



# REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM

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## COVID-19: The Current and Historical Roots of Bourgeois Lockdown “Socialism”

by Michael Pröbsting

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Picture on the cover: French police in Paris, November 2015 (Source: Wikipedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Police\\_nationale\\_en\\_service\\_en\\_r%C3%A9ponse\\_au\\_Attentats\\_%C3%A0\\_Paris,\\_November\\_15,\\_2015.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Police_nationale_en_service_en_r%C3%A9ponse_au_Attentats_%C3%A0_Paris,_November_15,_2015.jpg))

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# COVID-19: The Current and Historical Roots of Bourgeois Lockdown “Socialism”

## Police State and Universal Basic Income are key elements of the new version of reformist “War Socialism” of 1914

By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 19.12.2020

### INTRODUCTION

On the surface, the Lockdown in spring 2020 provoked a surprising and astonishing reaction among nearly the whole left. Social democrats, Stalinists, Anarchist and “Trotskyists” have been more or less united: they all support the Lockdown policy with all its related restrictions as it was imposed by capitalist governments around the world.

Of course, they were not uncritically towards the bourgeoisie. They criticized governments in various cases for imposing such Lockdowns not early enough, not drastic enough or not long enough. And they also called for various accompanying social and health measures – which, unsurprisingly, were all ignored by the bourgeoisie.

But on the main issue both the majority of the ruling class as well as most of the reformist and centrist left agreed: imposing a state of emergency with massive anti-democratic restrictions for the popular masses up to curfews – a policy which has been continued to different degrees since then. This is why the RCIT denounces these “socialists” and characterizes them as “*Lockdown Left*”.

These “socialists” objectively supported the key project of the monopoly bourgeoisie in the current period: the expansion of the *chauvinist bonapartist state apparatus*. This is a crucial strategic project of the ruling class because of the explosive crisis which it faces since autumn 2019. The imperialist world order has entered a deep crisis because of three, interrelated, development:

\* The onset of the worst depression of capitalist world economy since 1929;<sup>1</sup>

\* The acceleration of the rivalry between the imperialist Great Power – in particular the U.S. and China;<sup>2</sup>

\* A global wave of sharp class struggles and popular uprisings.<sup>3</sup>

It is this background which makes it necessary for the ruling class to launch historic attacks on democratic rights, which goes hand in hand with massive lay-off of workers and the worsening of labor conditions. These attacks are crucial for the goal of capitalists to lower the wages of the

labor force and to suppress mass struggles.

In other words, the ruling classes in East and West are exploiting the pandemic as a pretext for advancing the political and economic interests of the capitalist class – in particular of its top layer, the monopoly bourgeoisie. For this purpose the ruling class exaggerates the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic to the extreme. Yes, this is a serious pandemic but it is neither unprecedented nor does it justify the public hysteria which has been instigated by the governments and the bourgeois media. Hence, the Lockdown policy, the systematic attacks on democratic rights, the expansion of the police and surveillance state – all this is not caused by considerations for public health but rather by the stubborn will of the ruling elite to increase power and profit.

The RCIT has elaborated a comprehensive analysis of the COVID-19 Counterrevolution in more than 60 documents – including one book and several pamphlets.<sup>4</sup> We have denounced the Lockdown policy from the very beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in early February 2020.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this pamphlet is not to repeat our analysis. Neither do we intend to elaborate in detail our critique of the Lockdown Left. We will rather limit ourselves to a brief summary of the policy of these reformist and centrist left which we characterize as *social-bonapartists*, i.e. as supporters of capitalist state bonapartism under the cover of “socialist” phrases.

Instead, we will focus on showing the objective basis of the sudden political collapse of the left. Furthermore we will point to the historic similarities of such social-bonapartism and the program of *war socialism* which was propagated by social-patriotic reformists during World War I. Albeit most pseudo-leftists today might not be aware of it, their combination of support for the reactionary policy of imperialist states with socialist phrases bear strong similarities to their ideological predecessors in German social democracy after 1914.

## Comunismo Revolucionario

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# 1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY OF THE LOCKDOWN LEFT

We call the political outlook of the social-bonapartist left *Lockdown Socialism*. Its core elements are support for the current bonapartist measures of the capitalist state (under the pretext of the pandemic) and the call to this state to provide people with a basic income without conditions (often called *Universal Basic Income*).

When the bourgeoisie – first in China, than in Europe and on all other continents – started to wage an unprecedented campaign in spring 2020, the vast majority of the reformist and centrist left followed suit. It naively trusted, and repeated, the public propaganda about the worst pandemic in modern history and supported all kind of restrictions of the popular masses – from curfews, state of emergency, banning of mass meetings, deploying the police and army on the streets, etc.

## i) Support for Capitalist Police State

As we have elaborated a detailed critique of the supporter of the Lockdown Left for capitalist state bonapartism, we will limit ourselves at this point to exemplify our assessment with a few examples. <sup>6</sup> In countries where the Lockdown Left has been part of capitalist governments it actively promotes state bonapartism. In Spain, for example, 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. As we showed in a special article they have all fully supported the state bonapartist attacks. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> The same has been the case in South Africa where the Communist Party is a crucial part of the popular front 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.

In countries where such Lockdown reformists are not part of the government, they have called for repressive measures against the masses. In Brazil, the PCB even opened 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.” <sup>9</sup>

The German Stalinists, affiliated with the Greek KKE, followed the same social-bonapartist line. “A consistent lockdown of all non-essential processes would have been quite appropriate. But it was not implemented in Germany.” <sup>10</sup>

So-called Trotskyists have hardly been better. The IMT led by Alan Woods praised in its central statement on the

COVID-19 crisis the approach of the capitalist dictatorship in China and called for its implementation in Europe. “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.” <sup>11</sup>

Its Austrian section even called the male youth to volunteer for the alternative military service! “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.” <sup>12</sup>

Another pseudo-Trotskyist organization – the Latin America-based *International Workers League* (LIT-CI) with the Brazilian PSTU as its most important section – took the same approach. As we explained in a special article, this organization even refused to support spontaneous mass demonstrations against the arch-reactionary Bolsonaro government because of “the danger of the pandemic”! <sup>13</sup> It published a comprehensive action program against the COVID-19 pandemic which adopts the key elements of the COVID-19 policy of the bourgeoisie. <sup>14</sup> It calls the current crisis “the worst pandemic in a century” – repeating the bourgeois hypocrisy which ignores all the other pandemics which have cost annually hundreds of thousands or millions of lives during the past decades. According to the LIT leadership, doomsday is close and “humanity is helpless”. “There will be no vaccine in the short term, there is no safe treatment. After months of the most serious pandemic in recent history, humanity remains helpless.”

