-will-lead-to-social-revolutions?srnd=premium-europe>

Street Journal under the title “The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order”. “Nations cohere and flourish on the belief that their institutions can foresee calamity, arrest its impact and restore stability. When the Covid-19 pandemic is over, many countries’ institutions will be perceived as having failed. Whether this judgment is objectively fair is irrelevant. The reality is the world will never be the same after the coronavirus. (...) Leaders are dealing with the crisis on a largely national basis, but the virus’s society-dissolving effects do not recognize borders. While the assault on human health will — hopefully — be temporary, the political and economic upheaval it has unleashed could last for generations. (...) Now, we live an epochal period. The historic challenge for leaders is to manage the crisis while building the future. Failure could set the world on fire.”¹⁵³

We point out in passing that throughout history epidemics are usually a reflection of social and economic crisis of a society. Hence, they often result – directly or indirectly – in political instability and popular unrest.¹⁵⁴ As we have pointed out somewhere else, this has been already the case in the 14th century in Europe the “Black Death” resulted in a series of peasant uprisings which ultimately resulted in revolutionary mass uprisings and the decay of feudalism in Western Europe. Likewise there were a number of epidemics in the 19th century which correlated with revolutionary crises in Europe.¹⁵⁵

What will be the immediate effects of the global counter-revolutionary assault on the class struggle? Of course, we can only elaborate some hypotheses at such an early stage of the crisis. But it seems to us that, on one side, the masses are still in a certain stage of shock. If nearly all capitalist governments and their media – plus the cowardly leaderships of the workers and popular movement – agree about the devastating nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, about the necessity of “social distancing” and lockdown, then it must be true and everyone should try to hole up and wait until it is over. All this is increased by the massive blitz of imposing a state of emergency and the banning all forms of public meetings and protests. Hence, we see widespread confusion and fear. On the other side, such extreme conditions also create hatred as well as hunger. Hence, we have already seen riots in Hubei, Nigeria, Honduras, Panama, Columbia, Bolivia, etc. True, these are raw and spontaneous mass protests. However, we think that such struggles are harbinger of the future. Obviously, revolutionaries must fully support such spontaneous protests and try to help organizing and raising the consciousness.

The analysis which we have presented leads to important consequences for

153 Henry Kissinger: The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order, Wall Street Journal, 3 April 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever-alter-the-world-order-11585953005>

154 See on this e.g. Richard J. Evans: Epidemics and Revolutions: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Europe, in: Terence Ranger and Paul Slack (Ed.): Epidemics and Ideas. Essays on the historical perception of pestilence, Cambridge University Press, New York 1992, pp. 149-173

155 Yossi Schwartz: The 2019 Corona Virus and the Decay of Capitalism, February 2020, <https://www.thecomunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-and-decay-of-capitalism/>

the tactics and slogans which Marxists should put forward in the current situation. On one hand, given the dramatic scale of economic, political and health attacks, the nature of the response must be inevitable defensive. As we have stated in our documents, the priority will be to oppose sackings and wage cuts, to defend social benefits, to get food for survival, to get free access to health care, to have the right to assemble and demonstrate, to remove the state of emergency laws etc. It is hardly necessary to emphasize that revolutionaries must fully support such demands. (See on this our Health Action Program as well as the list of demands at the end of our *Manifesto*, both are attached in the Appendix.)

So on one hand, due to the nature of the situation, revolutionaries have to focus on raising a number of *defensive slogans*. However, these demands have to be raised in a highly “explosive” way. By this we mean, as we said in the previous chapter, that revolutionaries must not raise such demands as petitions to the bourgeois governments but rather by calling for mass struggles. Under the current conditions, these are *highly revolutionary forms of struggles* as they are tantamount with breaking the state of emergency laws which ban all forms of public protests. Hence, the defensive struggle for economic and democratic demands contains a highly explosive potential if it challenges the current authoritarian forms of rule. This means that such slogans – formulated as demands for struggle and not for begging petitions – can result, if the masses really fight for them, relatively quickly in revolutionary struggles for power.

Naturally, we do not have the illusion that the capitalist system will fall soon. The crisis of revolutionary leadership – i.e. the domination of the workers and popular movements by treacherous reformist bureaucrats due to the weakness of authentic revolutionary forces – does not allow this. Rather we are entering a longer period of ferocious class struggles which will result in a number of pre-revolutionary, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary situations. The revolutionary democratic struggle can and will play an important role in this. Lenin already pointed out that the socialist revolution is not a single act but a whole epoch of class struggles: „*The socialist revolution is not a single act, it is not one battle on one front, but a whole epoch of acute class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of economics and politics, battles that can only end in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding, overshadowing it, etc. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practise full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.*“¹⁵⁶

156 V.I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 144

The main slogan: Conversion of the State of Emergency into a Popular Uprising

For revolutionaries the starting point of any tactic must be the refusal of the bourgeois propaganda calling for “national unity” in order to fight the pandemic. It is under the cover of such reactionary “national unity” that the capitalists are making millions of workers unemployed and cut social benefits. It is under the cover of such reactionary “national unity” that the ruling classes are imposing state of emergency and building up their repression apparatus. The support for “national unity” by the reformist bureaucracy, which dominates the workers and popular organizations, is tantamount to *class truce*, i.e. the refusal to fight for the interests of the popular masses. In other words, the ideology of “national unity” results in the political and ideological disarming of our class. However, without mass struggles, the workers and popular masses will not achieve anything in the struggle against the political and economic attacks.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks had a lot of experience in fighting against attacks of the ruling class under the cover of “national unity”. During World War I, they were faced with a huge wave of patriotism and calls not to weaken their government in such a difficult hour like a major war. As it is well known, the Marxists refused any such capitulation and rather strived to utilize such situations in order to weaken and ultimately defeat the ruling class. Hence, soon after the beginning of the war in August 1914, the Bolsheviks raised in their *Manifesto* as the central slogan: “*The conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan.*”¹⁵⁷ During a cholera epidemic and a famine in Russia in 1910-11, they emphasized in similar spirit that the Marxist propaganda must explain that “*a real struggle against famine is inconceivable ... without a revolution*”. (See on this below)

We think that revolutionaries need to elaborate a similar slogan which summarizes the central line of the whole period. As we have explained above, we have identified the chauvinist bonapartist state machinery as the key obstacle, the central enemy for advancing the liberation struggle in the present phase. And we also concluded that the coming period is full of explosive potential since the contradictions are sharpening dramatically and struggles for immediate demands can easily result in violent clashes with the regimes.

For all these reasons we consider the following slogan as an appropriate summary of the strategic line for the coming period: “*Conversion of the State of Emergency into a Popular Uprising*”. As mentioned above, revolutionaries have to make a concrete assessment of the consciousness of the masses in each country in order to derive to the necessary slogans for immediate action. But what has to be done now is to *explain* the masses that they need to fight against the state of emergency regimes and to bring them down in an insurrection. Hence, it

157 V.I. Lenin: The War and Russian Social-Democracy (1914); in: LCW Vol. 21, p.34

is important now to prepare politically and organizationally for the struggles against the new Leviathan. Naturally, such a slogan has to be combined with concrete demands as outlined in our Manifesto or our Health Action Program as well as other appropriate demands from the Transitional Program.

It is particularly urgent to emphasize the necessity that the popular masses must not trust the government and their manipulations which they spread in order to cover their attacks. Hence, revolutionaries must raise slogans like "*Workers and Oppressed: Don't trust the State of the Rich and Powerful! Trust only Yourselfes!*" Such a slogan expresses the necessity to fight the pandemic not in collaboration *with* the ruling class but rather *against* it. This must be combined with concrete proposals for grassroots initiatives to improve the health conditions, to organize popular health initiatives, to organize self-defense units for defense against the repression, to fight within the trade union is possible and outside if necessary against the economic attacks, etc.

As said above, revolutionaries must support spontaneous mass protests and help to give them direction and organization. Building action committees in workplaces, neighborhoods, schools and universities is key for this.

In the imperialist countries it is urgent for revolutionaries to agitate for massive aid programs for the oppressed peoples living in the Global South. It is these peoples which will be affected most dramatically by the breakdown of the world economy with all the horrible consequences like hunger and epidemics. Hence, it is urgent that the workers and popular organizations, particularly in the imperialist countries, mobilize for an *immediate cancellation of all debts* as we as for *massive international aid for the peoples of the Global South*. Their slogan should be: "*The imperialists took the wealth, the health and lives of our people in the East and South! It's time that the imperialists pay back their debts!*"

Another crucial task of revolutionaries in the imperialist countries is to oppose all forms of chauvinism against Great Power rivals. As the RCIT has outlined repeatedly, Marxists advocate the policy of revolutionary defeatism in such cases and emphasize that "*the main enemy is at home*". In cases of imperialist wars in semi-colonial colonial countries, revolutionaries will advocate the defense of the oppressed people and the defeat of the imperialist enemy.

Furthermore, it is indispensable for revolutionaries to wage an intransigent fight inside the workers and popular movement against the bureaucracies which support the policy of "national unity" and class truce, austerity programs, lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights. It is not possible to fight against the counter-revolutionary offensive without fighting against its supporters within the workers and popular movement. "*Fight Social-Bonapartism! Break with the Lockdown Left!*" – these are slogans which summarize such an orientation.

This does not mean that revolutionaries should refrain from fighting within the workers and popular mass organizations for a correct orientation. They must demand from any "progressive" parliamentary representatives to vote

against all reactionary laws enabling mass lockdown, state of emergency, against banning of public assemblies, financial aid programs for the capitalists, etc. No to any participation in or support of bourgeois governments! Likewise they should demand from all workers and popular mass organizations to publish unambiguous statements refusing any policy of class truce and denouncing all these political and economic attacks of the bourgeoisie. They should call for the preparation for and organizing of mass protests. Finally, revolutionaries should call for international coordination and initiatives in order to fight against the global counter-revolutionary offensive as well as against any Great Power chauvinism.

In many circumstances, the class struggles in this initial conjuncture will be limited to basic, immediate demands. Workers stage protests at their work places for better health protection or urban poor break the lockdown and loot supermarkets to get food. In Nigeria's capital Lagos we have seen first initiatives to build neighborhood self-defense committees.¹⁵⁸

Naturally, revolutionaries have to support such struggles. They should intervene in order to bring organization and direction into these struggles as well as to explain the connection of such issues with the political counter-revolutionary agenda of the ruling class and the necessity to link all immediate demands with slogans directed towards defeating the state of emergency regimes.

Finally, it is urgent to point out that revolutionaries must adapt their political work to the dramatic change of the conditions. In a number of countries it has been possible until now to work relatively unrestricted under conditions of bourgeois democracy. Of course, there have been always limitations and different forms of repression – in some countries more than in others. However, what we see now is a deterioration of the legal conditions for revolutionary work all over the world. It seems that for the foreseeable future it will be legally banned to have larger public meetings and demonstrations under the pretext of the pandemic. Surveillance will increase dramatically and it might not last long until even disputing the real nature of this pandemic could become punishable.

This means that Marxists have to learn from the experience of countries where political work had to be done under semi-legal or illegal conditions (e.g. Egypt) respectively from the experience of revolutionaries in the past (e.g. the Bolsheviks in Tsarist Russia).

158 See on this RSV: COVID-19 Crisis in Nigeria: State Repression and the Left, 13th April, 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/report-on-covid-19-crisis-in-nigeria-13-4-2020/>; Fidelis Mbah: Nigeria: Lagos residents defend homes against curfew bandits, 15 April 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/nigeria-lagos-residents-defend-homes-curfew-bandits-200414165917113.html>

Famine and epidemics: some lessons from Lenin and the Bolsheviks

The approach of Marxists to catastrophes like famine and epidemics was pretty clear. While they recognized that such catastrophes often have “natural” causes (e.g. bad harvest), they explained that it is the duty of the society to help the victims in such circumstances. However, they emphasized that Marxists must not do so by subordinating to the governmental policy. They refused any support for the actions of the Tsarist regime. Quite the opposite, Lenin emphasized that Marxists must explain in such situations that no solution can be achieved within the existing social order and that the only way forward is the revolutionary overthrow of the regime.

Naturally, this did not mean that the Bolsheviks had a passive, fatalist approach. They supported grassroots initiatives of workers and poor peasants to help the victims of such famine and cholera. However, they stressed that such support should be not limited to philanthropically aid but should be combined with political agitation and propaganda among the popular masses.

Finally, it was inconceivable for Lenin and the Bolsheviks to refrain from calling for mass struggles in such periods of famine and cholera. Contrary, they emphasized that such catastrophes are an additional reason for the working class and the poor peasants to fight against the regime and to overthrow it. They did not delay the struggle but called for demonstrations and strikes in the given situation.

As an example for this we refer to the famine and cholera catastrophe which shattered Russia in 1910-11. The cholera begun in June 1910 and had devastating effects. Overall, more than 230,000 cases and 110,000 deaths occurred during this epidemic. The case-fatality rate was a staggering 45 percent. About 20 million people suffered from the consequences of the famine.¹⁵⁹

Lenin explained in various articles that Marxists must utilize the masses’ experience with the incompetent and greedy regime in order to explain the necessity for the revolutionary overthrow of the autocracy. In an article published at the end of 1911, he wrote: *“A real struggle against famine is inconceivable without the appeasement of the peasants’ land hunger, without the relief from the crushing pressure of taxes, without an improvement in their cultural standard, without a decisive change in their legal status, without the confiscation of the landed estates—without a revolution. In this sense this year’s crop failure is a new reminder of the doom that awaits the entire existing political system, the June Third monarchy.”*¹⁶⁰

159 See on this e.g. Charlotte E. Henze: *Disease, Health Care and Government in Late Imperial Russia. Life and death on the Volga, 1823–1914*, Routledge, New York 2011 (chapter 5); George Childs Kohn: *Encyclopedia of Plague and Pestilence: From Ancient Times to the Present*, Third Edition, Facts On File, New York 2008, pp. 327-329; John P. Davis: *Russia in the Time of Cholera: Disease under Romanovs and Soviets*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018 (Chapter IV)

160 V. I. Lenin: *Famine and the Reactionary Duma*, in: *LCW Vol. 17*, p. 449

The same idea was repeated in another article published three months later: *“But famine in present-day Russia, after so many boastful speeches by the tsarist government on the benefits of the new agrarian policy, on the progress of the farms that have left the village commune, etc., is sure to teach the peasants a great deal. The famine will destroy millions of lives, but it will also destroy the last remnants of the savage, barbarian, slavish faith in the tsar, which has prevented the peasants from seeing that there must inevitably be a revolutionary fight against the tsarist monarchy and the landowners. The peasants can find a way out of their condition only by abolishing the landed estates. Only the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy, that bulwark of the landlords, can lead to a life more or less worthy of human beings, to deliverance from starvation and hopeless poverty. It is the duty of every class-conscious worker and every class-conscious peasant to make this clear. This is our main task in connection with the famine. The organisation, wherever possible, of collections among the workers for the starving peasants and the forwarding of such funds through the Social-Democratic members of the Duma—that, of course, is also one of the necessary jobs.”*¹⁶¹

And a resolution of the Sixth (Prague) All-Russia Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party – as the Bolsheviks called themselves at that time – in January 1912 explained the Marxist approach in more detail. This resolution titled *“The Tasks of Social-Democracy in the Struggle against the Famine”* was drafted by Lenin and sharply criticized the government’s response to the catastrophe as well as the weak response by the liberal opposition parties. It drew three central conclusions which we quote in full.

“Having considered all these points, the Conference resolves that it is essential:

(a) *To enlist all Social-Democratic forces to extend propaganda and agitation among the broad masses of the population, and in particular among the peasantry, explaining the connection between the famine and tsarism and its en tire policy; to distribute in the villages for agitational purposes the Duma speeches, not only of the Social-Democrats and Trudoviks, but even of such friends of the tsar as Markov the Second, and to popularise the political demands of Social-Democracy—the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy, the establishment of a democratic republic and the confiscation of landed estates;*

(b) *To support the desire of the workers to aid the famine-stricken as far as possible, advising them to send their donations only to the Social-Democratic group in the Duma, to the workers’ press, or to workers’ cultural-educational and other associations, etc., and forming special nuclei of Social-Democrats and democrats upon their joining groups, committees or commissions for aid to the famine-stricken;*

(c) *To endeavour to give expression to the anger of the democratic masses aroused by the famine in demonstrations, mass meetings, and other forms of mass struggle against tsarism.”*¹⁶²

While we are fully aware of the differences between the concrete conditions

161 V. I. Lenin: Famine, in: LCW Vol. 17, p. 528

162 V. I. Lenin: The Tasks of Social-Democracy in the Struggle against the Famine, Resolution of the Sixth (Prague) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P., January 5–17 (18–30), 1912, in: LCW Vol. 17, p. 475

of the famine and cholera in Russia in 1910-11 and that of the COVID-19 pandemic, we think that the method of the Bolshevik's approach is highly instructive for revolutionaries today.

In this context we should also refer briefly to the experience of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union after taking power in October 1917. It would go beyond the constraints of this work to deal with this issue in detail at this place. However, there exist a number of informative works on this subject.¹⁶³

In summary, the revolutionary government in the times of Lenin and Trotsky was faced with extraordinary challenges. Four years of imperialist war and then another three years of civil war had killed millions of people and destroyed large parts of the country's economic resources. As a result, Russia faced a drastic decline in public health and was devastated by various plagues. The country experienced a horrible famine in 1921/22. A typhus epidemic between 1918 and 1922 caused 2.5 million deaths and a cholera outbreak between 1921 and 1923 resulted in an estimated 13 million deaths. Add to this the so-called "Spanish flu". Naturally, these were highly infectious and deadly plagues. The death rate for typhus was 8 to 10% and higher rates in rural areas. There was a high mortality rate of approximately 50% among doctors treating typhus patients in public hospitals.

However, through determined efforts in public health, as part of the construction of a workers and peasant state with a planned economy, the Soviet government was highly successful to overcome this catastrophic situation. As a result, and despite all these mentioned catastrophes, the Soviet government was able to raise the life expectancy from 32 years (1913) to 44 years (1926).

The focus of the Soviets health policy was to improve the social and hygienic conditions of the popular masses in order to undermine the basis for the spread of these diseases. *"A Health Statute in 1921 declared "the Communist Party of the Soviet Union will base its public health policy on a comprehensive series of health and sanitary measures designed to prevent the development of disease". An outbreak of malaria in 1920 prompted the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Moscow to pass a raft of measures to reduce the spread of the disease, establishing compulsory registration of sufferers and those exposed to the disease, malarial stations to provide treatment and clinical and laboratory work. Quinine was distributed duty-free. (...) In April 1919*

163 See on this e.g. Christopher Williams: *Health and Welfare in St. Petersburg, 1900–1941: Protecting the Collective*, Routledge, New York 2018; Sir Arthur Newsholme and John Adams Kingsbury: *Red Medicine: Socialized Health in Soviet Russia*, William Heinemann (Medical Books), London 1934; Dorena Caroli: *Bolshevism, Stalinism, and Social Welfare (1917–1936)*, in: *International Review of Social History*, 2003, Vol.48(1), pp.27-54; Susan Gross Solomon: *The Limits of Government Patronage of Sciences: Social Hygiene and the Soviet State, 1920–1930*, in: *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 3; Issue 3 (1990), pp. 405-435; Barbara Khwaja: *Health Reform in Revolutionary Russia*, 26 May 2017, <https://www.sochealth.co.uk/2017/05/26/health-reform-revolutionary-russia/>; Prof. Dr. P. Mühlens: *Die russische Hunger- und Seuchenkatastrophe in den Jahren 1921-1922*, Verlag von Julius Springer, Berlin 1923, <https://www.springer.com/de/book/9783642940422>

there was further compulsory vaccination against smallpox and health education campaigns and committees in districts, villages, factories, barracks together with numerous poster campaigns. By March 1920 the Commissariat of Public Health's focus of attention was the health of school age children, especially those suffering from TB. The Regional Institute for Microbiology and Epidemiology in South East Russia opened in Saratov in 1919. During epidemic outbreaks its epidemiological teams were sent out to assist affected areas. By 1925 a network of medical observation stations, anti plague laboratories and hospitals covering ten towns organised sanitation programmes led by sanitation and anti plague teams to clean workplaces and workers domestic accommodation, incinerate dwellings, carry out autopsies, organise burials and enforce isolation zones, combat rodents and fleas and run health education campaigns." ¹⁶⁴

The health policy of the Soviet government can be summarized in an official slogan which was propagated at that time: *"On from the struggle against epidemics to the fight for more healthful working and living conditions"*.

However, it is equally noteworthy that despite the highly infectious and deadly epidemics which devastated the country at that time, the Soviet government did not resort to lockdowns of the population. Neither did they ban mass gatherings or propagate "social distancing". Such individualistic and backward measures were alien to the Bolsheviks. Of course, they refused to resort to such measures not because they were not aware of the infectious nature of diseases like typhus (especially spotted fever).

Dr. Mühlens, a German professor of medicine who worked in Russia in the early 1920s in order to support the efforts of the Soviet health authorities, published a pamphlet on his experience in 1923. His report demonstrates that the Bolsheviks were fully aware of the fact that mass gatherings increase the danger of spreading diseases. *"In Moscow one could see an increase of the number of diseases after all larger celebrations, after gatherings of workers who were already infected."* ¹⁶⁵

But as Marxists the Bolsheviks recognized that the main instrument to fight such epidemics is to improve the living conditions of the people so that any disease does not find conditions for easy transmission. At the same time the Soviet government recognized that any social improvement is only possible if the workers and popular masses unite in collective action and do not separate individualistically via "social distancing".

These are important lessons to be learned for today. It is absurd that so-called leftists today support such reactionary concepts like mass lockdown and "social distancing" with banning of mass actions. The Bolsheviks in the early 1920s faced much worse epidemics than COVID-19 and they had much more primitive social and medical resources to combat such diseases than it is the case today. Nevertheless, they never resorted to similar measures of mass repression against the population as most bourgeois governments are doing today.

164 Barbara Khwaja: Health Reform in Revolutionary Russia

165 Prof. Dr. P. Mühlens: Die russische Hunger- und Seuchenkatastrophe in den Jahren 1921-1922, p. 28 (our translation; emphasis in the original)

The same is true for the whole communist movement. The so-called “Spanish flu” which raged the world from January 1918 to December 1920 was one of the worst pandemics in human history. It infected 500 million people – about a third of the world’s population at the time. There are different estimations of the death toll but they range from about 17 million to 50 million or even up to 100 million.¹⁶⁶

However, the response of the communists at that time was certainly not to call people to stay home, to stop their mass actions and class struggles or even to call for repressive state measures like mass lockdown. Contrary, the communists at that time intensified the class struggle and the collective mass activities. They fought for the overthrow of the capitalist class in order to create the conditions for a better, socialist society – a society which will overcome poverty and misery and with it the conditions for the spread of such deadly pandemics. It is absurd if groups which claim to stand in the tradition of the early Communist International have a completely contrary approach today. It is a shameful fact that such leftists support the state bonapartist suppression of democratic rights in times of COVID-19 while the communists totally opposed this and called for mass struggles in times of the “Spanish flu” (which was much more deadly than the Corona Virus)! The RCIT and all authentic revolutionaries today can not but follow the tradition of the communist movement in the times of Lenin and Trotsky!

Reactionary opponents of the lockdown

Left-wing supporters of the state-bonapartist lockdown policy like to refute our arguments by referring to reactionary forces which oppose the lockdown policy. They demagogically accuse us that we would “have the same position like Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro”. This is an argument which can be diplomatically characterized as mind-bendingly stupid.

It is a well-known method of anti-Marxist demagogues to slander revolutionaries as “supporters” or “agents” of evil powers. In World War I the Bolsheviks were accused of being “agents of German imperialism” because they called for the defeat of Russian imperialism. Such accusations were also raised by the “left-wing” parties of the Kerensky government in summer 1917, i.e. the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionaries. Similarly the Stalinists and social democrats accused the Trotskyists as “agents of Hitler” and “objective accomplice of fascism” in the 1930s because they refused to defend Western imperialism against Germany. In short, such accusations are well-known reactionary methods of slander.

Of course, in the real world it often happens that this or that project of a bourgeois government is opposed not only by revolutionaries but also by reaction-

¹⁶⁶ See on this e.g. Jaime Breitnauer: The Spanish Flu Epidemic and its Influence on History. Stories from the 1918–1920 global flu pandemic, Pen and Sword Books Ltd, Philadelphia 2019

aries. There exist always differences – sometimes smaller and sometimes larger – within the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes. There were pro-German circles within the ruling clique of the Tsar which opposed Russia's war against the Central Powers in 1914-16. For the Russian social-imperialists this was all the same – the Bolsheviks opposed Russia's war efforts and so did the pro-German aristocrats in Saint Petersburg. Likewise, there were pro-Nazi circles in the ruling class in France and Britain in 1939-40 which opposed a war against Hitler. We will find similar phenomena in more recent time. The extreme right-wing party of Le Pen (the father) opposed France's participation in the imperialist war against Iraq in 1991. Naturally, this did not stop us to oppose this war too – of course from an internationalist and anti-imperialist point of view. When U.S. imperialism demagogically “supports” the rights of the nationally oppressed Uyghurs in China, should we reduce our real, internationalist support for the Muslim brothers and sisters?! Or if Russia and China condemn the aggression of U.S. imperialism against Iran, does this reduce our opposition against Trump's sanctions and saber-rattling?! Sometimes, right-wing forces in opposition oppose this or that austerity plan of a government with demagogic “pro-people” phrases. Should this mislead revolutionaries to stop their opposition to such attacks? Of course not!

In the concrete case of the COVID-19 crisis things are pretty obvious. As the RCIT has explained in its documents since the beginning of this phase, revolutionaries call for opposition against all austerity cuts, for the expansion of the public health service, for free mass testing, etc. In order to fight for such demands, it is necessary to defend democratic rights instead of supporting the lockdown which nothing but disarms the working class. Needless to say that right-wing opponents of the lockdown do neither call for mass mobilizations against austerity and the capitalist crisis nor do they call for an expansion of the public health care.

But what are the specific reasons why Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro initially were opposed to the lockdown and in the case of Trump and Bolsonaro remain critical? It seems to us that there are basically two reasons. First, as we have seen in a number of other cases, Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro are rather clowns than strategic thinkers. Their governments are highly instable and they reduce their considerations to focus on winning the next election by any means. Hence, for example Trump prefers to build a “Mexican Wall” with money from the Pentagon budget instead of keeping the strength of the U.S. military abroad. Politically speaking, these clowns are incapable of acting as representatives of the “ideal total capitalist”.

Second, and related to the first point, the kind of right-wing forces like Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro usually represent only a minority faction within the monopoly bourgeoisie. Hence, they need to rely – more than other factions of the bourgeoisie – on the support of petty-bourgeois forces and small and middle capitalists. Such forces – small business people, small and middle capitalists,

workers in rural areas who are employed in small enterprises, etc. – are strongly and immediately affected by the shutdown of the economy as they lose the material basis of their income. Since politicians like Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro depend particularly on the support of such layers, they are more reluctant to support lockdowns.

Marxists support social and economic programs which defend first and foremost the interests of the working class and the oppressed. However, we will also defend the economic interests of petty-bourgeois layers in so far as we can turn them against the monopoly capitalists and hence create a basis for unity with the working class. We therefore support aid programs (financed by higher taxes of the big capitalists) in support of such petty-bourgeois layers in times of economic slump. Again, needless to say that such a policy is diametrically opposed to that of the right-wing reactionaries à la Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro.

Finally, the idea that right-wing reactionary governments would tend to oppose the lockdown is simply not true. Yes, Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro hesitate or hesitated for the reasons mentioned above. However, other right-wing governments – which are no less reactionary than Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro – enthusiastically support the lockdown policy. See e.g. Modi in India, Netanyahu in Israel or Orbans in Hungary.

Allies and opponents in future mass struggles

As we have outlined in our analysis above, the current events are a historic watershed. It will accelerate and deepen a process which has been taking place already in the years before. We have seen a rise of class struggles resulting in the emergence of new layers of young activists. These militants, on one hand, have a raw consciousness and lack experience. On the other hand, they are free from the conservative political ballast of the past.

Furthermore, the aggravation of the capitalist crisis as well as the escalating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers have deepened the contradictions within the official workers and popular movements. Reformist parties like SYRIZA in Greece have led governments which imposed years of brutal austerity and privatization on the popular masses. Bolivarian parties like the PSUV in Venezuela are a driving force in subordinating the country to Russian and Chinese imperialism. The French “Communist” Party as well as Jean-Luc Mélenchon supported the military intervention of Paris in Mali in 2013. The increasing distance between the leading reformist and populist parties in the official workers and popular movements, on one hand, and the new generations of militants active in the revolutionary uprisings of the past decade, on the other hand, has become very visible. One just needs to remember the vulgar denunciations of the liberation struggles in the Arab world by these reformist parties which in a number of cases mounted to the shameless support for the

counterrevolution (e.g. support for Assad or the military coup of General Sisi in Egypt in July 2013 by Stalinists and Bolivarians). Many so-called Trotskyists also shared such position or have taken a neutral stance in such conflicts. Likewise we see many Stalinists, Bolivarians and “Trotskyists” who – in open or disguised fashion – side with Russian or Chinese imperialism against the U.S. rival. There have also been various leftists who refused to support the *Gilet Jaune* movement in France.

All these developments have been put on a qualitatively higher (or one could also say lower) level by the recent global counter-revolutionary offensive. Nearly all leaderships of the official workers and popular movements and large sectors of the so-called left support the lockdown policy and the banning of public assemblies in the current period. In short, these forces are supporting the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie more than ever before in recent history.

For these reasons, we believe that the developments in the new Leviathan era will massively exacerbate the polarization within the workers and popular movement. The healthy elements – most likely a minority among these forces – will break with the majority and move to the left. However, the majority will continue and accelerate their turn to the right and to the camp of counter-revolution.

Since World War I Marxists have traditionally characterized those reformists within the workers movement supporting the imperialist policy as “*social-chauvinists*” or “*social-imperialists*”. Given the fact that the major element of the current crisis is the global counter-revolutionary shift to state bonapartism we have to characterize reformist and centrist forces supporting these measures as “*social-bonapartists*”. Such a Lockdown Left (or Leviathan Left) has joined the other, the counter-revolutionary side of the barricade.

The RCIT and all authentic revolutionaries will strengthen their efforts to fight against the social-bonapartist forces within the trade unions and the workers and popular movements in general. We welcome any rapprochement with leftward-moving socialist forces which share our broad analysis and conclusions in the current world situation and which are willing to break with the Lockdown Left. We are ready to participate in any concrete project which can advance such a process. The goal can only be to open a process of discussion and close collaboration and, if possible, to work towards fusion of forces. This is the only way to drive forward the work towards building a new World Party of Socialist Revolution.

It is important in this context to emphasize that when we speak about such forces moving to the left we don't limit this exclusively to self-proclaimed Trotskyists. Lenin recognized during World War I that potential companions of the revolutionary movement could not only be found among the Marxist forces in the Second International but also from outside. Hence, he looked to potential allies among syndicalists. Later in the early times of the Communist International, revolutionaries also opened discussion and tried to win – in some

cases with success – sectors of Anarchism, Chinese, Indian and Korean nationalists as well as black nationalists in the U.S. (e.g. the so-called “*African Blood Brotherhood*”).¹⁶⁷

Likewise, revolutionaries today have to be open and actively approach progressive forces from outside the “Trotskyist” and even outside the “Marxist” milieu. It would be surprising if the current conclusions in world politics will have no repercussions with Maoism, Pan-Africanism, various petty-bourgeois democratic movements, etc.

Furthermore, revolutionaries should be open to collaborate with forces with which we share no programmatic outlook and with which no fusion can be possible. However, if there is a common ground in terms of opposing state bonapartist oppression, imperialist wars, austerity attacks, etc. joint activities should not be excluded. Naturally, such collaboration must be limited to a strict united front tactic, i.e. joint practical activities without mixing the political banner.

Most importantly, we repeat, revolutionaries must refuse any orientation towards the middle class, the liberal intelligentsia and the labor aristocracy – an orientation which is typical for most of the so-called left. The RCIT has always criticized such an aristocratic orientation of the left. In fact, the left’s current collapse into social-bonapartism is the result of its political and ideological integration into this petty-bourgeois milieu. No, revolutionaries must – now more than ever – orientate towards the lower and middle strata of the working class and the oppressed. It is these layers which are most dramatically affected by the current triple crisis of capitalism. It is these layers which will rebel first against the counter-revolutionary attacks. It is these layers which are least affected by all the Stalinist and reformist prejudices. In summary, the slogans of revolutionaries in building a new World Party of Socialist Revolution must be to break with the so-called “Left” and to orientate towards the working class and oppressed masses.

Our orientation is based on the approach of Lenin and Trotsky as we have explained in detail in other works.¹⁶⁸ Here we reproduce only three quotes to underline our argument. Lenin emphasized the fundamental difference in the orientation between the opportunists and the Marxists when he wrote in 1916: *“And it is therefore our duty, if we wish to remain socialists, to go down lower and deeper, to the real masses; this is the whole meaning and the whole purport of the struggle against opportunism. By exposing the fact that the opportunists and social-chauvinists are in reality betraying and selling the interests of the masses, that they are defending the temporary privileges of a minority of the workers, that they are the vehicles of bourgeois ideas and influences, that they are really allies and agents of the*

167 See on this e.g. James P. Cannon: *First Ten Years of American Communism: Report of a Participant*, Pathfinder, New York 1973; Hakim Adi: *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, Africa World Press, Trenton 2013

168 See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2014

*bourgeoisie, we teach the masses to appreciate their true political interests, to fight for socialism and for the revolution through all the long and painful vicissitudes of imperialist wars and imperialist armistices.”*¹⁶⁹

Likewise, in explaining the strategic orientation of Bolshevism, Trotsky said: *„The strength and meaning of Bolshevism consists in the fact that it appeals to oppressed and exploited masses and not to the upper strata of the working class.”*¹⁷⁰ And in the famous founding program of the Fourth International – the *Transitional Program* – Trotsky stated: *„Opportunist organizations by their very nature concentrate their chief attention on the top layers of the working class and therefore ignore both the youth and the women workers. The decay of capitalism, however, deals its heaviest blows to the woman as a wage earner and as a housewife. The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class; consequently, among the women workers. Here they will find inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness and readiness to sacrifice.”*¹⁷¹

Some years ago, the RCIT summarized its approach on this issue in a major document on the world situation. We think that our conclusions are more relevant than ever: *“It is because of its orientation to the labor bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeoisie intelligentsia that the bulk of the centrist and left-reformist milieu is increasingly poisoned by pessimism, skepticism, moaning about the lack of “left unity”, hysterical renunciation of the “Leninist hyper-centralism” and the “vanguard party” concept as well as praising of liquidationism. Authentic revolutionaries however orientate towards the new, militant layers from the working class and the oppressed who are looking for a program and a strategy to fight against exploitation and oppression. This is where our optimism and firmness stems from. Those who wish to develop in a revolutionary direction must break from an orientation towards the centrist and left-reformist swamp and look for rooting themselves in the healthy, militant proletarian milieu.*

This does not mean that revolutionaries should ignore the reformist parties or the centrist groups. The policy of the united front tactic remains in full force as well as the need for a hard struggle to remove these revisionists’ influence in the workers vanguard. But in the first line the RCIT orientates towards new militants and initiatives from the ranks of the workers and the oppressed. From these layers only, new promising forces and a new dynamic will come. And such developments might affect healthier elements from the ranks of left-reformism and centrism and help them to break with the revisionists’ rotten method.