Like various other social-bonapartist organizations in the past few months, the LIT program denounced the ruling class not for imposing a lockdown but ... for not imposing a longer and harsher lockdown! “Contrary to what governments say, the pandemic is not under control. On the contrary, it is getting worse worldwide. There are many more infected and killed by COVID than official figures admit. Governments want to hide their absolute inability to preserve workers’ lives. They want to justify the end of partial quarantines worldwide. (...) Now, European governments have ended partial quarantines to save companies, as in Italy, Spain, and France. This directly exposes workers to a new wave of contamination by the virus. (...) Under pressure from companies, the governments in the world have even abandoned partial quarantines. They are exposing workers to a new round of the pandemic. (...) According to scientists, in no country, even in the most affected, has the stage

of “herd immunity” been reached, which ensures the control of the pandemic. All countries are threatened by the continuation of the current wave or a new wave before an effective vaccine or treatment is achieved. (...) We demand a safe quarantine, with housing and full wages for all workers, whether employed or not.”

Similarly the Cliffite SWP in Britain and their international comrades in the IST. These middle-class leftists openly call for a “full and indefinite lockdown” (of course except for the “essential workers” who should continue delivering things to the middle class at their homes!). “The Tories could have begun the necessary full lockdown of schools and non-essential workplaces over half term. But they squandered the chance. There has to be a full lockdown combined with a furlough scheme that pays 100 percent of the wages of workers who are laid off. And it must be indefinite, not just for a month.”<sup>15</sup>

And another ex-Trotskyist group – the “League for the 5<sup>th</sup> International” – not only fully supported the Lockdown policy but even called the capitalist police to enforce it as strongly as possible! “Cops need to enforce laws that actually do protect the population from morons who think that their “right” to infect the rest of us is sacrosanct.”<sup>16</sup>

Hence, it is not surprising that these two last-named organizations (as well as the Stalinists<sup>17</sup>) are committed supporters of the scandalous “ZeroCOVID” Campaign in Britain. This supposedly progressive campaign criticizes the Johnson government (which is indeed a reactionary bunch of highfalutin fools) for inconsistently imposing draconic Lockdowns. Instead, the organizers of this campaign (including SWP/IST and RF/L5I) demand “A full UK-wide lockdown until new cases in the community have been reduced close to zero”. They openly declare that their model for a

Lockdown strategy are countries mostly ruled by dictatorships resp. right-wing governments or countries with a strong tradition of authoritarian regimes. “There is a simple alternative to this chaotic policy of ‘living with the virus’, with its on-off lockdowns, ineffectual testing programme and constant economic insecurity. The alternative is the strategy currently in place in Australia, China, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam, who have almost entirely eliminated the virus and whose citizens enjoy life without the need for draconian lockdown restrictions. This means full lockdown and safe working conditions in essential workplaces until community transmission is near to zero, then suppression of small outbreaks via local public sector Find, Test, Trace, Isolate and Support, and 100% protection of livelihoods.”<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the SWP, L5I and others preach the reactionary police state methods – “successfully” deployed in China, Vietnam, Australia, etc. – of isolating the popular masses. “Lockdown Socialism” in its purest form!

We could go on with many more examples. Let us take Argentina, the country where “Trotskyist” parties have been most successful in recent past and hold several deputies in national and regional parliaments since some years. FIT(U) – an alliance which unites the strongest of these parties (PTS/FT, PO/CRCI, IS/UIT and MST/LIS) – repeatedly raised a slogan which de facto means a mass curfew for the working population: “For a quarantine without layoffs, suspensions and salary cuts.”<sup>19</sup>

Various organizations have been not so explicit in their support for the bourgeois Lockdown policy (e.g. the CWI led by Peter Taaffe and Tony Saunois.) But they implicitly support it by refusing to criticize or to oppose it.

## Books of the RCIT

### Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution

What It Is and How to Fight It

A Marxist analysis and strategy for the revolutionary struggle

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.

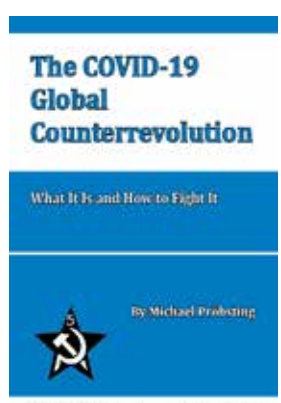
In addition, there is a wave of anti-democratic attacks of a scale which has not been seen in the imperialist countries since 1945. This has triggered a global turn towards Chauvinist State Bonapartism and the creation of a monstrous Leviathan-like state machinery.

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.

The book contains an introduction and 6 chapters plus an appendix (176 pages) and includes 5 figures and a diagram.



## ii) Call for Universal Basic Income

The idea of an unconditional basic income – usually called *Universal Basic Income* (UBI) – exists already for a long time. In the last years various progressive academics have expressed their support for concepts like “*building a post-work society on the basis of fully automating the economy, reducing the working week, implementing a universal basic income.*”<sup>20</sup> This idea has gained much more support since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.

In Spain the coalition government of social democratic PSOE and the left-populist PODEMOS (of which the Stalinist PSOE and IU are also part), introduced a so-called “*Living Minimum Income*” (IMV) a few months ago. This IMV guarantees an income of €462 a month for an adult living alone. Left-wing supporters of the government praise this initiative as a measure to introduce a *Universal Basic Income*, albeit some activists of pro-UBI initiative deny this.<sup>21</sup>

In Canada, Leah Gazan – a Winnipeg Member of Parliament from the social democratic NDP – has launched a campaign in collaboration with pro-UBI initiatives to introduce an unconditional, guaranteed livable income to all Canadians above the age of 18, paid on a regular basis, supplementing benefits already received from current and future government public services. According to a poll, 62% of the local population supports the introducing of basic income.<sup>22</sup>

In March 2020, over 500 academics and public figures from around the globe signed an open letter urging governments to enact emergency basic income during the pandemic. “*We are living in unprecedented times – as the Covid-19 virus spreads rapidly across the globe, it undermines the very foundations of the global economy. And, just as pandemics cannot be dealt with using ordinary public health measures, global economic collapse requires more than traditional welfare policies. (...) Without drastic government intervention, countless numbers will suffer, businesses will close, unemployment will skyrocket, and the economy will go into a steep recession and possibly even a second Great Depression. It is time for governments to enact emergency universal basic income, ensuring that everyone in their jurisdiction has enough money to buy the food and other essentials they need to survive. Alone, basic income will not be enough – migrants and detainees, for example, will need support specific to their circumstances, and evidently food and healthcare must be provided for all. But an unconditional basic income should play a central role in the emergency response to this crisis. Without it, lives will be lost.*”<sup>23</sup>