Revolutionaries have to understand in depth that not only has capitalism entered a new historic period of massive instability and sharp turns, but the international workers’ movement has done so too. No stone is left unturned. Those forces, who don’t understand the character of the period and its corresponding tasks, are doomed to degener-

169 V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism and the Split In Socialism* (1916), in: LCW Vol. 23, p. 120

170 Leon Trotsky: *Perspectives and Tasks in the East*. Speech on the third anniversary of the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (21 April 1924); in: *Leon Trotsky Speaks*, Pathfinder 1972, p. 205

171 Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*. The *Transitional Program* (1938); in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, New York 1973, p. 218

*ate more and more and get pushed to the right. For those forces, however, who are coming closer to an understanding of the sharply antagonistic nature of the present period, who are willing to join the masses in their struggles – in particular the lower strata of the working class and the oppressed – without arrogantly sneering about their “backward consciousness” and who are at the same time determined to fight intransigently for the revolutionary program and who ruthlessly attack the reformist and centrist traitors – those forces can revolve themselves and play a healthy and utterly positive role in the struggle to build the new World Party of Socialist Revolution. Being aware of the limitations of historic analogies, one has to see that to a certain degree the present period bears similarities to the years after the outbreak of World War I in 1914. In this period the workers’ movement went through sharp crises, splits and transformations. In this period the rottenness of the centrist majority of the Second International – which already existed before 1914 but was less obvious – came to full light. The orientation and tactics of Lenin and his supporters are highly instructive for the Bolshevik-Communists today.”*¹⁷²

172 RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists (March 2013). Theses of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, March 2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 8, p. 42, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013/>

V. The Lockdown Left: A Critique

Lenin once commented that „war is often useful in exposing what is rotten and discarding the conventionalities.“¹⁷³ The same can be said about the current COVID-19 crisis. The recent weeks have helped to “expose what is rotten” in the reformist and centrist left.

As we have shown in previous chapters the capitalist classes all over the world have launched gigantic economic attacks on the working class. Millions and millions of people have been thrown on the streets, the urban and rural poor are desperately fighting for survival, and many small shops have been driven into bankruptcy. However, there is hardly any resistance by the official workers and popular movements against these attacks of the bourgeoisie. Likewise the reformists launch no protests against the rapid expansion of the police and surveillance state. And, as we have also shown, all these capitulations by the reformists have taken place under the cover of the COVID-19 crisis.

Stalinist and left-reformist executors of the state-bonapartist lockdown policy

In many countries the leaderships of the trade unions and popular organizations agreed to the emergency economic, social and health programs decreed by the bourgeois governments. In several cases, reformist parties were even active promoters of the austerity and state bonapartist programs. As we have shown in an article, “left-wing” parties like PODEMOS, the *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE, Communist Party of Spain) – the historic party of Spanish Stalinism – and its ally *Izquierda Unida* (IU, United Left) are part of the government coalition led by the social democratic Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.¹⁷⁴ They have all fully supported the state bonapartist attacks. The PCE published statements saying explicitly: “We welcome the declaration of the state of alert, which allows the Government to coordinate and plan measures and functions of any public administration.”¹⁷⁵

The same is the case in South Africa where the Communist Party is a cru-

173 V.I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 115

174 Michael Pröbsting: COVID-19 and the Lockdown Left: The Example of PODEMOS and Stalinism in Spain, 24 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-lockdown-left-podemos-and-stalinism-in-spain/>

175 PCE: In light of the situation created by the expansion of the COVID-19 epidemic and its impact in Spain, 16 March 2020, <https://www.pce.es/in-light-of-the-situation-created-by-the-expansion-of-the-covid-19-epidemic-and-its-impact-in-spain/> (This statement has been published in English language by the PCE itself.)

cial part of the government coalition since 1994. As such, the SACP shares full responsibility for the nationwide military-patrolled lockdown which has been imposed on the people and which has caused massive hunger and poverty.

These are not isolated examples. In many countries Stalinists and social democrats actively support the lockdown policy. In Austria, the Stalinist party only dared to appeal to the conservative-led government to violate fundamental democratic rights for not too long: *“While many measures to contain the spreading of the Corona Virus COVID-19 are reasonable we also note that these restrictions of freedom of assembly and the massive interference in personal civil rights and liberties as well as in labor rights must be only of limited duration.”*¹⁷⁶

In countries where a lockdown and the suppression of democratic rights have not been already imposed, the Stalinists call for such – of course all under the cover of COVID-19. In Brazil, the PCB even opens its statement by praising and demanding *“largest possible scale, of social isolation”* which means nothing else but a ban of mass assemblies and activities. *“All over the world, the necessary actions to combat the spread of the coronavirus include the adoption, on the largest possible scale, of social isolation, which significantly reduces the economic activity of the countries.”*¹⁷⁷

Even in countries where the lockdown has very visibly provoked dramatic consequences for the popular masses, the Stalinists refrain from calling for its end and from calling for any struggles. In a recently published statement, the Political Bureau of the CPI(Marxists) in India is forced to admit the brutal consequences of the lockdown. *“The experience of the three week lockdown has shown the large scale spread of hunger and inadequate shelter for a significant section of our people.”* They are also forced to admit that the Modi government did not do any mass-testing during the period of the lockdown. *“The lockdown period should have been utilised for conducting large scale testing to identify the clusters where the pandemic is spreading in order to isolate and contain. Testing, however, remains at a very low level, one of the lowest in the world.”* What a surprise! As if this would have ever been the intention of the Modi government! The whole purpose of the lockdown is to atomize and weaken the people and not to improve their health situation!

However, irrespective of all this obvious devastating and useless role of the lockdown, the CPI(M) limit itself to ... call the right-wing Modi government to do better! *“It is most unfortunate that the Prime Minister did not decry some attempts that seek to sharpen social and communal polarisation. The government must ensure*

176 Kämpferische Arbeiterfront statt „Team Österreich“! Stellungnahme des Parteivorstands der Partei der Arbeit Österreichs (PdA), 19. März 2020, <http://parteierarbeit.at/?p=5937>. Here is the German-language original: *„So sinnvoll viele Maßnahmen, die derzeit zur Eindämmung der Ausbreitung des Coronavirus COVID-19 in Kraft sind, sein mögen, so sehr ist auch festzuhalten, dass diese Einschränkungen der Versammlungsfreiheit und der massive Eingriff in persönliche Freiheitsrechte und ins Arbeitsrecht nur von befristeter Dauer sein dürfen.“*

177 Brazilian CP: It is time to save working people, not capital! 8 April 2020, <http://www.solidnet.org/article/Brazilian-CP-It-is-time-to-save-working-people-not-capital/>

*that such disruptive efforts do not occur. We can only win this battle against Covid-19 with complete unity amongst our people. The Prime Minister said that the government will review the situation on April 20 and then take measures for some relaxation. Arrangements must be made to transport the migrant workers back to their homes. The Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) calls upon the Central Government to immediately address these issues and issue the necessary guidelines.”*¹⁷⁸ Not a single word about bringing down the state of emergency or about the need for the masses to fight back!

“Trotskyist” cheerleaders of the bonapartist state of emergency

A number of self-proclaimed “Trotskyist” organizations share this outlook. The *International Marxist Tendency* (IMT) led by Alan Woods is an example for social-bonapartism in “Trotskyist” clothes. The IMT’s central statement on the COVID-19 crisis praises the draconic lockdown policy of the Stalinist-capitalist regime in China as an example. It even supports China’s criticism of the lockdown policy of the Italian Conte government that it is not draconic enough!

„The emergency efforts must be organised by neighbourhood and workplace committees, which must be connected on a local and national level to organise a fully effective lockdown as the fastest means of dealing with the virus. (...) China today is undoubtedly a capitalist country. But it is a peculiar form of capitalism, which still retains some of the elements of central planning and state-controlled industries that it inherited from the past. It is precisely these elements that gave China a colossal advantage in combating the present pandemic, with quite remarkable results. This fact has been commented on by people who would not be normally sympathetic to socialism. The advantages China had in facing the Wuhan outbreak was that it could lockdown a huge area with around 50 million people, while using the resources of the rest of the country to come to the aid of the people in lockdown. They could send in nurses and doctors from other parts of the country; they could send resources from all around the country. Italy faced a very different situation. It received no help from the rest of Europe. In fact, countries like Germany blocked the export of face masks for instance, thinking in very short-term national terms. Had there been an internationally coordinated operation, things could have been very different. Here it is worth noting what Chinese doctors presently in Italy are saying needs doing. They have observed the situation in the country and from their experience of how they combatted the virus in Wuhan, they are of the opinion that there is still too much movement of people on the streets. This confirms what we have been saying ever since this new virus broke out: all non-essential production must be stopped. Italy could have been totally locked down, with the rest of Europe sending material and human resources to combat the initial spread of the virus. By doing so, the period of lockdown could have been shorter and more effective. Instead we had each national member state of the European Union acting in different ways and at different

¹⁷⁸ Polit Bureau of the CPI(M): Extended Lockdown: Poor & Marginalised Will Continue to Suffer, 14 April 2020, <http://www.solidnet.org/article/Marxistindia-Extended-Lockdown-Poor-Marginalised-Will-Continue-to-Suffer/>

speeds.”¹⁷⁹

The editor of the IMT’s website states in another article: *“For now, restrictions in China are being eased, but they are likely to be reimposed once a new outbreak takes off. Denmark and Italy are under lockdown. Many other countries will have to do the same. The governments are trying to appear to be “doing something”. While some of the measures taken make sense from an epidemiological point of view, they are undermined by private property, the anarchy of capitalism and the existence of the nation state.”*¹⁸⁰

In Nigeria, the IMT is forced to admit that the lockdown results in hunger. Its conclusion: we want a lockdown without hunger! *“Our concrete demand is: there should be adequate food, appropriate housings and other essentials for all while we keep safe at home to keep the virus at bay. (...) We demand: No to lockdown enhanced hunger – lockdown must come with adequate provision of food and essential household requirements for all in need.”*¹⁸¹ What a self-contradictory and illusionary demand! This is like accepting the cobra snake in your bed but asking it to leave one alone! As the RCIT comrades in Nigeria explained, one can not force the government to provide sufficient aid *without* mass struggles, i.e. without breaking the lockdown and the banning of public demonstrations and assemblies!¹⁸²

The extremely opportunist nature of the IMT’s social-bonapartism becomes very obvious when looking to its concrete implementation. In Austria the government coalition led by the conservative party of Prime Minister Sebastian Kurz imposed a state of emergency on 15 March. The central component of it is a decree by the minister of health banning people to leave their homes except for most necessary activities. The same decree also bans any public assembly and demonstration. (Later the government extended this ban of public assemblies until June.) The government also ordered the deployment of the

179 IMT: COVID-19 pandemic: the threatening catastrophe and how to combat it, 20 March 2020, <https://www.marxist.com/covid-19-pandemic-the-threatening-catastrophe-and-how-to-combat-it.htm>

180 Hamid Alizadeh: Coronavirus pandemic opens a new stage in world history, 13 March 2020, <https://www.marxist.com/coronavirus-pandemic-opens-a-new-stage-in-world-history.htm>

181 Oke Ogunde: The impact on Nigeria of the coronavirus pandemic: socioeconomic pandemonium! 14 April 2020, <https://www.marxist.com/the-impact-on-nigeria-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic-socioeconomic-pandemonium.htm>

182 See on this the statements of the Nigerian section of the RCIT: RSV: COVID-19 Crisis in Nigeria: State Repression and the Left, 13 April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/report-on-covid-19-crisis-in-nigeria-13-4-2020/>; WHAT DOES THE INVITATION OF CHINESE MEDICAL PERSONNEL MEAN FOR THE NIGERIAN HEALTH SECTOR? 10 April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/what-does-the-invitation-of-chinese-medical-personnel-mean-for-the-nigerian-health-sector/>; Nigeria: Against State Repression! For a Mass-based Alternative To The Pandemic! Cancel All Local and National Debt! 8 April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/nigeria-against-state-repression/>; Nigeria: Oppose the Lock Downs! 1 April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/nigeria-oppose-the-lock-downs/>

army and the civil service (the alternative to the military service).¹⁸³ Naturally, the Austrian section of the RCIT immediately issued a public statement which strongly condemned this state of emergency and the suppression of democratic rights.¹⁸⁴

The IMT in Austria however took a very different stance. It reacted with enthusiasm to the decree of the conservative-led government. In an official declaration of its leadership, the IMT stated: *„Europe is confronted with the biggest emergency situation since World War II. It is necessary to follow the instructions of the health authorities to isolate oneself physically. We support these provisions in content and practice. (...) People are now conscripted to the civil service in order to manage the foreseeable health emergency situation. We appeal to the conscripted age groups to quickly follow the draft, to volunteer and to put themselves into service to fight the catastrophe.“*¹⁸⁵

We leave aside at this point that at the time when the IMT issued this statement, no more than three people had died in Austria and until now the number of death is still a fraction of those who die every year because of influenza. We also leave aside the cynical imperialist arrogance of the IMT speaking of “the worst catastrophe in Europe since World War II” when more than 200.000 people were killed during the Bosnian War in 1992-95 (most of them Bosniaks). Surely, these were “only” people from the Balkans and not from “civilized” Western Europe so they seem not to count for the IMT. They count even less so for the IMT as these centrists shamefully refused at that time to defend the Bosnian people against the genocidal Serbian chauvinists – in contrast to our movement and to all authentic revolutionary internationalists.¹⁸⁶

Anyway, the public call of the IMT Austria to wholeheartedly support the state of emergency measures of the conservative government (including the ban of public assemblies and demonstrations) is a shameful demonstration of servile social-bonapartism. The same with the call to the youth to volunteer for

183 Bundesgesetzblatt Für Die Republik Österreich, Jahrgang 2020, Ausgegeben am 15. März 2020, Teil II, https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2020_II_98/BGBLA_2020_II_98.html

184 RKOB: COVID-19: Nieder mit dem Ausnahmezustand! Für ein ernsthaftes Gesundheitsprogramm statt Polizeistaat! 16 März 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/home/deutsch/covid-19-nieder-mit-dem-ausnahmezustand/>

185 Gesundheit vor Profite! - Erklärung der Funke-Redaktion zur Corona-Krise, Stellungnahme der Funke-Redaktion zur aktuellen Lage und den Aufgaben der Arbeiterbewegung, 15 March 2020, <https://derfunke.at/aktuelles/oesterreich/11329-gesundheit-vor-profite-erklaerung-der-funke-redaktion-zur-corona-krise> (our translation). Here is the German-language original: *„Europa ist mit der größten Notsituation seit dem 2. Weltkrieg konfrontiert. Es gilt den Aufforderungen der Gesundheitsbehörden, sich körperlich zu isolieren, Folge zu leisten. Wir unterstützen diese Maßnahme inhaltlich und praktisch. (...) Jetzt werden Zivildienstler eingezogen, um den absehbaren Gesundheitsnotstand bewältigbar zu machen. Wir appellieren an die eingezogenen Jahrgänge, der Einberufung schnell Folge zu leisten, sich freiwillig zu melden und sich in den Dienst der Bekämpfung der Katastrophe zu stellen.“*

186 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Are the Bosnian Muslims a Nation? March 1994, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/bosnian-muslim-nation/>

the civil service, which is a low-paid service for the capitalist state similar to the military service. When World War I began, social democrats called the youth to patriotically serve the government “in this difficult hour”. When the COVID-19 crisis began, the IMT called the youth in the same spirit to patriotically serve the government “in this difficult hour”.

The IMT is unfortunately not the only self-proclaimed Trotskyist organization supporting the lockdown policy. In Germany, well-known intellectuals of the Mandelist Fourth International like Winfried Wolf have also welcomed the lockdown policy. They even criticized the conservative-led government for doing so “*two weeks too late*”.¹⁸⁷ It is only logically that they also accept the massive attacks on democratic rights. They only appeal to the bourgeois government not to overdo their anti-democratic assault. Hence they demand that “*restrictions of constitutional rights should be clearly limited and temporarily*”.¹⁸⁸ No doubt, the ruling class will not be worried too much about such “criticism”!

Another example for such a capitulationist policy is the “*League for the Fifth International*” whose most prominent section was “*Workers Power*” in Britain (before it began its deep entryism in the Labour Party five years ago and renamed itself into “*Red Flag*”). It criticizes the bourgeois governments for not imposing earlier and stricter a lockdown! “*Having delayed its response while it worked out what was in its long term interest, the government has now been stampeded into an increasingly authoritarian stance, imposing the lockdown it should, and could, have imposed weeks ago.*”¹⁸⁹ While it is aware that the policy of atomizing the working class “is not a long-term solution”, it supports it as a short- and middle-term solution. “*Social distancing is not a long-term solution. (...) While socialists support and call for measures that limit social contact and place restrictions on people’s movement and contact with each other, so long as these measures are necessary for public safety, we in no way sign away our rights to determine how they are used and for how long they should last.*”¹⁹⁰ The L5I suggest a lockdown policy for a longer period as “*the restrictive control of the epidemic would shut down large parts of production for several months, but then allow production to resume with a largely undiminished workforce.*”

¹⁹¹ Evidently, these former revolutionaries are either not aware of the dramatic consequences for the working class if it is disabled to fight in the midst of a new 1929-like slump and the dramatic build-up of a police- and surveillance state ... or it willingly hazard the consequences. Even if it is only ignorance, such

187 Verena Kreiling, Winfried Wolf und Christian Zeller: Corona. Kapital. Krise für eine solidarische und ökologische Alternative, 4. April 2020, p. 1 (our translation)

188 Ibid, pp. 54-55 (our translation)

189 Red Flag: The Impending Catastrophe And How To Combat It, 24 March 2020, <https://www.redflagonline.org/the-impending-catastrophe-and-how-to-combat-it/>

190 Jeremy Dewar: Why the government is lying about coronavirus, 16 March 2020, <https://www.redflagonline.org/why-the-government-is-lying-about-coronavirus/>

191 Markus Lehner: Covid-19: From pandemic to global economic crisis (Part 2), translated from Neue Internationale 245, April, 2020, <https://fifthinternational.org/content/covid-19from-pandemic-global-economic-crisis-2>

stupidity borders to political criminality!¹⁹²

Excuse: Revisionist misunderstanding of the nature of the capitalist state

The IMT's and others criminal illusions in the capitalist state are not accidental. They are inextricably linked with their failure to understand the class nature of the capitalist state and the consequential tactics for revolutionaries. As we have pointed out in the previous chapter III, Marxists base their understanding of the bourgeois state on recognizing that it is a *"special organisation of force, an organisation of violence for the suppression of some class."* (Lenin) From this follows that the socialist revolution can not take place as a peaceful transformation but only as a violent, armed uprising aimed at the destruction of the capitalist state machinery as Lenin stated. *"The supersession of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution."*¹⁹³ *"The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine."*¹⁹⁴

However, sectors of centrism – like the whole tradition of Ted Grant, Peter Taaffe and Alan Woods – have always refused the Marxist approach as this would have undermined their pacifist and opportunist adaption to the bourgeois state in general and the reformist bureaucracy in particular. Alan Woods stated in a theoretical article on the IMT's theory of state: *„A peaceful transformation of society would be entirely possible if the trade union and reformist leaders were prepared to use the colossal power in their hands to change society."*¹⁹⁵ This is even more so, according to Woods, because bourgeois institutions of the capitalist state could become instruments of socialist transformation. Hence, in the dream world of the IMT, a revolution could even take place via parliamentary elections! *"Under these circumstances, there is not the slightest question, not only that the revolution in Portugal could have been carried out peacefully, but that it could have*

192 In passing we point out a small anecdote which illustrates the kind of political thinking of the L5I. Its Austrian section cancelled its planned public meeting already several days before the lockdown in Austria began. They explained their decision in a statement on their website as follows: *"We have decided, in the light of the fast expansion of the Corona Virus, to cancel our meeting on international women's movements. (...) The current situation indicates the infection of tens of thousands of people in Austria and an overloading of the health systems. Thereby we want to show responsibility and contribute to the containing of the virus."* (*„Angesichts der derzeitig raschen Ausbreitung des Coronavirus haben wir uns entschieden unsere heutige Veranstaltung Frauenbewegungen International abzusagen. (...) Die derzeitige Lage deutet auf eine Infektion von Zehntausenden allein in Österreich und eine Überlastung des Gesundheitssystems hin. Wir wollen damit Verantwortung übernehmen und zur Eindämmung des Virus beitragen."* [AST: VERANSTALTUNG: Frauenbewegung international (ABGESAGT), 11 March 2020, <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/?p=4078>]) It seems that these comrades believe they can better contribute to the struggle for public health by cancelling their public activities instead of increasing them! A Marxist organization would think higher of its activities!

193 V. I. Lenin: The State and Revolution, in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 405

194 V. I. Lenin: The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 237

195 Alan Woods: Marxism and the State, December 2008, <https://www.marxist.com/marxism-and-the-state-part-one.htm>

*been done through parliament.”*¹⁹⁶

(Dis)armed with such a petty-bourgeois pacifist theory, it is not surprising that the IMT considers the capitalist state as capable of progressive tasks. In their world view, the capitalist state has a *dual nature*. Sometimes it acts against the interests of the working class and sometimes (as in the case of the current COVID-19 crisis) it acts in favour of the proletarian interests. They ignore that the health politics of the capitalist state is simply a continuation of its general reactionary politics. Lenin once remarked: *“In these circumstances, in view of the unprecedentedly wide-spread distortion of Marxism, our prime task is to re-establish what Marx really taught on the subject of the state.”*¹⁹⁷ Observing the tremendous theoretical and practical confusion of the IMT, this task has not lost its importance!

***“Speech is silver, silence is golden.”
Not in revolutionary politics!***

Other centrists have not gone that far. However, hardly any of them has been prepared to oppose the lockdown and the banning of democratic rights. The *International Socialist Alternative* (ISA), which split last year from Peter Taaffe’s CWI¹⁹⁸, indicates in a long statement of its international leadership that they support the lockdown at least in some regions. *“In those regions where quarantine is necessary, the distribution of food and other necessary items has to be organised publicly by democratically elected committees to prevent a situation where those with more money get “served” better than others.”*¹⁹⁹

The ISA’s former comrades have published several extensive statements on the COVID-19 crisis. However while the *Committee for a Workers’ International* (CWI) raises all possible demands in terms of defense of wages, health protection etc. they do not challenge the lockdown itself and hence the very conditions which make it hardly possible to fight for all those demands!

“In lockdowns, the CWI demands action to immediately safeguard living standards for those unable to work, to maintain necessary food and medical supplies and to protect

196 Alan Woods: Marxism and the State

197 V. I. Lenin: The State and Revolution, in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 391

198 See on this e.g. Crisis in the CWI: For a Marxist Way Out! A proposal to all current members and former members of the CWI to discuss the way forward in these tumultuous times. Open Letter from the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 29 June 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/open-letter-to-cwi/>; The Crisis in the CWI - Background and Perspectives, Special Double Issue of Revolutionary Communism (New Series No.20&21) <https://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revolutionarycommunism-new-series-20-21/>

199 ISA: Socialists and the Covid-19 Pandemic. How the virus is used by the ruling class and big business in their interests, and what should we demand? Statement from the International Executive of the International Socialist Alternative, 4 March 2020 <https://internationalsocialist.net/en/2020/03/coronavirus-international-statement>

the poorest in society."²⁰⁰ "The union leaders have for the most part been invisible during this crisis. They should be going onto the offensive demanding everything necessary for workers to withstand a lockdown."²⁰¹ A so-called "workers' charter to tackle the crisis", issued by the "mother section" of the CWI in England and Wales, does not even mention the issue of the lockdown!²⁰²

This is not because the CWI would not be aware of the consequences of the lockdown of the popular masses. In a statement issued by its international leadership, the CWI notes: "Repression has also been a feature of the lockdowns, using force and fines, rather than trying to both provide effective material and financial support for those living under lockdown arrangements and taking the necessary steps to try to limit the virus spread."²⁰³ However, they refuse to call for an end of the lockdown policy which currently affects a third of humanity and which dramatically reduces the democratic space for the working class and the oppressed to fight for their rights!

We see a similar scenario in the case of the so-called Lambertists with the POID in France as their major component. Many demands, many denunciations of the capitalists ... but no call for mass struggles against the state of emergency and the lockdown policy!²⁰⁴

Such policy of centrism has a lot of parallels with the semi-hidden support for imperialist war provided by various groups of Russian social-chauvinists during World War I. While Plekhanov and his supporters openly and proudly called for the defense of the imperialist fatherland, other social-chauvinists were more cautious or more skillful. An influential current of Menshevik reformists around the paper "Nasha Zarya" called the workers "to offer no resistance to the war". As Lenin noted: "The liberal-labour politicians are behaving essentially in ex-

200 CWI: An emergency programme to fight Covid-19 and protect working people, 18 April 2020, <https://www.socialistworld.net/2020/04/18/cwi-emergency-programme-to-fight-covid-19-and-protect-working-people/>; see also Coronavirus plunges capitalism into global turmoil -The need for a socialist alternative, Statement from International Secretariat of the CWI, 23 March 2020, <https://www.socialistworld.net/2020/03/23/coronavirus-plunges-capitalism-into-global-turmoil-the-need-for-a-socialist-alternative/>;

201 Covid-19: Organise to fight for health and safety – socialist planning not capitalist chaos, 10 April 2020, The Socialist, weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party (CWI England & Wales), <https://www.socialistworld.net/2020/04/10/covid-19-organise-to-fight-for-health-and-safety-socialist-planning-not-capitalist-chaos/>

202 Coronavirus – A workers' charter to tackle the crisis, 17 March 2020, Socialist Party (England and Wales section of the CWI), <https://www.socialistworld.net/2020/03/17/coronavirus-a-workers-charter-2020/>

203 Covid-19: Economic catastrophe spurs state intervention and workers' resistance, 9 April 2020, Statement by the International Secretariat of the CWI, <https://www.socialistworld.net/2020/04/09/covid-19-economic-catastrophe-spurs-state-intervention-and-workers-resistance/>

204 See e.g. A threat and the means of combatting it. Editorial of La Tribune des Travailleurs (Workers' Tribune) Issue n°.230, 11 March 2020, in: IWC Newsletter No. 154, 13 March 2020; Wage war on the epidemic, give oneself the means to do so, Statement by the Independent and Democratic Workers Party (POID), 20 March 2020, in: IWC Newsletter No. 155, 27 March 2020

actly the same way, but in a different environment and in a slightly modified form. These range from *Nasha Zarya*, which teaches the people and the proletariat "to offer no resistance to the war".²⁰⁵

The centrists mentioned above act in a similar fashion. While they do not openly praise the lockdown, neither do they call for its end not to speak about calling the masses to fight against it. The proverb "*speech is silver, silence is golden*" might be a useful advice for silly people speaking nonsense. It is however alien to any revolutionary policy where speaking out the truth is a precondition for acting in the interests of the working class!

What unites all these revisionists is an artificial separation of the current economic and political crisis of capitalism, on one side, and the health crisis of capitalism on the other side. They do not recognize that all these three crises are related with each other and that the response of the ruling class is to these three crises is an expression of one and the same counterrevolutionary line. They are incapable of viewing these three areas as part of *one and the same totality*. In his notes on Hegel, Lenin once emphasized that it is "*the essence of dialectical cognition*" to recognize "*the sum-total, the entirety of the moments of Actuality.*"²⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the revisionists are far away from such recognition of the total nature of the current world situation! However, without understanding the "true essence" of the present period, it is impossible to arrive to the necessary programmatic conclusion!²⁰⁷

Before we deal with some specific issues of the reformist and centrist policy in the current period, we shall summarize the main differences between Marxists and Social-Bonapartists in the COVID-19 crisis in the form of a diagram. Obviously this is a schema which covers the *general tendency of the main features*. Not all social-bonapartists necessarily implement *all aspects* of such policy.

205 V. I. Lenin: *How Servility to Reaction is Blended with Playing at Democracy* (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, p. 268

206 V. I. Lenin: *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic* (1914); in: *Collected Works* Vol. 38, pp. 157-158

207 Soviet philosopher Abraham Deborin once remarked aptly: "*In order to understand the character of an epoch and its wars and all possible processes, one has to identify the 'true essence' of the epoch, its most fundamental driving forces, which determine all the other appearances. One has to interlink them to a unified total irrespective of the manifold of the outward appearance.*" (Abram Deborin: *Lenin als revolutionärer Dialektiker* (1925); in: Nikolai Bucharin/Abram Deborin: *Kontroversen über dialektischen und mechanistischen Materialismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 1974, p. 79 [our translation])

Diagram: Practical Consequences of the Differences between Marxists and Social-Bonapartists in the COVID-19 Crisis

<i>Marxists</i>	<i>Social-Bonapartists</i>
<p>Call for an End of the Lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights to demonstrate and assemble</p>	<p>Oppose calls for an End of the Lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights to demonstrate and assemble</p>
<p>When the popular masses spontaneously rise up Marxists will support them and try to bring direction and organization into the struggle</p>	<p>When the popular masses spontaneously rise up the Social-Bonapartists will either openly oppose it or they will limit themselves to show only “understanding” for the masses’ concerns but will refuse supporting such struggles</p>
<p>Marxists call to organize for and launch the class struggle now and not to wait until the COVID-19 pandemic is over</p>	<p>Social-Bonapartists wait with calling for struggles until the COVID-19 pandemic is over. The only kind of struggles they support are those at workplaces in order to shut these enterprises also down</p>
<p>Marxists call to prepare and organize for semi-legality also in imperialist countries</p>	<p>Social-Bonapartists ignore the dangers of state repression and are silent on the issue of semi-legal political work</p>

“Workers control” over state bonapartist Lockdown?

Some pseudo-Trotskyist forces are advocating a slogan with which they hope to circumvent the unpleasant fact of supporting the state bonapartist assault on democratic rights. They advocate the slogan of “workers control” over the lockdowns and over the banning of all public assemblies and demonstrations. Such, for example, does “*Socialist Resurgence*” – a Trotskyist organization in the U.S. which was founded last year after splitting from the left Mandeliste group “*Socialist Action*” on the basis of a number of correct criticisms. However, in its statement on the COVID-19 crisis, it does not actively call for a lockdown but raises the slogan: “*Democratic decision-making carried out through public discussion on all restrictions of movement!*”²⁰⁸

The above-mentioned L5I also tries to connect its support for the lockdown policy with the “workers control” slogan: “*Workers and their unions must take the lead and control this lockdown. They have the power to stop non-essential work and insist on adequate protection for those workplaces required to remain open. Working class action and organisation is clearly needed right now.*”²⁰⁹

We think that such a slogan is a poor attempt to cover-up a de facto support for the state bonapartist lockdown policy. The whole idea of “workers control” is to challenge the power of the capitalists over the means of production as a first step to expropriate them and to ultimately transfer them in a planned economy. However, Marxists have always strongly rejected the idea of mixing the slogan of workers control with the bourgeois repression apparatus. If the L5I leaders would not have completely forgotten their revolutionary past, they would remember that we always strongly condemned the arch-opportunist slogan of the CWI calling for “*democratic workers control over the police*”.

Revolutionaries do not call for “control” of the bourgeois repression apparatus but call for *smashing* it. Neither do Marxists call for “workers control” over immigration, imperialist war or the limitation of rights of lesbian and gay people.²¹⁰ They always and unconditionally fight against immigration control in imperialist countries, against imperialist wars and for all democratic rights

208 Statement by Socialist Resurgence on COVID-19, By the National Committee of Socialist Resurgence <https://socialistresurgence.org/2020/03/24/statement-by-socialist-resurgence-on-covid-19/>

209 Bernie McAdam: Workers Must Take Control of the Lockdown, 31 March 2020, <https://www.redflagonline.org/workers-must-take-control-of-the-lockdown/>

210 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Patriotic “Anti-Capitalism” for Fools. Yet Again on the CWG/LCC’s Support for “Workers” Immigration Control and Protectionism in the US, 30.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-lcc-us-protectionism/>; Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: The Slogan of “Workers” Immigration Control: A Concession to Social-Chauvinism, 27.3.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/workers-immigration-control/>; Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: A Social-Chauvinist Defence of the Indefensible. Another Reply to the CWG/LCC’s Support for “Workers” Immigration Control, 14.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-immigration-control/>

of lesbian and gay people. Likewise, revolutionaries do not want to “control” the state bonapartist measures which lock up the workers at home and ban their right to meet and demonstrate but desire to smash this largest assault on democratic rights in the imperialist countries since 1945!

This slogan is even more illusionary and dangerous in the current confused climate when the workers and oppressed face a ferocious offensive of the unholy alliance of the monopoly bourgeoisie, the media and the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers and popular movements. Under such conditions of widespread confusion and fear, it is quite possibly that a majority in the trade unions or the working class as a whole might accept the suppression of democratic rights to assemble and to demonstrate. However, revolutionaries have to defend the right of the vanguard of the workers and oppressed to fight for its possibilities to organize and to demonstrate – even if a majority of the people, under the impression of the gigantic bourgeois media campaign, would momentarily not support this!

The practical significance of such “workers control” is that it provides a theoretical loophole for the centrists to justify their failure to denounce the state bonapartist lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights. No, the slogan of “workers control” over lockdown and the suppression of democratic rights is an intellectual balancing act which can only end in a painful belly-flop.

Social-Bonapartism: an offspring of economism and Menshevism

The failure to fight against the state bonapartist lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights is closely related with the classic features of economism, i.e. the policy of prioritizing economic demands over political demands. This is the case in several respects. First, the Lockdown Left separates the *economic demands* from the *political demands*. It calls for economic and health measures – against austerity, for public health care etc. – *now* while, at the same time, it does not call for the defense of democratic rights today but reserves such calls for *a while later*, when the pandemic is over. No one knows when this will be case or if there will be not another pandemic.

This reflects that these forces consider the economic and health demands as much more important, much more urgent than the political demands. In fact, it is the opposite. As we did show above, not a single economic or health demand can be achieved without breaking the state bonapartist suppression of democratic rights! Hence, it is impossible to fight for a program against austerity or against the pandemic without, at the same, fighting for the democratic rights. The failure to do so reflects a policy of *social-bonapartist economism*.

Related to this is the classic economist mistake to ignore the central importance of educating the working class about the crucial role of political demands and fighting for political power. Revolutionary socialism is impossible without

revolutionary democratism. Revolutionary democratism is impossible without fighting against capitalist state bonapartism – in general as well as in times of pandemic.

Lenin once characterized “economism [as] a bourgeois, opportunist trend, which strove to subordinate the workers to the liberals.”²¹¹ This is particularly true today. Emphasizing only the economic and health demands without, at the same time, putting the political, democratic demands in the forefront can only play in the hands of the chauvinist bonapartist state machinery. In other words, it serves the both the “liberal” as well as the “state-capitalist” bourgeoisie which dominate the state in most imperialist countries in West and East.

In addition, the left’s failure to fight against the state bonapartist lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights in the current situation reflects an ineptitude to swim against the stream in such a historic moment of global counter-revolutionary offensive. It is not difficult to oppose dictatorship and chauvinism when it is popular and “trendy”. But only authentic revolutionaries are capable to swim against the stream when it is necessary albeit temporarily “unpopular”. Lenin once observed during World War I: „Like every crisis in the life of individuals or in the history of nations, war oppresses and breaks some, steels and enlightens others.”²¹² It is already obvious that most of the so-called left has not stood the current historic test!

It is crucial in this context to call to mind the very foundation of the Marxist theory of the revolutionary party. As we have elaborated in our book on this issue the basic idea of the revolutionary party is that it combines the most consciousness elements of the working class on the basis of a revolutionary program. Hence, it is not a party of the whole class but only of the vanguard. Hence, the clarity in program, the iron discipline, etc. Such a separation allows the vanguard to withstand the pressure of the more backward sectors of the proletariat which easier come under the influence of the bourgeois media.

The Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky summarized the lessons of Marxism in its *Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution* adopted at the Second Congress in 1920.

“The communist party is a part of the working class, the most advanced, most class-conscious, and hence most revolutionary part. By a process of natural selection the communist party is formed of the best, most class-conscious, most devoted and far-sighted workers. The communist party has no interests other than the interests of the working class as a whole. The communist party is differentiated from the working class as a whole by the fact that it has a clear view of the entire historical path of the working class in its totality and is concerned, at every bend in this road, to defend the interests not of separate groups or occupations, but of the working class in its totality. The communist party is the organizational and political lever which the most advanced section of the working class uses to direct the entire mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat

211 V. I. Lenin: Adventurism (1914); in: LCW Vol. 20, p. 356

212 V.I. Lenin: Reply to P. Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov) (1916); in: LCW 23, p. 22

along the right road.”²¹³

The Comintern warned against blurring the conception of the party and class, and emphasized the need to constitute the vanguard as a separate party which fights against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influences inside the working class and which does not adapt to consciousness of backward workers.