One of the signatories, Jens Lerche, emphasized in an interview the hope for UBI as a solution: “*The only simple and straightforward system that could carry everyone through the crisis is universal basic income. It could ensure that no one fell through the cracks.*”<sup>24</sup>

Sectors of the ex-Stalinist *Party of the European Left* – the left social democratic alliance of the LINKE (Germany), PCF (France), PCE and IU (Spain), SYRIZA (Greece), etc.<sup>25</sup> – play a central role in pushing a broad campaign in the European Union for the introduction of a *Universal Basic Income*. They even present it as a kind of a first step towards the principle of socialism (“*To Each According to Her or His Basic Needs*”). “*Basic income is not just one financial measure among many but a social, economic and civic financial amount which has a far-reaching multiplier effect in many areas*

*of life. Basic income is a profound civilizational change on par with the introduction of universal suffrage or universal health care. Read an analysis of its key aspects.*”<sup>26</sup>

Together with other forces, they have initiated a petition campaign appealing to the EU governments to introduce such a basic income: “*Our aim is to establish the introduction of unconditional basic incomes throughout the EU which ensure every person’s material existence and opportunity to participate in society as part of its economic policy. (...) We request the EU Commission to make a proposal for unconditional basic incomes throughout the EU, which reduce regional disparities in order to strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU. This shall realize the aim of the joint statement by the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission, stated in 2017, that “the EU and its member states will also support efficient, sustainable and equitable social protection systems to guarantee basic income” in order to combat inequality.*”<sup>27</sup>

More “orthodox Marxist” currents remember some phrases from the classics and hence warn against the illusionary strategy of a *Universal Basic Income*. However, as we have shown a number of these organizations call for an unlimited Lockdown “until it is safe to leave our houses” or until a “safe vaccine” has been developed. Until then, they demand people should get a decent living wage.

While such demands are not an explicit approval of the *Universal Basic Income*, it effectively adapts to this policy. How long do these Lockdown Leftists want people to stay home? Until it is safe to come out? But this can take one year or longer! It is already more than 9 months ago that the virus spread around the world. Until there is a safe vaccine? Again, when will this be? All the vaccines which are entering the market now have not gone through a sufficient testing period so that we could know their efficiency and their long-term effects. Hence, they are not safe and they can not be safe! In other words, the whole policy of the Lockdown Left effectively means calling for a *Universal Basic Income* at least for one or two years!

Finally, we note that this whole “left-wing” Lockdown policy is utterly cynical towards the working class and the oppressed people. How can a society continue existing if many people are forced to stay at home? It is only possible if the countries of the South and the lower strata of the working class in the imperialist countries (many of them migrants from the South) continue producing all the food and the commodities which people in the rich country then can order from their homes via online shopping. In other words, the Lockdown policy deepens the divisions between the workers from the North and those from the South as well as the divisions between the middle class and better-off workers, on one hand, and the lower strata of the proletariat (the so-called “essential workers”).

## iii) The Revolutionary Response

Many supporters of the Lockdown Left justify their policy by pointing out that nearly all governments in the world are responding in such a way to the COVID-19 crisis. This is, to put it diplomatically, an utterly idiotic argument! Nearly all bourgeois governments around the globe have reacted in the past decades to the decline of the profit rate and the general crisis of capitalism with a program of cuts in social and health services, privatizations, deregulations,



etc. This has not been a confirmation of the correctness of the neoliberal doctrine (“*There Is No Alternative*”) but rather of the Marxist thesis that all these governments serve the interests of the capitalist class.

All imperialist governments deal with increasing migration by imposing stricter border controls and stopping many migrants from entering the rich countries. This has not been a confirmation of the correctness of the chauvinist principles of border control and “*putting our homeland first*” but rather of the Marxist thesis that imperialism is inherently racist and an enemy of the oppressed people of the South. The same is the case concerning the fact that all imperialist states treat large sectors of migrants in their countries as second-class citizens and deny them of many democratic and social rights. The fact that this is the case all over the world can hardly make a Marxist supporting such national oppression! We could go on with many more examples but we are sure the reader gets the point.

We have elaborated in a number of RCIT documents what should be the revolutionary response to the current crisis. Let us briefly summary the main pillars of our program.<sup>28</sup>

The pandemic must be fought not with the methods of the bourgeois police state but rather with a socialist health program. We call for a massive expansion of the health sector – more hospitals, more ICU, more health personal with better wages, etc. Instead of spending billions for the expansion of the police and surveillance state, the money should be used for health measures. Likewise there has to be free access to health care and the possibilities for tests. There must be also free provision of protective gear and hygiene articles at workplaces and public places. Necessary investments have to be made to install more secure air conditioning systems in closed rooms. Furthermore we call for the nationalization of all private corporations in the care industry without compensation and the building of additional care homes with additional and better paid personal. Socialists should also call for the nationalization of the drug and bio-tech industry in order to implement a centralized plan for the development of safe vaccines.

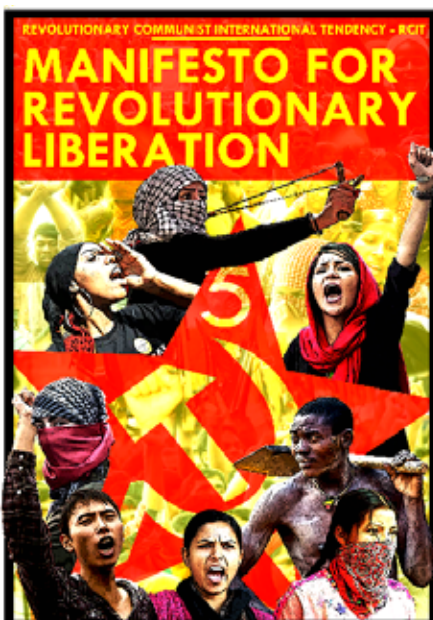
However, the decisive point of such a program is that must be implemented under workers and popular control – and not under the control of the capitalist police state. It is clear and obvious that the ruling class exploits the current pandemic in order to advance their control over the people. Under no circumstances must socialists support such a bonapartist policy but rather insist on a program based on workers and popular control!

In order to defend our living standards the workers must not only defend their wages and jobs but also mobilize for a public employment program as well as for the nationalization of the corporations and banks under workers control. Such a program must also include a massive program of building new houses for the poor with proper infrastructure in order to reduce crowdedness in slums.

Another crucial issue is the struggle for the defense of democratic rights and against the expansion of the power of the bonapartist state machinery.

All these demands – for democracy, for proper health reforms, against social misery – can not be achieved without mass struggles (e.g. mass demonstrations, strikes, general strikes, popular uprisings). This is why the RCIT calls for the democratic mass assemblies – which, we note in passing, by definition require socialists to oppose the anti-democratic Lockdown rules. We also call for the creation of organs of self-defense against brutal police thugs.