„A sharp distinction must be made between the concepts of party and class. The members of the ‘Christian’ and liberal trade unions of Germany, England, and other countries are undoubtedly parts of the working class. The more or less numerous groups of workers who still follow Scheidemann, Gompers, and their like, are undoubtedly part of the working class. In certain historical circumstances it is even quite possible for the working class to include very numerous reactionary elements. It is the task of communism not to adapt itself to these backward sections of the working class but to raise the entire working class to the level of the communist vanguard. Confusion of these two concepts — party and class — can lead to the greatest mistakes and bewilderment. It is for example clear that in spite of the sentiments and prejudices of a certain section of the working class during the imperialist war, the workers’ party had at all costs to combat those sentiments and prejudices by standing for the historical interests of the proletariat which required the proletarian party to declare war on the war. Thus, on the outbreak of the imperialist war in 1914 the parties of the social-traitors in all countries, when they supported the bourgeoisie of their ‘own’ countries, always and consistently explained that they were acting in accordance with the will of the working class. But they forgot that, even if that were true, it must be the task of the proletarian party in such a state of affairs to come out against the sentiments of the majority of the workers and, in defiance of them, to represent the historical interests of the proletariat. In the same way, at the beginning of this century, the Russian Mensheviks of that time (the so-called Economists) rejected open political struggle against Tsarism on the ground that the working class as a whole had not yet reached an understanding of the political struggle. In the same way the right wing of the German Independents always insist, when acting irresolutely and inadequately, on ‘the will of the masses’, without understanding that the party is there to lead the masses and show them the way.”²¹⁴

The failure of the Leviathan Left to fight against the state bonapartist lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights reveals also an adaption to the classic conception of stagism as it was advocated first by Menshevism and later Stalinism. Hence, the Lockdown Left promotes the idea of advocating *first* economic and health demands and only *later* democratic, anti-bonapartist demands. In fact, this is not possible. Victory of state bonapartism means strengthening of the monopoly bourgeoisie and hence of the counter-revolutionary program of austerity and cuts in the health sector.

The approach of the Lockdown Left to the COVID-19 pandemic reminds one

213 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents. Selected and edited by Jane Degras, Volume I 1919-1922, p. 128

214 Ibid, p. 129

also to a theory which was popular among Stalinist parties in the 1980s. In order to promote Moscow's peace campaign against the NATO nuclear armament program, the Stalinist stated that there are, on one hand, class issues and, on the other hand, so called "*humanity issues*". While the first were relevant for the working class, the later were relevant for "all people", i.e. also for sectors of the bourgeoisie. Hence, so the Stalinists argued, it would be possible to build a popular front alliance with the "peace-loving bourgeoisie".

Today, large sectors of the reformist and centrist left claim – openly or disguised – that the COVID-19 pandemic is a danger which threatens all and, hence, it would be possible to fight such pandemic together with the "reasonable" sectors of the ruling class (like Xi, Merkel, Macron, Sanchez, etc.). Such an approach is the theoretical basis for these leftists to accept (or even to advocate) the lockdown policy and the suppression of democratic rights "for a limited time". It is true that there are "intelligent" sectors of the bourgeoisie. These are those who cleverly exploit the COVID-19 pandemic in order to advance the economic and political counterrevolution. But this can hardly constitute a basis for an alliance with self-proclaimed socialists. At least not with intelligent socialists!

Spontaneous mass actions against the lockdown conditions: a litmus test for the left

It seems to us that the decisive litmus test for all socialists in the current situation is which stance they take regarding the current food riots and anti-police protests. As already mentioned above, there are spontaneous mass actions in a number of countries all over the world where the workers, youth and poor protest against the repressive lockdown conditions. There have been food riots in various Latin American and African countries, there were clashes in Hubei with the Chinese police, there was a mass protest in North-Ossetia against the lockdown imposed by the Russian government, there have been youth riots against the police in Paris and Brussels and many more mass protests will certainly come. All these protests violate the lockdown conditions and reflect the popular hatred against this regime. Of course, these are raw and spontaneous mass actions because of hunger and repression as a result of the draconic conditions of the capitalist crisis and the lockdown policy.

Objectively, these are mass protests against the global lockdown regime. The RCIT and all authentic revolutionaries enthusiastically support such spontaneous mass actions. Naturally, we are aware of their limitations. This is why more organization and more political direction are necessary. But it is a beginning. These protests pose the question: what will self-proclaimed left-wing organizations do? Will they support these mass actions? If they do so, they have to recognize that this is in complete contradiction to their policy of supporting or tolerating the lockdown policy since these mass protests are a fundamental

violation of these repressive conditions. If they remain consistent supporters – or at least non-critics – of the lockdown policy, they will not support such mass protests. While such a position is consistent, it is a consistent counter-revolutionary stance!

It is quiet likely that various self-proclaimed Marxists will denounce such protests as “backward”. They will say that while they surely “understand” the concerns of the masses they should accept the priority of containing the pandemic by staying at home. The Lockdown Left will surely raise all possible demands to improve the economic situation of the masses, etc. However, if they are consistent in their support for the state bonapartist lockdown policy they will not support such riots and protests and consider the masses as “backward”.

The experience of the past years shows that most reformist and centrist organizations fail to support such spontaneous mass protests. An example for this has been the *August Uprising* in Britain in 2011. During this historic event, the lower strata of the working class and the nationally and racially oppressed rose up after the police shot Mark Duggan, a father of six children. According to *Scotland Yard* more than 30,000 working class youth, black and migrants fought against the police on the streets and expressed their anger between 6 and 10 August. It forced the Tory/Liberal-Democrat government to mobilize 16,000 police on the street to put down the uprising and even to consider the use of the army against its own population. Despite all its limitations and weaknesses, it was definitely one of the most important class struggles in Britain since the miners’ strike of 1984/85. While the RCIT welcomed and supported this uprising, most reformists and centrists – like the CPB/Morning Star, CWI, IMT, L5I, etc. – failed to support it or even denounced the youth. Pseudo-Marxist academics like Slavoj Žižek even denounced the youth as “rabble”!²¹⁵ The approach of French reformism and centrism to the youth uprisings in the banlieues around Paris was not better.

All these self-proclaimed leftists are so much integrated into the middle class milieu of the reformist bureaucracy and the liberal academic world that they fail to understand and support the struggles of the poor and oppressed masses. They have the petty-bourgeois intellectualist idea that the masses should *first* acquire a “progressive”, “socialist” world view and *then* they will be capable to launch meaningful struggles. They forget (or want to forget) that masses learn

215 On the RCIT’s analysis and tactics during the August Uprising in Britain in 2011 see: Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting: These are not “riots” – this is an uprising of the poor in the cities of Britain! The strategic task: From the uprising to the revolution!, 10.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/uprising-of-the-poor-inbritain/>; Michael Pröbsting: The August uprising of the poor and nationally and racially oppressed in Britain: What would a revolutionary organisation have done?, 18.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/august-uprising-what-should-have-been-done/>; Bericht der RKO-Delegation über ihren Aufenthalt in London 2011, <http://www.rkob.net/international/berichteuprising-in-gb/>; Michael Pröbsting: Britain: “The left” and the August Uprising, 1 September 2011, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>

in struggle, that they often join a struggle with raw or backward ideas and learn in the process of struggle, that it is the task of a revolutionary organization to transmit socialist ideas during such struggles and by supporting such struggles!

Lenin explained – in discussing the approach to liberation struggles of “backward” nations – that revolutionaries must unconditionally support such struggles. „*To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.-to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up in one place and says, “We are for socialism”, and another, somewhere else and says, “We are for imperialism”, and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a “putsch”. Whoever expects a “pure” social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.*

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But objectively, the mass movement was breaking the hack of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason the class-conscious workers led it.

The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it—without such participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But objectively they will attack capital, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for difficult reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately “purge” itself of petty-bourgeois slag.”²¹⁶

The petty-bourgeois left fails to understand that as long as capitalism oppresses the workers and popular masses it is only possible for them to a limited degree to develop a socialist consciousness. This is why the leadership of a revolutionary party, based on the vanguard and rooted in the masses, is decisive for the struggle for socialist revolution. Lenin already pointed out this problem

216 V. I. Lenin: The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up (1916), in: LCW Vol. 22, pp. 355-356 (emphasis in the original)

and explained the failure of reformism and centrism.

*“The petty-bourgeois democrats, their chief present-day representatives, the “socialists” and “Social-Democrats”, are suffering from illusions when they imagine that the working people are capable, under capitalism, of acquiring the high degree of class-consciousness, firmness of character, perception and wide political outlook that will enable them to decide, merely by voting, or at all events, to decide in advance, without long experience of struggle, that they will follow a particular class, or a particular party. It is a mere illusion. It is a sentimental story invented by pedants and sentimental socialists of the Kautsky, Longuet and MacDonald type. Capitalism would not be capitalism if it did not, on the one hand, condemn the masses to a downtrodden, crushed and terrified state of existence, to disunity (the countryside!) and ignorance, and if it (capitalism) did not, on the other hand, place in the hands of the bourgeoisie a gigantic apparatus of falsehood and deception to hoodwink the masses of workers and peasants, to stultify their minds, and so forth.”*²¹⁷

It would be not surprising if the current historic shift results in a widespread process of demoralization among significant sectors of the left. Many will use the counterrevolutionary offensive and the danger of pandemics as a pretext to withdraw from active political work and to limit themselves to comment on social media. They will excuse themselves by referring to the health risks and might even praise such demoralized retreat as “a demonstration of solidarity and a contribution to public health” (remember the explanation of the L51 group for cancelling a public meeting which we quoted above). The following quote reflects that there is a growing acceptance among such leftists to refrain from public manifestations.

*“All the while, the main tactic of leftist opposition has become impossible: public manifestations. Believing that socialism is upon us simply because governments are, in times of crisis, considering a universal basic income or universal healthcare, is naïve. If we should have learned one thing from decades of austerity, it is that neoliberals never let a serious crisis go to waste. Keynesian and Neo-Marxist policies might be considered in times of need, but they will quickly disappear in the annals of history if there is no substantial political backdrop to solidify their effects. If the Left fails to grasp this momentum, it will be business as usual once things go back to normal. But how do you organize opposition from the comfort of your home that exceeds free-floating clicktivism? The Left is confronted with a challenge of reconstructing the world after COVID-19 and has lost the most powerful weapon in its arsenal. Corona has hitherto only changed the world in various ways; the point, now, is to give it the correct interpretation to not let it go to waste.”*²¹⁸

Clearly, the class struggle is not the appropriate place for such professional cowards disguised as hobby revolutionaries!

217 V. I. Lenin: The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, in: LCW 30, pp. 266-267

218 Tim Christaens: Must Society be Defended from Agamben?, 26 March 2020 <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/03/26/must-society-be-defended-from-agamben/>

In summary, all these political and theoretical failures have resulted in a situation where large sectors of the left do not limit themselves to fight for progressive demands in a half-hearted, reformist way. We are rather faced with the tragic situation that such “leftists” support the counterrevolution under the cover of combating the pandemic. There can be no doubt that the failure of these sectors of the workers movement and the left is of no less serious as the failure of the majority of the Second International was in 1914 when they refused to oppose the imperialist war.

VI. Concluding words

We conclude this book by pointing out again that it has been written under extraordinary circumstances as it appears in the midst of a historic crisis. Hence, if this book would appear in 6 or 12 months, one could certainly add more data, make more definite assessments about some trends or arrive to clearer conclusions about this or that development. However, as we said in the introduction, the purpose of the book is to aid militants all over the world in developing a revolutionary line in these tumultuous events and, hence, to be better prepared for intervening in the class struggle. Waiting until everything is over and until the picture is clearer would be a petty-bourgeois academic approach.

While we do not, and cannot, know the exact course of events it is pretty clear what is the objective, historical, meaning of the current situation – irrespective of the intentions of this or that government leaders. What is currently taking place is a global counterrevolutionary offensive – a pre-emptive counterrevolution. The ruling classes launch gigantic economic and anti-democratic attacks which will worsen dramatically the conditions of the working class to fight. This is why the lockdowns and the suppression of the right to demonstrate are so dangerous.

COVID-19 is the perfect excuse to suppress these rights. This is why the ruling class is spreading fear and panic. This is why they will use it not only now but for months and years! And if the COVID-19 pandemic is temporarily over, the ruling class will surely warn about a return of it. Or there will be another pandemic by another virus. We repeat our warning: the bourgeoisie will use the danger of such pandemics for years in order to confuse and paralyze the working class and popular masses.

This is why accepting the logic of lockdowns and suppression of the right to demonstrate “because of the pandemic” is so dangerous. They want to bind our hands for years of slump and authoritarian rule. This is why the RCIT sharply condemns all those leftists who support lockdowns and suppression of the right to demonstrate. These forces objectively serve the counterrevolution. They are a modern version of social-chauvinism in WWI.

We have no doubt that we are marching towards great events. At the moment everything seems to be superimposed by the COVID-19 crisis. However, the fundamental contradictions of capitalism have not and can not disappear. The ruling classes have launched their counter-revolutionary offensive not because they are strong but rather because of desperation given the devastating crisis of their system. The harder the bourgeoisie strikes now, the stronger will be the reaction and the greater the response from the workers and popular masses.

As we have outlined in this book the new era provokes a qualitative aggravation

tion of the contradictions between the classes and states. It will massively exacerbate tendencies which have been already in place before. Most prominently among them are the structural crisis of the capitalist world economy and the decay of the productive forces, the rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers – in particular between the U.S. and China –, and the class struggle and revolutionary uprising of the workers and oppressed. We have recognized and analyzed these developments over a number of years and provided a Marxist perspective. The present triple crisis – a new 1929-like slump, the rise of the state bonapartist Leviathan and the COVID-19 pandemic – is another crucial development.

Trotsky once noted: *“The power of the Fourth International lies in this, that its program is capable of withstanding the test of great events.”*²¹⁹ This statement is no less true today. Revolutionaries around the world should judge organizations which raise the banner of Marxism by their historic record. The RCIT has demonstrated over a number of years that it is capable to recognize new developments and to provide a revolutionary answer. We understood the revolutionary character of the present historic period opening in 2008 when many others were overpowered by pessimism and retreat. We defended the justification of the Arab Revolution when many had dropped supporting it or even turned to support counterrevolutionary butchers like Assad and Sisi. We recognized the rise of China and Russia as new imperialist powers when most denied such or even ridiculed such a position. We stressed from early on the necessity to apply the program of revolutionary defeatism in any Great Power conflict between the U.S., the EU, Japan, China or Russia. And in the current COVID-19 crisis we have been nearly alone in taking a consistent revolutionary stance against the global lockdown policy. We can justifiably claim that the methods of the RCIT, its program and prognoses have been capable of withstanding the test of great events.

The new era will also provoke inevitably a qualitative aggravation of crises and contradictions within the workers and popular movement and the so-called “left”. It will trigger political and organizational crisis in organizations; it will push the opportunists even further to the right, into the middle class camp of social-imperialist liberalism which is in tow of the bourgeoisie. However, we are confident that it will also open a process of rethinking and moving to the left among Marxists which can result in regroupement of revolutionary forces. The RCIT orientates to the raw but militant masses and looks for rapprochement with those Marxists who share such a revolutionary outlook.

At the beginning of World War I Lenin aptly summarized the tasks of Marxists in a few words. *“What is to be done? Preach and prepare civil war. Instead of*

219 Fourth International: Imperialist War And The Proletarian World Revolution, Adopted by the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, May 19-26, 1940; in: Documents of the Fourth International, The Formative Years (1933-40), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 323, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>

becoming ministers, join the illegal propagandists!!"²²⁰ Likewise, revolutionaries today have to prepare for a longer period of struggles under difficult conditions. However, these conditions will give birth to the biggest political explosions the world will have seen for a long time!

In such a period, the most important, the most urgent task for authentic Marxists is to combine their forces and to unite their efforts to build a new World Party of Socialist Revolution. The RCIT calls all revolutionaries to join us in this task! We repeat the words of our latest Open Letter: "*Act Now because History is Happening Now!*"

²²⁰ V. I. Lenin: Plan for a Pamphlet „The European War and European Socialism (1914)“, in: LCW Vol. 41, p. 340

Appendix

COVID-19: A Cover for a Major Global Counterrevolutionary Offensive

We are at a turning point in the world situation as the ruling classes provoke a war-like atmosphere in order to legitimize the build-up of chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes

*Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT),
21.3.2020*

Introduction

Any organization claiming to defend the interests of the working class and the oppressed must base its strategy on a correct assessment of the fundamental dynamics in world politics. Without a realistic understanding of the relation of forces between the classes and states, it is impossible to find the correct way forward.

Throughout the history of the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) resp. its predecessor, we have identified on several occasions important developments which we characterized as *major political turning points*. In the past two decades, such turning points were the 9/11 event in 2001, the Great Recession in 2008/09, the long process of the Arab Revolution (with all its ups and downs) or the rise of China as a major imperialist Great Power. Each of these events had important and long-term repercussions in world politics. Hence, these were crucial tests for any Marxist. Those organizations which failed to understand such events correctly were left politically confused and lost as a revolutionary force.

The current global COVID-19 crisis is a major event of similar historic magnitude. The RCIT has understood the political importance of this development from the very first days. In contrast to nearly all self-proclaimed Marxist organizations we immediately recognized the *political counter-revolutionary nature* of these events. We explained in a series of statements and articles since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis that the ruling classes utilize the panic to advance their political goals. We emphasized that the vanguard must respond to these events with a combined program in defense of democratic rights, the expansion of health care and against all austerity attacks. Recent events have fully confirmed our analysis as well as our programmatic response. (See the links to our documents in the appendix.) On the other side of the barricades, intelligent analysts of the ruling classes also recognized soon the meaning of the COVID-19 crisis. Tellingly, a bourgeois commentator of Bloomberg – a mouthpiece of the imperialist bourgeoisie – compared the historic significance of the current developments with World War I which “*inaugurate a turbulent new political and*

economic era.”¹

The real political nature of COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic is certainly a significant health crisis. However, things have to be seen in context. The influenza epidemics in the past decades have caused 290,000-650,000 death each year, without provoking any major political initiative by the ruling class.² The overall all-cause influenza-attributable mortality in the 2017/18 season was estimated to be about 152,000 deaths in Europe alone!³ The Swine Flu Pandemic in 2009 has killed up to 203,000 people. Since the COVID-19 crisis has caused, until now, several thousand victims, it is evident that the global shut down which we are currently experiencing must have different causes.