However, in the end the COVID-19 counterrevolution can not be defeated via some social and health reforms. Every limited success of mass struggle would be attacked and overturned soon again by the vicious ruling class. As the RCIT explained in its works we have entered a new era of repression and state bonapartism. In this new period the key slogan is the *transformation of the state of emergency into a popular uprising*. The recent events in the U.S. as well as other countries (e.g. Peru, Guatemala, Nigeria, France) have fully confirmed this strategic slogan. We are convinced that the coming period we will see even more uprisings! The task of revolutionaries is to prepare and organize for the coming events.



## PROGRAM OF THE RCIT

# Manifesto for Revolutionary Liberation

*Adopted at the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress of the RCIT in October 2016*

**Introduction \* I. Decaying Capitalism \* II. Today's Worldwide Historic Revolutionary Period \* III. The Reactionary Offensive of the Ruling Class \* IV. A Program for Socialist Revolution to Halt Humanity's Collapse into Barbarism \* V. The Crisis of Leadership and the Construction of a Revolutionary World Party \* VI. Work in Mass Organizations and the United Front Tactic \* VII. The Semi-Colonial South \* VIII. The Emerging Imperialist Great Powers of the East: China and Russia \* IX. The Old Imperialist Great Powers: The EU, North America and Japan \* X. Conclusion**

*A RCIT Pamphlet, 36 pages, A5 Format*

## 2. A MARXIST CRITIQUE OF LOCKDOWNISM AND UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

It is no accident that many “progressive” supporters of the Lockdown policy also call for the introduction of a *Universal Basic Income* and, vice versa, nearly all pro-UBI forces advocate massive anti-democratic restrictions under the pretext of COVID-19. As we will show below there exist an objective logic which connects the two: it is the naïve trust in and support for a well-meaning authoritarian state which would “look after the people”. In other words, it is the logic of social-bonapartism.

### i) The Chauvinist Bonapartist State as an Enemy of the Workers and Oppressed

We have explained in our works in detail that any support of “left-wing” forces for the Lockdown policy is a treacherous capitulation to chauvinist state bonapartism. Hence, at this point we will only briefly summarize our most important criticism.

First, as we demonstrated in various documents, the scope of the pandemic does not justify in any way the comprehensive destruction of democratic rights as it has been taking place around the globe in the past 9 months.

Secondly, how can any democrat, any intelligent person, not to speak about Marxists, imagine that the ruling class could react to such a pandemic from the viewpoint of public health interests?! When they deal with issues of the economy, they do so from the point of view of the capitalist class. When they deal with issues of war and peace, they do so from the point of view of the capitalist class. When they deal with issues of migration, they do so from the point of view of the capitalist class. When they deal with issues of ecology, they do so from the point of view of the capitalist class. When they deal with issues of public health policy (health insurance, number of public hospitals, wages for nurses, etc.), they do so from the point of view of the capitalist class. So when they deal with the issues of the pandemic, they shall NOT do so from the point of view of the capitalist class?! Such an assumption is utter nonsense! And for Marxists such naivety equals to idiocy and borders to political criminality!

Thirdly, and related to this, even if one believes that the pandemic is as serious as the governments and their media claim, how can any democrat, not to speak about Marxists, support a policy which dramatically increases the presence and control of police and army on the streets and which massively restricts the freedom of movement and democratic rights in general for the popular masses? And should any democrat, not to speak about Marxists, not get suspicious that the ruling class has evil intentions in exploiting the pandemic when they see no problem that people go to their jobs but ban them from meeting others in their free time?!

As a matter of fact, the ruling class has repeatedly utilized in history “global shocks” – as the OECD calls such events – in order to launch a shock-and-awe attack against democratic rights of their population. To name just a few examples we refer to World War I or, a more recent example,

the 9-11 attack in 2001.<sup>29</sup>

Fourthly, any democrat, not to speak about Marxists, should be able to recognize that anti-democratic and anti-popular nature of the governments’ response to COVID-19 when looking to the Modi government in India, Netanyahu in Israel, various right-wing and authoritarian regimes in Africa and Latin America. Should a democrat, not to speak about Marxists, not start thinking critical about the Lockdown policy at least at this point?!

Finally, how can any democrat, not to speak about Marxists, deny the bonapartist nature of the Lockdown policy when – at the same time – the very same governments launch unprecedented reactionary attacks in other field of politics?! To take just a few examples: Israel’s never-ending war of expulsion and mass murder against the Palestinian people<sup>30</sup>, Modi’s war against Kashmir and the Muslim minority in India<sup>31</sup>, Macron’s war against Muslims in France and around the globe as well as the police state law by his government<sup>32</sup>, the anti-popular policy by the extreme right-wing governments in Chile and Bolivia (until the last elections)<sup>33</sup>, the extremely oppressive policy of the Xi dictatorship in China in Hong Kong, Xinjiang / East Turkestan as well as the whole country<sup>34</sup>, etc. How can Marxists recognize the reactionary character of all these regimes but when it comes to the COVID-19 policy of the very same governments they should suddenly stop being reactionary?! Is it not obvious that such an approach violates the most fundamental principles not only of Marxism but even of most elementary common sense?!

No, it is clear and undeniable that the COVID-19 policy of bourgeois governments around the world is an essential part of a broader agenda of the ruling classes: the formation of “strong-man regimes” ruling with iron fist in order to safeguard the capitalist system in a period of economic collapse, rivalry between states and popular unrest. In other words, the Lockdown policy is part of a comprehensive strategy of the monopoly bourgeoisie: the creation of a chauvinist bonapartist state. Marxists should be very clear about the political nature of this animal: such a state is an instrument of the ruling class and hence an enemy of the workers and oppressed.

We conclude this chapter by referring to the well-known phrase by the Prussian war theoretician Carl von Clausewitz: “*War is a mere continuation of policy by other means*”.<sup>35</sup> As it is well-known, this formula has been quoted approvingly many times by Lenin and other Marxists. We have pointed out in our book about the COVID-19 Counterrevolution that this fundamental insight is not only relevant for war but also for other aspects of bourgeois policy. In fact, 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)."<sup>36</sup>

Revolutionaries have to aid the vanguard to fully understand the nature of this process and to arm the workers and oppressed with a program of struggle against this ruling class offensive. As the Lockdown policy is "a mere continuation of the bourgeoisie' policy by other means" so must be the position of the working class "a mere continuation of its anti-capitalist policy by other means". It must oppose the Lockdown policy as it opposes all other aspects of capitalist policy (austerity, racism, war-mongering, etc.).