These causes are first and foremost of political nature. As the RCIT has elaborated in its latest *World Perspective* document, global political developments in recent past have resulted in the emergence of a *pre-revolutionary world situation* opening up in autumn 2019.⁴ The main features of this new global situation have been:

* In the second half of last year the capitalist world economy entered the worst slump since 1929;⁵

1 „For the coronavirus signals a radical transformation, of the kind that occurs once in a century, shattering previous assumptions. In fact, the last such churning occurred almost exactly a century ago, and it altered the world so dramatically that a revolution in the arts, sciences and philosophy, not to mention the discipline of economics, was needed even to make sense of it.” (Pankaj Mishra: *Get Ready, A Bigger Disruption Is Coming*. The Covid-19 pandemic reflects a systemic crisis akin to the seminal crashes of the 20th century, 16. März 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-03-16/coronavirus-foreshadow-s-bigger-disruptions-in-future>)

2 See on this e.g. WHO: Up to 650 000 people die of respiratory diseases linked to seasonal flu each year, 14 December 2017 <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/detail/14-12-2017-up-to-650-000-people-die-of-respiratory-diseases-linked-to-seasonal-flu-each-year>; Iuliano AD, Roguski KM, Chang HH, Muscatello DJ, Palekar R, Tempia S, et al. Estimates of global seasonal influenza-associated respiratory mortality: a modelling study. *Lancet*. 2018;391:1285-300. Medline:29248255 doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(17)33293-2; Paget J, Spreuwenberg P, Charu V, et al. Global mortality associated with seasonal influenza epidemics: New burden estimates and predictors from the GLaMOR Project. *J Glob Health*. 2019;9(2):020421. doi:10.7189/jogh.09.020421

3 J. Nielsen et al: European all-cause excess and influenza-attributable mortality in the 2017/18 season: should the burden of influenza B be reconsidered? in: *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* Volume 25, Issue 10 (October 2019), pp. 1266–1276

4 RCIT: *World Perspectives 2020: A Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation*. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 8 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2020/>

5 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: No, the Corona Virus is not the Main Cause of the Global Economic Slump! Bourgeois Media Officially Recognize the Beginning of another Great Recession, 3 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/corona-virus-is-not-the-main-cause-of-global-economic-slump/>; Michael Pröbsting: Another Great Recession of the Capitalist World Economy Has Begun. The economic crisis is an important factor in the current dramatic shift in the world situation, 19 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/>

* A global wave of mass struggles in numerous countries on all continents;⁶

* The tensions between the Great Powers have massively accelerated in the past years as the Global Trade War resp. the Cold War between the U.S. and China demonstrate.⁷

These are the conditions which make it necessary for the ruling class to adopt major steps in order to regain the initiative and to enforce its political control over the popular classes via massively expanding its state apparatus. In order to achieve this goal, they create the atmosphere of global panic and a state of emergency. They do so both on a national as well as on a global level.

Naturally, by this we don't suggest any silly conspiracy theory that the global bourgeoisie has "invented" the Corona Virus in order to find a cover for their counterrevolutionary attacks. Furthermore we reject the conspiracy theories about the creation of the virus by a laboratory in China which is a myth spread to fuel chauvinism. No, this health crisis took the global bourgeoisie by surprise and so it stumbled into this process. However, they quickly understood – some quicker than others (just think about the clown trio of Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro) – that this "*crisis offers an opportunity*". The Chinese regime started this process and a global chain reaction followed soon.

As mentioned above, we quickly recognized the political nature of the global COVID-19 crisis and developed and updated our analysis in series of articles and statements since the 2 February. Already in the RCIT statement of 5 February we identified as such goals of the bourgeoisie:

"The RCIT emphasizes that the hysteria around the 2019 Corona Virus objectively serves the following objectives:

"a) The ruling classes in China as well as in many other countries exploit the hysteria in order to justify the vast expansion of surveillance and control of its population.

b) They also utilize this hysteria in order to wipe up patriotism and suspicion against "foreigners", people "from outside" or simple "others".

[net/worldwide/global/another-great-recession-of-the-capitalist-world-economy-has-begun/](https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/another-great-recession-of-the-capitalist-world-economy-has-begun/); see also Michael Pröbsting: The Next Looming Great Recession. Observations on the Latest Stock Market Slump and the Structural Crisis of the Capitalist World Economy, 12 October 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-next-looming-great-recession/>

⁶ For an overview and a characterization of these events see, in addition the relevant statements on the individual countries, Michael Pröbsting: Are We Nearing a New "68 Moment"? A massive upsurge of global class struggle in the midst of a dramatic shift in the world situation 22 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/are-we-nearing-a-new-68-moment/>

⁷ See on this e.g. the numerous RCIT's documents on the Global Trade War which have been collected at a special sub-page on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/collection-of-articles-on-the-global-trade-war/>; for a more fundamental analysis of the Great Power rivalry we refer to our book by Michael Pröbsting: Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective, RCIT Books, January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>

c) *China's regime utilizes the hysteria also in order to create a climate of fear so that anxious people put all their hopes in the state forces.*

d) *The ruling classes in other imperialist states utilize the global hysteria in order to wipe up anti-Chinese chauvinism and to advance their stakes in the ongoing rivalry between the Great Powers. US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross cynically suggested that the outbreak of the 2019 Corona Virus is an opportunity for the US.*

e) *Likewise, reactionary forces outside China exploit the crisis in order to foster suspicion and hatred against Chinese or, more generally, against Asian migrants.*

f) *The ruling class will exploit the 2019 Corona Virus (and subsequently China) in order to find a culprit for the Great Recession which has recently begun. In fact, while the global measures to supposedly contain the spreading of the virus deepen the slump, the capitalist world economy has entered a recession already in the second half of 2019. The truth is that the reasons for this Great Recession are the same like those for all the others in the past: the frantic drive for profit of the capitalist corporations provokes again and again in economic crashes of the world economy."*

Since these lines were published, global events have fully confirmed our warnings. The bourgeoisie all over the world has started a wave of mass sackings and wage cuts. Factories are stopping production and millions of workers either get unemployed or face dramatic worsening of labor conditions. Fundamental democratic rights are under attack, borders are closed and chauvinist attacks against migrants or against other states are rising.

The ruling classes soon understood that the COVID-19 crisis is a huge political opportunity. James Boughton, a well-known economist and historian who has served for decades at the International Monetary Fund, explicitly said so when he refers to past crises in South Korea and Indonesia which were catalysts for dramatic neoliberal attacks on the rights of the working class and the popular masses. Referring to the COVID-19 crisis, he said a few days ago: *"Only in a crisis are governments able to rally people to accept necessary but painful reforms. Every crisis is also an opportunity."*⁸

While it is difficult to predict the course of the next events, it is likely that the ruling classes will keep the global state of emergency for weeks if not months. Their goal is to advance their counterrevolutionary attacks as much as possible in this time so that they can present the popular masses after this period with the implementation of radical political and economic changes as a fait accompli.

⁸ Quoted in Bloomberg: The worldwide coronavirus pandemic will change the way we shop, travel and work for years to come. History shows us how, 15 Mar, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-13/coronavirus-will-change-how-we-shop-travel-and-work-for-years?srnd=premium-europe>

Chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes: the new Leviathan

Characteristically, several state leaders compare the COVID-19 crisis with a state of war. China's President Xi called for a "people's war" against the virus.⁹ And France's President Macron declared in a major speech on 16 March "we are at war", adding: "We're not up against another army or another nation. But the enemy is right there: invisible, elusive, but it is making progress."¹⁰ Various bourgeois media create a climate that "we are under attack."

Such belligerent rhetoric is necessary to justify drastic measures of the capitalist state to impose a lock down on millions of people and to massively increase the executive powers of the police and army. This is exactly what we are currently experiencing in China, Italy, France, Spain, Austria and now the whole of Europe. Similar developments have already begun in Latin America as well as the U.S. Macron sends 100,000 police to patrol the streets in France. In various countries governments mobilize the army to take over civilian tasks. "Suddenly", governments take it as granted to monitor the movements of its population via telecommunication. The Chinese Stalinist-capitalist regime boasts about its abilities to use Artificial Intelligence for surveillance of its population.¹¹ It deploys small mobile robots on the streets of Shenzhen which measure the temperature of pedestrians and warn them via loudspeaker to wear face masks and to follow the instructions of the authorities. It also deploys drones for such surveillance measures.¹² With one stroke, "Big Brother" is here, openly and without any attempt by the capitalist state to conceal it. The massive surveillance techniques will soon be the new normal worldwide.

Currently, these regimes pretend to focus on fighting a pandemic. Soon they will fight against various "internal security threats" as well as against other states. The war of words between the U.S. and China is a foretaste for future developments. President Trump and other officials of his Administration have repeat-

9 Global Times: Fighting coronavirus is a people's war, 2020/2/5 22: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1178655.shtml>; Yew Lun Tian: In 'People's War' on coronavirus, Chinese propaganda faces pushback, March 13, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-propaganda-a/in-peoples-war-on-coronavirus-chinese-propaganda-faces-pushback-idUSKBN2100NA>

10 Michel Rose, Richard Lough: 'We are at war': France imposes lockdown to combat virus, March 16, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-macron-restriction/we-are-at-war-france-imposes-lockdown-to-combat-virus-idUSKBN2133G5>

11 See on this e.g. Zeng Yi and Sun Kang: Fighting COVID-19 with AI: efforts and lessons from China, Global Times 2020/3/7 <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1181846.shtml>; Andy Chun: In a time of coronavirus, China's investment in AI is paying off in a big way, 18 March 2020 <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3075553/time-coronavirus-chinas-investment-ai-paying-big-way>

12 See e.g. Rebecca Fannin: The rush to deploy robots in China amid the coronavirus outbreak, March 2 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/02/the-rush-to-deploy-robots-in-china-amid-the-coronavirus-outbreak.html>

edly called the coronavirus the “Wuhan virus”, the “Chinese virus” or simply the “foreign virus”. In turn, China’s foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said on Twitter that “it might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan”.¹³

In other words, what is currently taking place is the build-up of *chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes* – of an “all-powerful state”, to put it in the words of a Bloomberg commentator.¹⁴

The current developments confirm with full clarity important theses which have been elaborated by Marxist theoreticians of the 20th century. Such for example Lenin pointed out that “imperialism is the negation of democracy” – a statement which has been proven correct as the bloody history of the past century demonstrated. Today, the correctness of this statement is confirmed again as monopoly capital in all imperialist states becomes increasingly anti-democratic in light of the advancing decay of capitalism. The acceleration of the capitalist crisis leads to an acceleration of anti-democratic reaction – a fundamental dynamic which has been already in place for some time, as we have pointed out repeatedly.¹⁵

The current events confirm also another statement of Lenin. He emphasized that in the epoch of imperialism the capitalist state and the monopolies increasingly fuse which each other and characterized this as “process of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism.”¹⁶ This goes hand in hand with a “an extraordinary strengthening of the “state machine” and an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries.”¹⁷ And Nikolai Bukharin, a leading theoretician of the Bolshevik Party, concluded his analysis of the development of the capitalist state and its increasing role in the era of imperialism: “This is the New Leviathan,

13 JosephStepansky: Trump, coronavirus and the politics of a pandemic, 14 March 2020 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/trump-coronavirus-politics-pandemic-200313174546799.html>

14 Pankaj Mishra: Coronavirus Will Revive an All-Powerful State. Much maligned in recent years, big government will come back—and with it, the potential for both greater good and evil, 17. März 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-03-17/coronavirus-will-revive-an-all-powerful-state>

15 See e.g. the RCIT’s *Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*, adopted in 2012: „On the top of the – by increasingly sharp contradictions marked – class society rises, like an octopus, a monstrous state apparatus, which manages in the interests of the capitalist class its political business and oppresses the proletariat (the working class) and the popular masses. This state machine - a true Leviathan of the bourgeoisie (a beast of the ruling class) - is merged with capital in many ways.“ (p. 9, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>) See also the pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting: *The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today*, August 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/democracy-vs-imperialism/>

16 V. I. Lenin: *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917), in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 387

17 *Ibid.*, p. 415

beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes looks like a child's toy." ¹⁸ Indeed, such an imperialist Leviathan is now being built-up by the ruling class in full force – under the pretext of fighting a pandemic. The era of relatively extensive bourgeois democracy in the imperialist states will soon be over.

As the RCIT has explained repeatedly, all this takes place against the background of the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers, marked by the historic decline of long-time hegemon like the U.S. and the European Union and the rise of China. ¹⁹ It becomes now obvious that these decadent bourgeois, pro-austerity pseudo-democracies of the West have caused a decline of their national healthcare systems which prove now to be unable to deal with the current epidemic. Furthermore, it has now become even more obvious that they are incapable to handle global crisis. Even the EU has failed to collectively respond to the epidemic and its member states rather close their national borders against each other. As a result of these developments it is indicative that many imperialist governments no longer look to the U.S. as a model but rather to China and its Stalinist-capitalist regime. They ask Beijing and not Washington for aid and advice. ²⁰ This confirms once more the RCIT's long-standing analysis that China has become a leading imperialist Great Power. There can be also no doubt that such a decline of the old Great Powers will sooner or later encourage the oppressed people in the Global South to rebel against their imperialist long-time masters (similar to the wave of anti-colonial struggles against Britain and France after World War II).

18 Nikolai Bukharin: *Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State* (1915), in: Robert V. Daniel: *A Documentary History of Communism*, Vol. 1, Vintage Russian Library, Vintage Books, New York 1960, p. 85, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1915/state.htm>

19 On the RCIT's analysis of the Great Power rivalry and China's rise as emerging imperialist powers see the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. In particular we refer to the book by Michael Pröbsting *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective*, RCIT Books, January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>. See also, by the same author, *The China-India Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements?* 18 August 2017, *Revolutionary Communism* No. 71, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/> The China Question and the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, December 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-csr-pco-on-china/>; China's transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4>.

20 Joe Penney: *As the U.S. Blames China for the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Rest of the World Asks China for Help*, March 18 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/18/coronavirus-china-world-power/>

South Korea: a certain exception

The situation in South Korea has been somewhat different to other countries. The government of President Moon Jae-in reacted differently to the COVID-19 crisis in so far as it imposed much less state repression than China, Europe and now other countries. Most importantly, there was no large lock down of the population. At the same time they imposed mass testing for free as well as health care for free for those affected. These have been crucial measures in order to substantially limit the impact of the virus. As a result, South Korea has been much more successful in combating the Corona Virus than all other states which have been largely affected. This is a powerful confirmation of the RCIT's analysis that the mass lock down of the population in other countries is not a necessary instrument to fight against the COVID-19 epidemic but is rather politically motivated.

There have been several reasons for this different response. First, the people of South Korea have a strong memory about the horrendous time of the decades of military dictatorships before 1987. Hence, people are sensitive and not willing to accept reactionary measures like mass lock downs. In addition, there is a strong tradition of militant class struggle albeit it has lost its dynamic since the early 2000s. For these reasons it would have been also pretty difficult to impose such measures, in particular given the fact that the Administration of President Moon is part of the bourgeois-liberal/"progressive" camp and state repression like mass lock downs would have provoked resistance among his basis. At the same time, the South Korean population behaves disciplined in its social behavior which is also a result of its sensitivity to such epidemics given the country's experience with SARS and MERS in recent times. In addition to all this, South Korea as a new imperialist state has the economic resources necessary for an adequate response to the COVID-19 epidemic.²¹

Consequences for the global class struggle and for the workers movement

As we said above, the global COVID-19 crisis is a major turning point in the world situation. It has already resulted in a massive decline of the class struggles and popular uprisings which started in 2019. This does not mean an end of such struggles as various bold demonstrations of workers and youth in Chile, Iraq, Algeria, France and Hong Kong showed. The ongoing heroic liberation struggle of the Syrian people in Idlib against the Russian-Iranian-Assadist occupation forces is another example. But in general we have seen a massive

21 On the RCIT's analysis of South Korea see e.g. our pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting: South Korea as an Imperialist Power. On the nature of South Korean monopoly capital and the ensuing programmatic tasks of the workers vanguard, December 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/study-on-south-korea-as-an-imperialist-power/>

decrease of these protests in the past weeks as the all-powerful capitalist state Leviathan is building up its forces.

This means that the pre-revolutionary world situation has ended for now and a *global counter-revolutionary situation* has opened up. However, it is clear that such a situation unfolds in an uneven way around the globe. In some countries the counter-revolutionary offensive with fundamental attacks on democratic rights has assumed a much more aggressive form (e.g. China, Europe, parts of North, Central and South America, Malaysia) than in others.

Of course, there are different types of counter-revolutionary situations. There can be a situation where the bourgeoisie smashes the workers and popular organizations and destroys whole layers of militants. Such was the case, for example, in Russia after the Stolypin coup in June 1907, in Germany 1933, in Chile 1973 or in Egypt after the military coup on 3 July 2013. These were counter-revolutionary attacks resulting in strategic or even historic defeats of the working class.

The current situation is very different. What we see is a major counter-revolutionary offensive which confuses large sectors of the workers and popular movements since it is masked as a response to a pandemic. It is characterized by a massive strengthening of the repressive state apparatus as well as a temporary decline of the global wave of the mass struggles. Hence, it is highly likely that this is a temporary setback of the class struggle resulting in the accumulation of massive contradictions which will sooner or later result in massive political explosions.

It is not possible to predict how long this situation will last. It might be a matter of only a few months. However, what is clear is that the counter-revolutionary offensive of the ruling classes will create explosive political contradictions. Sooner or later, it will be difficult for the state-bonapartist regimes to justify their massive attacks on democratic rights. It will become soon obvious that while they give billions of dollars to the big capitalists, many workers face unemployment and wage cuts. Some strikes in Italy or people under lockdown clapping and singing on the balconies are examples of promising albeit limited developments. Likewise, a massive increase of global tensions between the Great Powers is inevitable. In other words, the global counter-revolutionary offensive can only temporarily cover up the accelerating political and economic contradictions between the classes and the states. Sooner or later, this will result inevitably in new and massive political explosions, probably in the form of major domestic crisis, wars as well as revolutionary uprisings – in the Global South as well as in the imperialist states of the West and the East.

Why is it inevitable that the massive contradictions – which, for the moment, seem to have been pushed to the background by the overlaying everything COVID-19 crisis – will result in massive political explosions? The fundamental reason for this is that these developments take place within a *historic revolutionary period*. As the RCIT has elaborated extensively in a number of documents,

this period opened up in 2008 and is characterized by the decay of capitalism. Such decay inevitable provokes economic crises, political instability and the incessant danger of war. Such conditions continually generate mass protests, popular uprisings and revolutionary situations as well as counterrevolutionary dangers. This fundamental lack of equilibrium on a world scale is the reason why the RCIT characterizes this historic period as “*revolutionary*.”²²

These fundamental contradictions have not and can not disappear because of an epidemic, public hysteria and state of emergency. The ruling classes have launched their counter-revolutionary offensive not because they are strong but rather because of desperation given the devastating crisis of their system. The harder the bourgeoisie strikes now, the stronger will be the reaction and the greater the response from the workers and popular masses.

Another highly likely political consequence will be major splits and regroupement within the parties of the bourgeoisie. A new era characterized by a “strong state” will plunge old parties into ruin and create new forces.

Likewise, the current global events will provoke major shifts within the work-

22 For the RCIT’s analysis of current historic revolutionary period see e.g. chapter 14 in Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/>. See also the annual World Perspective documents which the RCIT has published in the past years: RCIT: World Perspectives 2020: A Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 8 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2020/>; RCIT: World Perspectives 2019: Heading Towards a Volcanic Political Eruption. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 2 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2019/>; Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>; RCIT: World Perspectives 2017: The Struggle against the Reactionary Offensive in the Era of Trumpism, 18 December 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2017/>; RCIT: World Perspectives 2016: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase, 23 January 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/>; RCIT: Perspectives for the Class Struggle in Light of the Deepening Crisis in the Imperialist World Economy and Politics, 11 January 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-january-2015/>; RCIT: Escalation of Inner-Imperialist Rivalry Marks the Opening of a New Phase of World Politics. Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation Adopted by the RCIT’s International Executive Committee, April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* (English-language Journal of the RCIT) No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-april-2014/>; RCIT: Aggravation of Contradictions, Deepening of Crisis of Leadership. Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation Adopted by the RCIT’s International Executive Committee, 9.9.2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 15, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-september2013/>; RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists. Theses of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, March 2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 8, www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013

ers movement. The parallels to war-situations, which the ruling classes have drawn in past weeks, contain an element of truth. Indeed, they create a hysterical atmosphere of patriotic unity and chauvinism. Naturally, as it was the case in past major wars, such shift to chauvinism reinforces the social-patriotic nature of the reformist bureaucracy in the trade unions and in social democratic and Stalinist parties. We can assume – in fact we see it already – that these forces will jump on the bandwagon and support calls for “national unity” and “patriotic” sacrifices. They will agree to wage cuts and worsening of labor conditions. And all this will happen in the name of the struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic. It is quite likely that in some countries this will result in splits of reformist parties and fusion of its right wing – or maybe of the whole party – with open bourgeois forces (as it was the case in Italy after 1991).

It is also likely that the new era will provoke further crisis and divisions within the self-proclaimed Marxist milieu. Since these left-reformist and centrist organizations usually opportunistically adapt to the labor bureaucracy – and this bureaucracy is now massively shifting to the right – we can expect political capitulations and organizational splits and collapses. In short, the thorough crisis of the so-called left which could be already observed in the past years will accelerate. It is already clear by now that significant part of these organizations fail to oppose the counter-revolutionary offensive as they don't oppose the massive lock down in many countries. In fact, some even wholeheartedly support such anti-democratic attacks! Some have cancelled public meetings and rallies even before the state banned such gatherings. Some call people to stay at home and stop close interaction with others, praising the so-called “*social distancing*”. Their criticism is directed against individual capitalists who do not implement the lockdown measures in their companies but not against the anti-democratic lockdown policy of state, i.e. the ideal total capitalist. They often limit their criticism on insufficient measures by the governments in public health care. While such criticism is obviously correct, it ignores the fundamental *political* aspects of the COVID-19 crisis: the *anti-democratic and chauvinist offensive* of the ruling classes! Clearly such a pro-lockdown left is completely useless for the class struggle. It is part of the problem, not of the solution!

Effectively, these sectors of the left have joined the social-patriotic wave and support the most important instruments of the ruling class in the current situation of a brutal counterrevolutionary offensive. Objectively they are proponents of a policy of *class truce*, similar to the notorious “Burgfrieden”-policy of the opportunist social democrats in 1914.

In fact, an important characteristic of the specific current counter-revolutionary situation is that it is exactly the bourgeois-liberal, reformist and left-wing forces which constitute the whips of the state repression and lockdown policy. This is an important reason why many militants in the vanguard are confused and can't recognize the counter-revolutionary nature of the bourgeoisies' political offensive.

At the same time, the militant vanguard – particularly those new layers which have emerged in the global wave of class struggles last year – will make new experiences. True, in the short term, the global counter-revolutionary situation will mean a temporary setback. The activists will need some time to reconsider and discuss the new situation. Some might be confused for a certain period. But others will look for explanations and answers to the new political challenges. It is also likely that the crisis and regroupement within the centrist milieu will provoke splits and result in a progressive development of some sectors.

It is the task of revolutionaries to patiently explain the causes of the recent turns in world politics and to present a programmatic way forward. It is also our task to aid activists in understanding the authentic revolutionary spirit of Marxism. We will demonstrate that genuine Marxism has nothing to do with the pro-capitalist state policy of the Leviathan Left. The RCIT has offered since years a thorough analysis of the major global developments and outlined a revolutionary program. We will continue to do so in order to advance a process of unification of authentic revolutionary forces.

It is the task of revolutionaries all over the world to sharply denounce the Lockdown Left. Those, who support the suppression of fundamental rights in a period of gigantic political and economic attacks of the bourgeoisie, are nothing but supporters of class truce and, hence, they are objectively enemies of the working class struggle. The RCIT calls all revolutionaries who share our opposition to the Lockdown Left and who agree on the urgent necessity of a coordinated international response to the counter-revolutionary offensive to enter with us in serious discussion and collaboration.

Pillars of a revolutionary program against the global counter-revolutionary offensive

The RCIT proposes the vanguard of the workers and popular masses to organize on the basis of a program of struggle for the current phase. This means a fighting program in order to oppose the current global counter-revolutionary offensive. Clearly any fundamental solution of the crisis is only possible via a world socialist revolution which expropriates the bourgeoisie and establishes a planned economy in the interest of the workers and popular masses.

However, in the short term, the vanguard will have to focus on organizing a defensive struggle against the counter-revolutionary attacks which take place under the cover of COVID-19. This means that the struggle has to focus on five pillars:

- * *Revolutionary democracy against the capitalist state Leviathan;*
- * *Anti-chauvinism against “patriotic unity” and xenophobia;*
- * *Radical expansion of the public health system – not under the control of the capitalist state but under workers and popular control;*
- * *Massive international aid for people of the Global South;*

** Stop the austerity offensive.*

These are the central five pillars on which the vanguard must prepare for the future mass struggles. Concretely, the RCIT propose and action program with the following central slogans:

** No to the mass lockdown of people! Defend the democratic right to assembly and to demonstrate!*

** Down with mass surveillance and police state! No deployment of the military in civilian service!*

** Oppose travel ban and immigration control! Open borders for refugees!*

** Down with chauvinism against migrants as well as against other states! No to anti-Chinese chauvinism!*

** For systematic and complete health screening of all people who might have had contact with the virus. This screening must be free for all people but should be mandatory. The same is necessary for any potential treatment which should include quarantine if necessary.*

** For health screens for all travelers and for immediate health care for free if any case of infection is detected.*

** Create international teams of experts and medical staff in order to develop cure and preventive vaccination as soon as possible! All developments in this field must be accessible to the global public and have to be monitored and controlled by workers and popular organizations.*

** Build additional public health care facilities and hospitals!*

** Nationalization of the private health sector (hospitals, laboratories, etc.)!*

** Put the whole health sector under the control of the workers and oppressed as well as health experts!*

** All necessary projects in the struggle to protect public health must be financed by taxes of the rich!*

** Nationalize the pharmaceutical corporations under workers control and utilize the resources in a centralized and effective way to develop drugs against widespread illnesses like corona virus, influenza, cholera, HIV/AIDS, etc.!*

** For the immediate building of an international solidarity campaign to support semi-colonial countries to cope with the virus via free supply of medicine, medical equipment, food and hygiene products! For an international mobilization of volunteers, organized by the labor movement in order to support our brothers and sisters in these times!*

** Formation of workers and popular committees for the control and supply of basic necessities (food, cleaning, medicine)!*

** Cancel all public and household debts!*

** No sacking, no wage cuts, no attacks on labor rights!*

** Nationalization under workers control of all enterprises which shut down production!*

Comrades, brothers and sisters! Let us not loose time, let us act now! In the biblical myth God eventually smashed the monster Leviathan. In the world today, the working class and oppressed under the banner of a revolutionary

world party will defeat the modern Leviathan. Join the RCIT in preparing for the further struggles on the basis of a revolutionary program!

International Secretariat of the RCIT

A Revolutionary Action Program to fight COVID-19!

Workers and Oppressed: Don't trust the State of the Rich and Powerful! Trust only Yourself!

*12 points against the crisis by the Revolutionary Communist
International Tendency (RCIT), April 2020*

The pandemic caused by the novel Coronavirus 2019 (or - as it was renamed – SARS-CoV2) is used by various bourgeois states worldwide to implement a lockdown, to suppress democratic rights and to force people to apply “*social distancing*”. Many self-proclaimed leftists argue that the lockdown measures are necessary and should be supported in order to prevent the collapse of the healthcare system. This is completely wrong!

In one study of the *Imperial College of London* the scenario of a full lockdown is described as the most effective of all measures based on the current amount of hospital beds, intensive care units, etc. The scenario is based on a duration of at least 5 (!) months which is indeed the minimum time span for an epidemic to flatten under the given circumstances. It is nearly impossible that the bourgeoisie will keep the full lockdown for so long making the measures ineffective to begin with. Most bourgeois governments have failed to prevent the virus from spreading, as well as to develop a health infrastructure to fight the epidemic. Right now, health workers around the globe are forced to work under poor and dangerous conditions, and are being repressed when they complain about this.

However, spreading fear and panic about the pandemic and mobilizing massively the state apparatus allows a perfect distraction from the real reasons of the current great recession: the crisis and decay of capitalism. In addition the few weeks of lockdown give the ruling classes enough time to establish a “new normal” where our democratic rights are massively reduced under the cover of a permanent threat by COVID-19 and similar pandemics.

The RCIT has analyzed in numerous articles and documents the real reasons for the Lockdowns. We opposed these measures from the very first moment. Without democratic rights to demonstrate and to assemble, we can not fight against the current economic attack or for any immediate health care measures. Neither is a lockdown necessary for successfully fighting the pandemic as we can see in South Korea.

Below we present a short Action Program against the current health crisis. It is a minimum program for the immediate tasks in the struggle against the pandemic. Any long-term solution is impossible as long as the ruling class – owning the economy and controlling the state apparatus – remains in power. Liberation is only possible when the working class and the popular masses overthrow capitalism and open the road to an international socialist society without exploitation and oppression!

The following demands can only be realized if the workers and oppressed organize themselves in action committees, in trade unions and popular mass

organizations, etc. Only if the masses have their own fighting organization will it be possible to force the capitalists to make any concessions and to organize aid for those in need.

The RCIT calls all revolutionaries to collaborate internationally in order to defend our class and all oppressed against the attacks of the bourgeoisie and the threat by the new coronavirus.

Comrades, brothers and sisters: Act Now because History is Happening Now!

To All Revolutionaries: Join Forces and Fight Back!

#1: Reject the ban of assemblies, rallies, demonstrations, strikes and other democratic rights by any means necessary! Oppose the Lockdown! Fight against any surveillance! Hack and reprogram or destroy artificial intelligence used by the state, the repression apparatus and their lackeys!

#2: For an international solidarity campaign to focus all forces on helping our brothers and sisters in the Global South to survive the pandemic! Such a solidarity campaign must include practical help like aid supplies of food, hygienic products, medication and many more. Fight for the immediate cancellation of all debts! The campaign must include help to fight other diseases like HIV and Ebola! Nobody should die from preventable diseases – free vaccination, medication and therapy in all semi-colonial countries, put under control of the local health staff, the workers and poor but financed by the expropriation of the multi-national corporations!

#3: Organize and support a broad health campaign by the international labor movement and the organizations of the oppressed in order to inform the public how to prevent an infection. This includes proper way of washing hands, sneezing into one's elbow, not touching the face and covering the mouth and nose when you attend gatherings, public places, etc. Organize action committees, supported and guided by health workers to actively spread information on proper prevention measures.

#4: Help people who feel sick respectively observe any symptoms (like a running nose, a cough, etc.) to stay at home without worrying for their job via strong and militant trade union work. Popular committees should also support the urban and rural poor who are self-employed via collection of financial aid in the time of illness! Oppose all wage cuts, sackings and austerity packages!

#5: Inform people who stay at home because of symptoms to immediately contact a doctor in case of severe health problems. Also doctors should be contacted via phone if people have a suspicion that they are infected. Mobile phones, food, sanitary products, etc. should be provided by the labor movement if needed.

#6: Mobilize progressive doctors and experts by the labor movement and the organizations of the oppressed to volunteer their medical support to the poor.

#7: Demand the mass production of testing kits, respiratory protective devices, etc. Fight for internationally coordinated research programs by teams of

medical experts to jointly develop a vaccination respectively a cure for the new coronavirus. Their work must be monitored by the labor movement! Organize demonstrations and strikes up to the expropriation under workers control for companies which produce respectively could produce medical facilities as well as the pharmaceutical industry. The life of people must not depend on greedy profit calculations of private corporations!

#8: Encourage people older than 60 years respectively people with underlying health condition to engage in activities with others for a shorter period of time during the spread of viruses like the coronavirus, the flu and other infectious diseases. They should meet with others more often but shorter instead of long meetings at home. Friends, families and others must be rigid in their own hygiene and prevention control.

#9: Fight for the immediate employment of hygiene and prevention teams to support the healthcare workers who should assign restocking, passing documents to other health departments, feeding of patients free from dysphagia and similar tasks to these semi-skilled teams. Administrative tasks should be limited to a minimum and if possible delegated by the skilled healthcare workers in order to concentrate on the care for the patients.

#10: Healthcare workers must get proper rest, massive increase of their wage, access to healthy food and water for free 24/7 and must be tested regularly in order to prevent weak immune system and infections! Organize political strikes for a massive investment in the health care system financed by the expropriation of the super-rich! Don't stay at home and let them alone! Fight for them because they fight for us!

#11: Organize self-defense units to protect infected people against any chauvinist respectively reactionary attacks. The health of the self-defense units must be monitored by health workers and the team members of the units should not rotate. Additional self-defense units must be organized in order to protect mobilizations like rallies and strikes against attacks of the repression apparatus and to defend migrants against racist attacks.

#12: Focus on political mobilizations and activities to fight against the massive attack on our democratic rights and the threats on our health! All revolutionaries need to join forces based on a revolutionary program to fight against the reactionary offensive of the ruling classes!

International Secretariat

Act Now because History is Happening Now!

A call to all revolutionary organizations and activists to join forces against the global counter-revolutionary offensive under the cover of COVID-19

Open Letter of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 26 March 2020

Comrades, brother and sisters!

The ruling classes around the world – from China to the U.S., from France to Argentina, from India to Nigeria – are currently waging a gigantic counter-revolutionary offensive against the working class and the popular masses. As the capitalist world economy experiences a slump of 1929 dimensions, they viciously throw millions of workers on the streets, cut wages and attack labor rights. As they rightly fear a militant response of the workers and oppressed, they drastically increase state repression in order to suppress any revolutionary explosions.

In order to confuse and paralyze the masses, they utilize the COVID-19 crisis for their political goals. Spreading fear and panic, they put hundreds of millions of people under lockdown and suppress their rights to demonstrate and to assembly. In many countries we experience the most severe attack on democratic rights since decades if not since 1945. In other words, the COVID-19 crisis is a cover for a major global counterrevolutionary offensive.

Shamefully, large sectors of the official workers movement and the so-called “left” capitulate to this pressure and support those anti-democratic attacks, claiming that their main purpose would be to fight the Corona Virus. We call these supporters of authoritarian attacks the Lockdown Left.

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)* has analyzed the COVID-19 crisis from the very beginning. We warned in a series of statements and articles about the *political counter-revolutionary nature* of these events and outlined a revolutionary response.

Comrades, we are experiencing a major historic situation. It is no less significant than situations like the collapse of Stalinism in 1989-91 or the 9-11 events and the consequential imperialist war against Afghanistan in 2001.

We consider it of utmost urgency that those revolutionary forces which refuse the capitulation of the Lockdown Left join forces. At the moment, large sectors of the workers vanguard are confused, paralyzed and lack a clear perspective. However, things will change. Sooner or later, the tremendous political and social contradictions which are currently accumulating will explode. For this we need to prepare. We must lose no time for this!

Comrades, we are convinced that it is of utmost urgency that all revolutionaries who have not capitulated to the reactionary offensive immediately start

closer discussion and collaboration. We must unite our efforts in order to fight against the global bourgeois offensive and the consequences of COVID-19 and the Great Recession. If you have a similar assessment of the situation and agree that we need to jointly fight against the global counter-revolutionary offensive, we urge you to contact us as soon as possible. If you have relevant documents on this issue, please send them to us and we would be glad to publish them on our website.

Those interested in such discussion and collaboration should not waste time and start concrete joint work. We suggest to create a kind of international bloc which collaborates on a regular basis and which initiates wherever possible concrete international campaigns. We are willing to consider all ideas and proposals for such collaboration. We from our side suggest a platform like the following as a political basis for such a bloc.

1) Recognition of the reactionary nature of the current global counterrevolutionary offensive of the ruling classes under the cover of the COVID-19 crisis.

2) Down with the state of emergencies, the expansion of the police state and surveillance technologies! No to all mass lock downs and suppression of the right to demonstrate and to assembly!

3) Free mass testing and free hospitalization of those infected by the Corona Virus! For the radical expansion of the public health sector under workers and popular control! Expropriation of all large private health institutions! For international cooperation to quickly develop effective vaccines respectively a cure!

4) Fight against all austerity attacks! No sacking, no wage cuts, no attacks on labor rights!