## ii) Decay of Capitalism: A Few Facts and Figures

While we understand that many progressive activists support the demand for a *Universal Basic Income* in order to overcome misery, we think that such hopes are misplaced. Marxists consider the *Universal Basic Income* as an illusionary concept. Not only this, it is a dangerous trap for the struggle of the workers and oppressed.

Let us briefly explain why this is the case. UBI is an illusionary concept because it is based on the idea that "social capitalism" is possible. However, this is impossible because the whole system of "market economy" is based on capitalist exploitation of the workers as well as on imperialist super-exploitation of the oppressed people of the South<sup>37</sup> (as well as migrants in the rich countries).<sup>38</sup> This system is doomed to decay and, in fact, it experiences accelerating decline since a number of years. Under such conditions, competition between the capitalist monopolies as well as between Great Powers also accelerate inevitable. We limit ourselves to a few remarks at this point as we have demonstrated such historic decay of capitalism in a number of

works.<sup>39</sup>

In Table 1 we show that annual world output growth rates declined, in average, consecutively from +5.84% (1960–70), +4.09% (1970–80), +3.46% (1980–90), +3.04% (1990–2000) to +2.66% (2000–10).

The decade since 2010 has seen the lowest growth within the expansion phase of a business cycle and in late 2019 world economy entered the worst depression ever. This can be clearly seen in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 2, which covers a broader historic perspective as it goes back until 1871, also demonstrates that in 2008 we have entered a period of decay which resembles the crisis-ridden period of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As we have pointed out in our documents, the fundamental tendency which is the driving force behind the historic crisis of capitalism is the long-term decline of the profit rate. As widely known, Marx elaborated this fundamental law in *Capital Vol. III*. It basically means that, in the long run, the share of surplus value becomes smaller relative to all of the capital invested in production (in machinery, raw materials, etc., as well as wages paid to workers). Therefore, the surplus value which can potentially be used for the reproduction of capital on an extended level becomes less and less. This inevitably leads to disruptions and crises and a historic tendency of decline as it becomes less and less profitable for the capitalists to invest in the expansion of production.

Naturally, over-accumulation of capital, over-production of commodities, and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is not a linear process, but its tempo and dynamics are influenced by various counter-veiling tendencies – most importantly by the relation of forces between the classes, i.e., the political class struggle.<sup>43</sup> However, while such factors can for some time slow down or temporarily halt the fall of the rate of profit (as happened in the 1990s, for ex-

**Table 1. Development of World Gross Domestic Product, 1960–2010 (in absolute numbers as well as average annual growth)**<sup>40</sup>

<i>Global GDP in absolute numbers</i>	<i>Average annual growth rate (10 years)</i>
1960: 7279	
1965: 9420	
1970: 12153	1960–1970: +5.84%
1975: 14598	
1980: 17652	1970–1980: +4.09%
1985: 20275	
1990: 24284	1980–1990: +3.46%
1995: 27247	
2000: 32213	1990–2000: +3.04%
2005: 36926	
2010: 41365	2000–2010: +2.66%

*Legend: GDP figures are in billions of constant 2000 US dollars. The growth figures are the respective averages of the five ten years cycle (our calculations).*

ample, as a result of the coalescing neoliberal offensive, advance of imperialist globalization, and the collapse of the Stalinist workers' states), they cannot stop – or even reverse – the decline for in the long run. (See Figure 3)

In summary, capitalism is in decay because of the fundamental laws of this system and not because of a bad policy of this or that government or the greed of individual shareholders. Hence, the process of absolute impoverishment of the working class is the result of the law of capitalist accumulation as Marx pointed out in *Capital Vol. I*. “We saw in Part IV, when analysing the production of relative surplus value: within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his lifetime into working time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i. e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.”<sup>45</sup>

In other words, “social capitalism” is a petty-bourgeois daydream since capitalism without a tendency of impoverishment of the mass of laboring classes is impossible.

### iii) The Petty-Bourgeois Dream of Universal Basic Income: A Naïve and Dangerous Illusion

Does this mean that Marxists should have a passive approach to the day-to-day struggle of the workers in defense of their living standards? Certainly not! But one needs to have a realistic assessment. Instead of preaching the illusion of a social just version of capitalism – or even a version of this system where the popular masses could survive with a reasonable income – Marxists point out a different perspective. They say that only if workers organize and fight as a class in workplaces and on the streets, only then can they achieve that this or that attack of the capitalists can be delayed. But even such successes are only of a short-term nature and sooner or later the capitalist class will renew their attacks with more ferocity. Ultimately, the capitalist system is doomed to collapse and to provoke catastrophes (economic depression, ecological disaster, major wars, etc.). Hence, the working class and

the oppressed must not limit themselves to fight for this or that reform but must rather organize for the socialist revolution to overthrow this system. They must utilize each and every struggle for a reform or for defense against a capitalist attack in order to deepen their political and economic organization and to prepare for the socialist revolution – nationally and internationally.

In order to achieve any success – to defeat attacks, to achieve some reforms or even to overthrow capitalism – the working class must mobilize its strength and wage a war against the bourgeoisie where it hurts them most: in the workplaces where capitalist surplus value is created by the labor forces.

From this follows that socialists must not advocate perspectives which turn the focus away from the workplaces. The task must be that workers get jobs as much as possible, that they aim at control over the labor process and that they take over enterprises. The slogan for a *Universal Basic Income* is an obstacle for such a perspective. It focuses on achieving a decent income *outside* of the workplace, *without* a job. It objectively aids the capitalist class as it turns the attention of workers away from fighting at the workplace, fighting for jobs and rather focuses on getting a handout from the capitalist state. But without jobs, without the ability to organize at the workplaces, workers have much less power to fight and to hurt the capitalists. They can not meet daily at the workplaces and organize themselves. They are in a more difficult situation to pressurize the capitalists as it hurts the latter most when workers strike in enterprises and stop the creation of surplus value, i.e. the basis for the capitalist profit.

Naturally, Marxists don't ignore issues outside the workplaces. But in order to get a better social wage or improved access to the health system, workers have better opportunities to achieve this when they organize strikes at workplaces than without such.

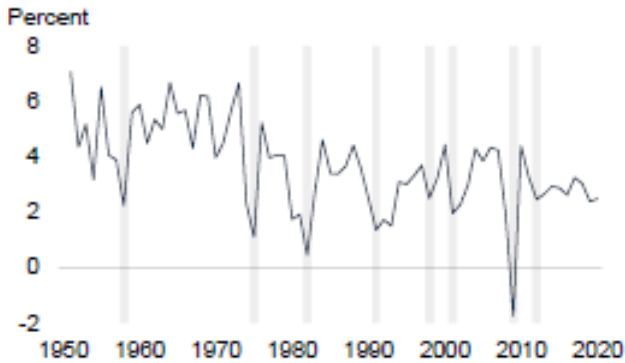
Hence, Marxists consider the slogan for a *Universal Basic Income* as a demobilizing slogan, i.e. a slogan which weakens the struggle of the workers and oppressed. Instead of organizing as a fighting class, the UBI slogan transform the workers and oppressed into a layer of beggars hoping that the bourgeois state will provide them regularly with a handout. And if the state stops doing that or cuts the UBI because of its austerity programs (and such attacks are inevitable given the long-term decline of crisis-ridden capitalism)?! Which means to fight are left to the workers and oppressed if they are reduced to beggars?!

For all these reasons the RCIT considers the slogan for a *Universal Basic Income* as an illusionary and dangerous trap for the workers and oppressed which only serves the bourgeoisie!

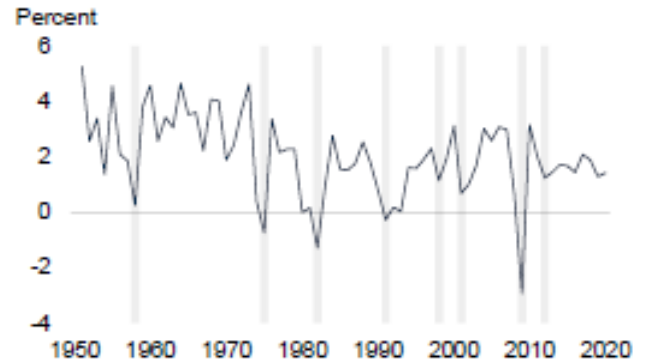
Figure 1. Global Growth of Output, Output per capita, Industrial Production and Trade, 1950-2019 <sup>41</sup>

Figure A2.1. Global activity

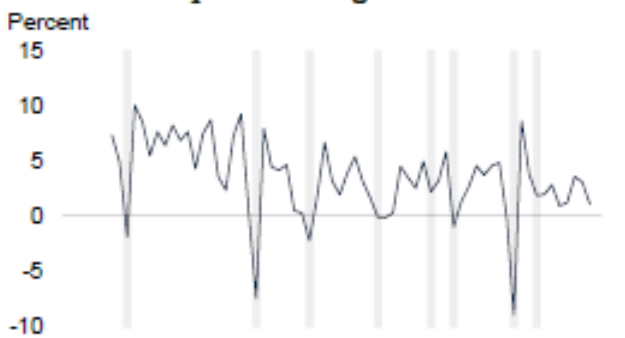
**A. Output growth**



**B. Output per capita growth**



**C. Industrial production growth**



**D. Trade growth**

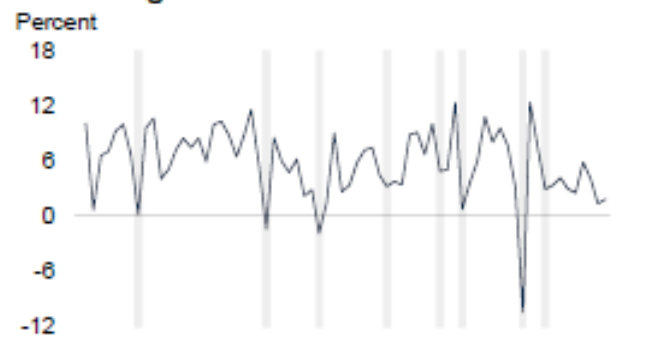
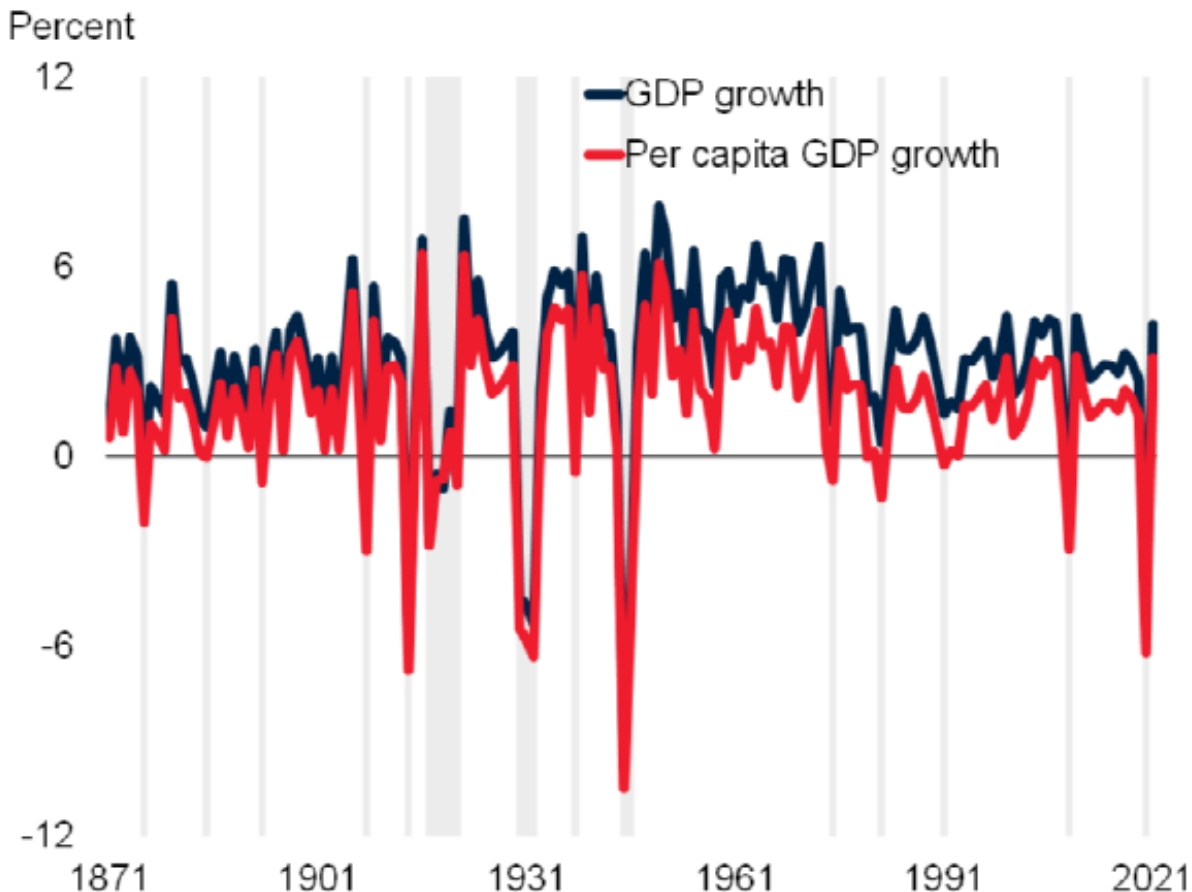


Figure 2. Global GDP Growth 1871-2020 <sup>42</sup>

**B. Global GDP growth**





### 3. THE BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY OF THE “CARING STATE” (THE CAPITALIST HANDOUT STATE)

It is hardly surprising that a section of the monopoly bourgeoisie has picked up the demand for a *Universal Basic Income* and integrates it into its chauvinist bonapartist program. In fact, a growing number of bourgeois ideologists realize that the doctrine of “free market” and neoliberalism become dysfunctional. This ideology has lost any appeal because of the obvious failure of capitalism, in particular since the Great Recession in 2008. Furthermore, such an ideology does not correspond anymore to the political and economic interests of the monopoly bourgeoisie in the current period characterized by Great Power rivalry, catastrophes and decomposition of capitalism.