5) International Aid for the people in the Global South! Cancel all public and household debts! Expropriate the multinational corporations under workers control!

6) Intransigent struggle against the Lockdown Left within the workers and popular mass organizations!

Comrades, brothers and sisters! This is a crucial historic turning point in world politics. The time has come to join forces on the basis of a program of struggle! Do not hesitate, act now because history is happening now!

2019 Corona Virus: Oppose the Global Wave of Chauvinist Hysteria!

Workers and oppressed: Do not trust the ruling class and its media!

A Statement of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 05.02.2020

1. The global public seems to be under the spell of the 2019 Corona Virus. The media in Asia, Europe and other parts of the world are dominated by panic-mongering about “*the danger from China*” as the new virus seems to have originated in the Chinese city Wuhan. Some are even talking about the “*Yellow Peril*” – a racist color-metaphor stemming from the epoch of Western colonialism. People from China are banned from entering countries, airlines on all continents are cancelling flights to and from China, and Asian migrants are experiencing increasing racist hostility in the public. The Italian government has declared a six-month state of emergency today after two (!) Chinese tourists tested positive for the coronavirus.

2. The Stalinist-capitalist dictatorship in China itself reacts to the crisis by brutal bureaucratic measures. Close to 60 million people remain under lockdown in Wuhan and at least 15 other cities. The regime utilizes the fear in order to increase the control and surveillance over its population. It certainly needs such distractions because its economy experiences a slowdown since some time and also because it partly lost control over Hong Kong since the beginning of the popular uprising in June 2019.

3. The global hysteria about the 2019 Corona Virus has already significant consequences for the economy and this will most likely worsen. Factories and shops are closing in China, transport is cut, etc. China’s stock market already experienced a dramatic crash and, according to Bloomberg, global stock exchanges lost \$ 1.5 trillion since 20 January. If the ruling classes continue this wave of chauvinist hysteria, the economic consequences will be far more dramatic.

4. This is not to downplay the seriousness of the 2019 Corona Virus. Until now, 492 people have died and more than 24,500 people have been infected across 25 countries. However, socialists need to point out that societies experience regularly flu epidemics which cause many more losses of life. For example the overall all-cause influenza-attributable mortality in the 2017/18 season was estimated to be about 152,000 deaths in Europe alone! It is worth pointing out that even the UN’s *World Health Organization* advises the governments not to impose travel or trade restrictions on China saying such measures can cause “*fear and stigma*”.

5. There can be no doubt: the reason for the global hysteria of the ruling

classes does not lie in health precautions but rather in *political calculations*. The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) emphasizes that the hysteria around the 2019 Corona Virus objectively serves the following objectives:

a) The ruling classes in China as well as in many other countries exploit the hysteria in order to justify the vast expansion of surveillance and control of its population.

b) They also utilize this hysteria in order to wipe up patriotism and suspicion against “*foreigners*”, people “*from outside*” or simple “*others*”.

c) China’s regime utilizes the hysteria also in order to create a climate of fear so that anxious people put all their hopes in the state forces.

d) The ruling classes in other imperialist states utilize the global hysteria in order to wipe up anti-Chinese chauvinism and to advance their stakes in the ongoing rivalry between the Great Powers. US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross cynically suggested that the outbreak of the 2019 Corona Virus is an opportunity for the US.

e) Likewise, reactionary forces outside China exploit the crisis in order to foster suspicion and hatred against Chinese or, more generally, against Asian migrants.

f) The ruling class will exploit the 2019 Corona Virus (and subsequently China) in order to find a culprit for the Great Recession which has recently begun. In fact, while the global measures to supposedly contain the spreading of the virus deepen the slump, the capitalist world economy has entered a recession already in the second half of 2019. The truth is that the reasons for this Great Recession are the same like those for all the others in the past: the frantic drive for profit of the capitalist corporations provokes again and again in economic crashes of the world economy.

6. The RCIT welcomes spontaneous popular initiatives which are countering the chauvinist hysteria. Examples for this are the #*Jenesuispasunviro* campaign in France in defense of Asian migrants or informative campaigns of doctors in order to counter the widespread fake news which only foster panic.

7. The RCIT calls workers and popular organizations to unite across the borders and to stand up against the global campaign of the ruling classes to exploit the 2019 Corona Virus for their ill intentions.

** No to the lockdown of people in Wuhan and other cities by China’s Stalinist-capitalist regime!*

** For systematic and complete health screening of all people who might have had contact with the virus. This screening must be free for all people but should be mandatory. The same is necessary for any potential treatment which should include quarantine if necessary.*

** Oppose any entry ban for people from China!*

** For health screens for all travelers and for immediate health care for free if any case of infection is detected.*

** No to general travel or trade restrictions on China!*

** Rally to stop any campaign against Chinese or Asian migrants!*

** Create international teams of experts and medical staff in order to develop cure and preventive vaccination as soon as possible! All developments in this field must be accessible to the global public and have to be monitored and controlled by workers and popular organizations.*

** Build additional health care facilities and hospitals! (China has demonstrated how fast such construction projects can be realized if the will for it exists!)*

** All necessary projects in the struggle to protect public health must be financed by taxes of the rich!*

** Nationalize the pharmaceutical corporations under workers control and utilize the resources in a centralized and effective way to develop drugs against widespread illnesses like influenza, corona virus, cholera, HIV/AIDS, etc.!*

International Bureau of the RCIT

Coronavirus: “I am not a virus” ... but we will be the cure!

The chauvinist campaign behind the “Wuhan Coronavirus” hysteria and the revolutionary answer

*Article by Almedina Gunić, Revolutionary Communist
International Tendency (RCIT), 02 February 2020*

The 2019-nCoV (short for: 2019 novel Coronavirus) dominates the news since more than two weeks now, broadly labeled as the “Wuhan Coronavirus” respectively “Wuhan Virus”. Travel bans were announced by the U.S., followed by Australia. Western European countries like Britain withdraw the majority of their staff in embassies and consulates from China (1).

Revolutionaries, however, need to distance themselves from the sensational hype and take a sober look at this phenomenon. #*Jenesuispasunvirus* (“I am not a virus”) was initiated by migrants from various countries like China, Vietnam, Cambodia and many more who live in France and experienced a massive increase of chauvinism lately (2). We need to understand and learn from the experiences that our brothers and sisters from various Asian countries made since the media hype started.

Information on the virus itself which is given by doctors, health workers and research institutes help us to get an idea about the virus itself. But it is our Marxist worldview that provides us with the methodological framework to draw the correct conclusions in order to deal with measures implemented by the ruling class. It is our Marxist worldview which guides us in elaborating a revolutionary stance even in such events like the spread of a virus. In the end of the day, it is the task of our class – the proletariat – to solve all fundamental problems of the human society.

Hard Facts on 2019-nCov

The 2019-nCov is a virus which shares some similarities with already known diseases like the so-called SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS-CoV) and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome or EMC/2012 or MERS-CoV). All three diseases are a form of zoonotic human coronavirus. This means that they most likely started with an infection passed to human by animals like some species of bats in the case of SARS-CoV and eventually 2019-nCov and camels in the case of EMC/2012. It is not excluded that some intermediate host linked these viruses between the named animals and humans. However, after the infection all three viruses are spread from human to human as the viruses mutate and adapt to the specifics of our bodies. All three forms are part of the Coronavirus family which is named after the appearance of the viruses being

reminiscent with a worn crown (3).

2019-nCov is not well researched yet as it most likely infected patient zero (first human infected by the virus) in December 2019 or sooner, giving medical researches not enough time to fully understand its character. However, it seems that patient zero was *not* infected at the Huanan seafood market (Wuhan) but rather a later infected person “brought” the infection to the market where it spread rapidly (4). The morbidity (number of infections in a population group) is not clear yet, although we know that worldwide 11,955 laboratory-confirmed cases of 2019-nCoV infection have been reported until 1st February. The same source states that the number of deaths is 259, which doesn’t give an exact answer to the mortality (ratio of how many died in a statistic group of people) but gives a certain premature idea (5). A commentary published by the NPO institute Molecular Diversity Preservation International (MDPI) states: “*A range of disease has been observed highlighted by fever, dry cough, shortness of breath, and leukopenia; patients have included mild cases needing supportive care to severe cases requiring extracorporeal membrane oxygenation; however, compared to SARS-CoV (10% mortality) and MERS-CoV (35% mortality), the 2019-nCoV appears to be less virulent at this point with the exception of the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.*” (6)

The basic reproduction number of 2019-nCov might be 3.11 (i.e. how many people are infected by one patient), although approximately only 5% of the cases in Wuhan may be known yet (7). The incubation period seems to be something around 6 days (8).

In simple words one can say that as far as we know, 2019-nCov was most likely caused by an animal like a bat infecting a human, potentially transmitted via another host but is spread by human-to-human contact since then. It seems to be similar contagious to the flu, although we don’t know if it is spread via air, sneezed droplets or other ways. It is absolutely unclear how many people have been in contact with the virus without an outbreak of infection respectively how many people have functioned (“only”) as a host. Therefore we only estimate that the virus is less deadly than SARS -CoV and MERS -CoV but more deadly than Influenza (the flu) compared to the overall contact it gets. Mutations of the virus are developing, which is a general virus behavior. Very dangerous mutations might or might not happen as with other viruses. Last but not least the origin of the first infections seems *not* to be the Huanan Market (Wuhan).

The Perception of 2019-nCov

The virus itself may or may not become a severe threat to mankind, a danger always looming on the medical horizon. However, the way the bourgeoisie and its media deal with the virus is quite exceptional. One of the most chauvinist examples of bourgeois media coverage on 2019 -nCoV is the French paper

“Courrier picard”. The printed issue from the 26th January had the words *“Alerte Jeune”* (Yellow Alarm) on its cover and the title *“Nouveau péril jeune?”* (New Yellow Peril) on the leading article (9). The racist phrase *“Yellow Peril”* has a long history in the Western world to describe threats from the continent of Asia which are destroying the culture, the economy and health of Western societies. It is arch-reactionary and was very often used in France in the time of colonialism (10).

In addition to the USA and Australia, countries like Singapore, Mongolia and Guatemala have announced travel restrictions respectively travel bans from Chinese visitors. Italy has even declared the state of emergency for the next six months because of two (!) Chinese tourists in Rome, who were diagnosed with 2019 -nCoV infection. The spokesperson of the WHO, Chris Lindmeier put it rightly: *“As we know from other scenarios, be it Ebola or other cases, whenever people want to travel, they will. And if the official paths are not opened, they will find unofficial paths.”* (11). The major threat is not 2019-nCov, it is the potential for chauvinism and bonapartism. The major threats are the steps that have been and will be taken by the ruling classes against the workers and oppressed under the pretext of security. China has already forced the people of Wuhan into quarantine, allowing only minimum interaction between the citizens (12).

The progressive protests in Hong Kong (13), which had mainly the youth on the streets fighting against the bonapartist regime in China may come under a reactionary influence with some blue ribbons joining the protests (14). The RCIT strongly oppose any collaboration between the protesters in Hong Kong with pro-establishment forces. In addition some activists have raised reactionary accusations similar to the chauvinist Yellow Peril-trend in France. It is true that the imperialist Chinese regime can not be trusted in its implementation of the correct measures against the virus. However, any chauvinism against the people from Wuhan and other parts of China must be opposed by any means!

Irrespective of all of these developments, the Chinese imperialist state has shown how centralized it deals with the outbreak of 2019-nCov. A whole new emergency hospital, the Huoshenshan Hospital with 1,000 beds for patients infected by 2019 -nCoV was build in only 9 days (15)! The Western imperialists’ approach shows a combination of chauvinism towards the people of the continent of Asia and the general increase of inner-imperialist tensions. However, for the more neoliberal, less state-capitalistic Western imperialists such an efficient and centralized reaction by the Chinese state is so far beyond their understanding. The only explanation they have for such an efficient reaction is: the 2019 -nCoV is a bigger threat than known yet and Chinese imperialists are hiding information. It is beyond the horizon of the lobbyist structured U.S. and the ideals of the Western imperialist version of free market to create such a facility irrespective of the costs in shortest time.

Even with all resources at hand, the government of the U.S. had nothing similar done in 2009 and later on as the so-called *“swine flu”* infected 60.8 millions,

killing between 8,868 and 18,306 patients in the United States in only one year! The (H1N1)pdm09 virus (swine flu) killed 151,700-575,400 people worldwide without a single state declaring travel ban for US-citizens (16). This demonstrates again that the paranoia around the 2019 -nCoV is simple chauvinism against Chinese people and people from Asia in general.

Not to speak about the fact that so many other diseases are killing people in poor semi-colonial countries like the war-driven Yemen where a Cholera outbreak infected 686,722 people and killed 1,093 – mainly children – between 1st January 2018 and 12th May 2019 (17). Another example is the HIV/AIDS infection where the estimated regional death toll stood at a total of 2.2 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2001 (18). Even from a pure medical point of view, it is unreasonable to participate in any hysteria with 2019 -nCoV when so many more people in the world die from other diseases. However, it is the imperialist arrogance where the lives from the Western respectively the imperialist citizens (in case of Japan, Russia, China) count more than thousands or even millions of lives from people living in semi-colonial countries.

Revolutionary Answers

Now, with all the facts clear and the bigoted, chauvinist motives of the people behind the hysteria made visible, it is important to draw the correct conclusions out of the current situation.

First, revolutionaries have to oppose any form of chauvinism that occurs against people from Asia (or any other part of the world). This chauvinism can appear openly articulated like in the newspaper “*Courrier picard*” and the Yellow peril ideology. But it can also be far more hidden like it is in the case of the double standard towards dealing with diseases coming from China with the 2019 -nCoV and diseases coming from the U.S. like the (H1N1)pdm09. Therefore revolutionaries should even oppose general travel bans and forced quarantine. This doesn't mean to ignore the necessity of protection against 2019 -nCoV and other diseases. However, the answer is to implement health screens for all travelers and to offer immediate health care for free if any case of infection is detected.

Second, revolutionaries should demand that both cure and preventive vaccination must be developed as soon as possible. This means that experts and medical staff all around the world have to collaborate in order to fulfill these tasks in short time. All developments in this field must be accessible for the global public and have to be monitored and controlled by the international workers movement. Health care facilities and hospitals must be built in the same tempo as it was the case with the Huoshenshan Hospital in order to offer sufficient treatment.

Third, the general quarantine for all people in Wuhan and other places has to be lifted and replaced by systematic and complete health screening of all

people who might have had contact with the virus. This screening must be free for all people but should be mandatory. The same is necessary for any potential treatment which should include quarantine if necessary. The results however, should only be accessible for the health staff and the patients. All information must be protected by the workers movement in order to prevent any outrage against infected people.

The costs of all measures must be financed by the multinational corporations, especially the pharmaceutical industry which needs to be nationalized under workers control. We must fight for these and other revolutionary demands via protests and strikes and general strikes.

2019 -nCoV is a virus and its cure has to be developed by medical experts. However, we as the working class are the class which leads mankind into a future of freedom and health. We are the ones to fight against the ruling classes, against capitalism and imperialism. We are the ones to fight for a revolutionary uprising, a world revolution against this class system. A system which is responsible for the unnecessary dead of billions of people in so many forms! Let us make sure that no brother or sister must die in misery anymore!

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About the Author

Michael Pröbsting was born in Vienna (Austria) in 1967. He became politically active when he was 14 years old and has been an organized Trotskyist militant since the age of 16. After five years of membership in the *United Secretariat of the Fourth International* of Ernest Mandel, he joined the *League for a Revolutionary Communist International* (later renamed to *League for the Fifth International*) in February 1989. He served on the leadership bodies of the Austrian section from 1989 and of the LRCI/LFI since 1994, until he and his comrades-in-arms were expelled by the majority of this organization in April 2011. Soon after this, they founded the *Revolutionary Communist Organization for Liberation* in Austria and the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* which has sections, activists and fraternal organizations in 18 countries on all continents. He serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

As part of his international political work, Michael Pröbsting has spent lengthy periods in Occupied Palestine (Israel) in 1985, Eastern Germany during the political revolutionary process of 1989-91, Britain in 1994, and during the revolutionary period in Argentina in 2002. In addition, he gained experience in workers' and anti-imperialist movements during visits to numerous countries in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

Michael Pröbsting is the author of many articles and pamphlets in both German and English of which a number have been translated in other languages. His books are:

- * *Rosa Luxemburg – "Ich bin ein Land der unbeschränkten Möglichkeiten"* (Co-Author, 1999)
- * *The Credit Crunch – A Marxist Analyses* (Co-Author, 2008)
- * *Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration* (2010)
- * *Die halbe Revolution. Lehren und Perspektiven des arabischen Aufstandes* (2011)
- * *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital* (2013)
- * *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism* (2013)
- * *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice* (2014)
- * *Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony. The Development of Greek Capitalism* (2015)
- * *Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today* (2016)
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- * *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan* (2019)

In *The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution* Michael Pröbsting analyses the dramatic events in spring 2020 which have opened a new historic era. A triple crisis has shocked the world. The Third Depression has begun, characterized by a devastating economic slump of the capitalist world economy which is certainly no less dramatic than the crisis which started in 1929.

In addition, there is a wave of anti-democratic attacks of a scale which has not been seen in the imperialist countries since 1945. This has triggered a global turn towards Chauvinist State Bonapartism and the creation of a monstrous Leviathan-like state machinery.

And finally, the world faces COVID-19 – a pandemic which endangers many lives and which is exploited by the ruling classes in order to spread fear, to deflect attention from the capitalist causes of the economic crisis and to justify the turn towards chauvinist state bonapartism.

The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution also shows that large sectors of the reformist workers movement and the so-called left fail to understand the meaning of this triple crisis. Similar to the situation in 1914 after the beginning of World War I we can observe a gigantic wave of opportunist capitulation by many self-proclaimed socialists as they support or at least do not denounce the global lockdown and the suppression of democratic rights which the ruling classes are imposing in the name of combat against the pandemic.

The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution offers a Marxist analysis of this historic crisis and elaborates a revolutionary perspective for the struggles ahead.



Michael Pröbsting is a revolutionary activist since more than 37 years. He is the author of many articles and pamphlets in English and German language. He published a number of books which deal with issues of modern capitalism and class struggle, the history of the workers movement as well as with issues of Marxist theory. He is the International Secretary of the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*.