In fact, the idea of a UBI has a long history. Milton Friedman – the “father” of neoliberalism – advocated similar ideas more than half a century ago. In two books – published with his wife Rose – he raised the idea of a “negative income tax”. *“The advantages of this arrangement are clear. It is directed specifically at the problem of poverty. It gives help in the form most useful to the individual, namely, cash. It is general and could be substituted for the host of special measures now in effect. It makes explicit the cost borne by society. It operates outside the market. Like any other measures to alleviate poverty, it reduces the incentives of those helped to help themselves, but it does not eliminate that incentive entirely, as a system of supplementing incomes up to some fixed minimum would. An extra dollar earned always means more money available for expenditure.”*<sup>46</sup>

For most of the time, such concepts were largely ignored – both by the bourgeoisie as well as by the left. However, in the last years, when the decline of capitalism became more and more perceptibly, the idea of a *Universal Basic Income* and, more generally, of building a “caring capitalism” won an increasing number of adherents among the bourgeoisie and its ideologists. Two decades ago, Ronald Glassman, a Professor of Sociology at a university in New Jersey, published a book titled *“Caring Capitalism”*. In this book this progressive liberal warned about the social danger of capitalism without limits and argued that *“there must be a renewed emphasis on humanism. (...) The market must be encouraged, yet tempered. (...) ‘Caring capitalism’, then, could become an economy of abundance in both goods and services.”*<sup>47</sup>

Faced with the devastating experience of the Great recession in 2008/09, Lew Daly, an evangelical conservative in the U.S., published a book with the telling title *“God’s Economy. Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State”*. Unsurprisingly, the author emphasizes the necessity to preserve a traditional society based on family and market. However, as other supporters of capitalism had to find out painfully, this goal can not be achieved via the spontaneous market forces. Hence they call for the help of god and, more concretely, put their faith in a “Caring State”. *“Security for the life cycle of the family is the fundamental moral purpose of political order and the proper social objective of a caring state”*<sup>48</sup>

However, it was not only academic writers but even some of the top elite of the super-rich who have become advocates of the *Universal Basic Income* in the past years. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in a speech in 2017: *“The*

*greatest successes come from having the freedom to fail. Now it’s our time to define a new social contract for our generation. We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things.”*<sup>49</sup>

Another high-tech monopoly capitalist, Sam Altman, the president of venture capital firm *Y Combinator*, has also become a strong advocate of a *Universal Basic Income* and started a pilot project in Oakland. *“And to be clear: we think of basic income as providing a floor, and we believe people should be able to work and earn as much as they want. We hope a minimum level of economic security will give people the freedom to pursue further education or training, find or create a better job, and plan for the future. We’ll be spending the next few months designing the pilot, and we welcome any input to help us do the best job possible - especially from the Oakland community.”*<sup>50</sup>

Tesla’s Elon Musk has also joined the ranks of UBI supporters. He said in a speech at the World Government Summit in Dubai in 2017: *“I think we’ll end up doing universal basic income. It’s going to be necessary.”*<sup>51</sup>

It is not surprising that big capitalists like Zuckerberg, Altman and Tusk support the idea of the UBI as it offers multiple benefits for their multinational corporations. First, the wages which they would have to pay would be drastically smaller because the *Universal Basic Income* – provided by the state – constitutes a large part of it. Second, the capitalists could save even more costs because any (further) education would also de facto be paid by the state via the UBI. No surprise that the role of education is nearly always mentioned by them when it comes to the UBI.

And last but not least, the *Universal Basic Income* opens the road to even bigger divisions between migrant workers from semi-colonial countries and other parts of the working class. The reason is that such a UBI would be most likely accessible only for the (mostly white) workers with citizenship but not for the migrants (with a foreign passport). As a result, the migrant workers would end up with much lower wages. Needless to say that such a development would be highly profitable for corporations which – like Tesla, Google and others – strongly rely on migrant labor! For migrant workers this would mean not only lower wages but also that they would be forced – even more than they are already – to take several jobs in order to survive!

Another prominent supporter of a *Universal Basic Income* is Andrew Yang, a liberal capitalist who participated in the primaries of Democratic Party for the 2020 U.S. presidential election.<sup>52</sup> He calls for a “Freedom Dividend,” a monthly UBI of \$1,000 to every American adult. *“The first major change would be to implement a universal basic income (UBI), which I would call the ‘Freedom Dividend.’ The United States should provide an annual income of \$12,000 for each American aged 18–64, with the amount indexed to increase with inflation. It would require a constitutional supermajority to modify or amend. The Freedom Dividend would replace the vast majority of existing welfare programs. This plan was proposed by Andy Stern, the former head of the largest labor union in the country, in his book Raising the Floor.”*<sup>53</sup>

To a certain degree we can see a more fully developed

model of the capitalist caring state in East Asia. Here we have the type of capitalism with a “strong state”, i.e. an all-embracing bonapartist state apparatus, which intervene in all aspects of social life. As two academic authors, Minh T.N. Nguyen and Meixuan Chen, pointed out some years ago: “What is particular about the rise of social protection in Vietnam and China under market socialism is the strong role of the party-state, which not only relentlessly fosters the cultivation of the self-responsible moral subject but also exercises a grip on the moral obligations of non-state institutions.”<sup>54</sup>

As we see, concepts of a *Caring State* and a *Universal Basic Income* have swirled around for some time. However, the transformation of crisis-ridden capitalism into a state of actual decay and decomposition since late 2019, has dramatically spurred the leading proponents of capitalism – or at least a significant sector of them – to look for new ideologies or, better say, for the expansion and modification of its ideological arsenal.

The classic right-wing bonapartist ideology rests on chauvinism (against national minorities, rivaling states, etc.), law-and-order, war-mongering against domestic and foreign enemies, etc. Trump, Modi, Nethanyahu, Bolsonaro, Orbán, etc. are actual examples for this current which we can characterize as the *traditional right-wing reactionary forces*. It is no accident that these forces have massively increased their influence in the past years.

However, there is also another current among the leading strata of the bourgeoisie emerging. This current attempts to combine the chauvinist bonapartist state with some forms of what we could call *integrative social-liberalism*. Representatives for such currents are Macron, Merkel, Sanchez, Kurz and the new U.S. President Biden. This current is in fact even more dangerous than the first type because they are usually more successful in manipulating the workers movement and pacifying the popular masses. Such an integrative policy is particularly urgent in a pe-

riod like the current where we have seen a global wave of popular uprisings. Trump’s failure to stop the BLM / George Floyd Uprising in summer 2020 is a good example which demonstrates the impotence of right-wing reactionary forces in such situations.

In consequence, the *social-liberal bonapartists* – if we might call this second current like this – combine the expansion of the police and surveillance state (Lockdown policy) and Islamophobic chauvinism (e.g. raids and domestic repression against Muslims, aggressive foreign policy in the Middle East) with liberal and integrative rhetoric. While the ideology of these forces is still in the process of formation, we can already see several crucial elements of their outlook.

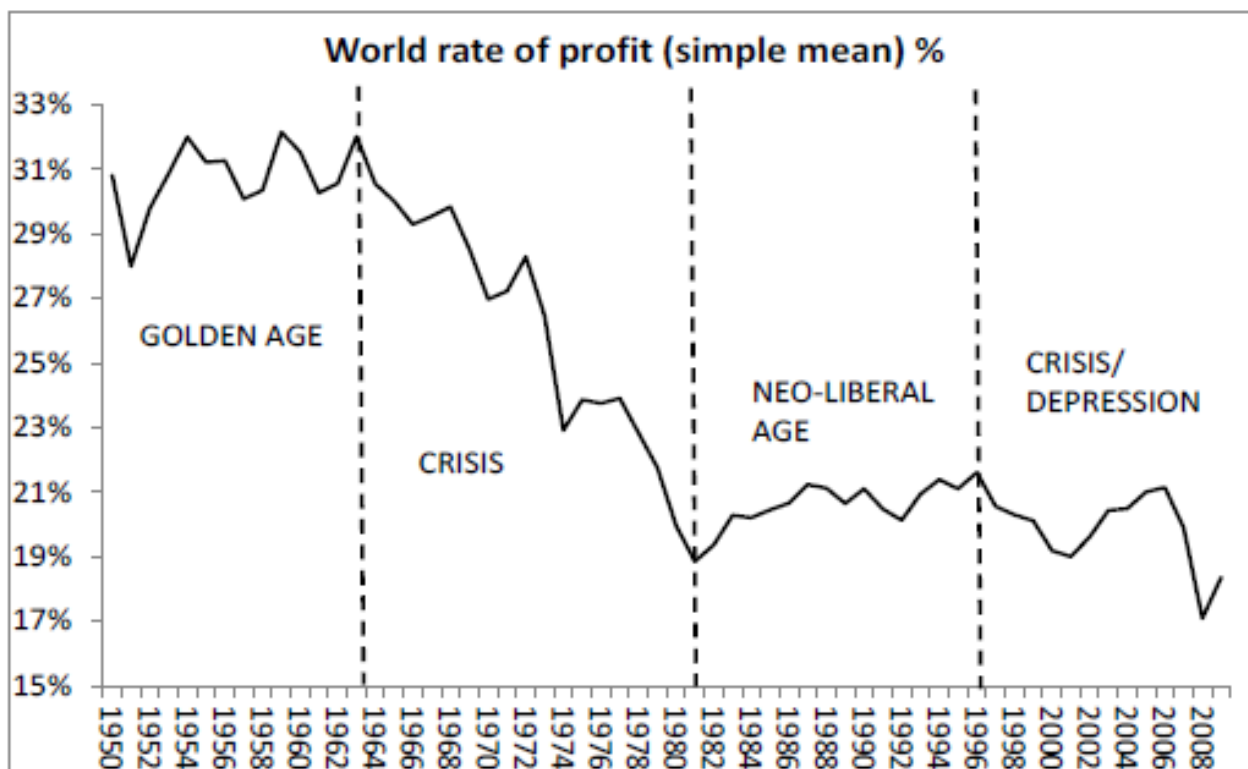
Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis an increasing number of academic institutions have started to call for the introduction of the *Universal Basic Income*. To give two examples:

“In this editorial, we discuss UBI as a possible solution for some consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and also as a long-term solution to our changing economies that increasingly include precarious employment and income insecurity”<sup>55</sup>

“The COVID-19 pandemic has been a monumental challenge to address and accordingly may warrant unprecedented economic relief programs. As governments, organizations, and individuals are working to understand, confront, and navigate rapidly changing conditions, a UBI program represents a beneficial policy option to provide financial relief. Implementing a UBI allows for a measure of uncertainty in a post COVID-19 pandemic changed world.”<sup>56</sup>

More importantly, prestigious institutions and publications of the monopoly bourgeoisie have also publicly defended the necessity for state-capitalist intervention as well as for *Universal Basic Income*. In early April – at the height of the Lockdown policy in spring 2020, the *Financial Times* – a kind of central organ of the Western monopoly

Figure 3. World Rate of Profit (1950-2010)<sup>44</sup>



bourgeoisie – published a remarkable editorial in which it called for an “*active role of the state*” in the economy as well as certain social reforms like the *Universal Basic Income*.

“*Radical reforms—reversing the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades—will need to be put on the table. Governments will have to accept a more active role in the economy. They must see public services as investments rather than liabilities, and look for ways to make labour markets less insecure. Redistribution will again be on the agenda; the privileges of the elderly and wealthy in question. Policies until recently considered eccentric, such as basic income and wealth taxes, will have to be in the mix.*”<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, on 12 March, French president Emmanuel Macron told the public: “*What this pandemic is already revealing is that free healthcare without income conditions, career or profession, our welfare state, are not costs or burdens but precious goods, essential assets when fate strikes. What this pandemic reveals is that some goods and services must be placed outside the laws of the market.*”<sup>58</sup>

We see the same trend in Germany. The editor of *Deutsche Welle* also published in late March 2020 “*a call for a caring state*” in which it demands that “*the state has to get more involved*”. *Deutsche Welle* is representative for the ruling class of Germany as it is the official international broadcaster. Such writes the DW editor:

“*As far-reaching, catastrophic and deadly as the consequences of the coronavirus crisis are and will continue to be, at some point the outbreak will end. However, by then the world will have changed as today’s fears and suffering make a lasting impact. Many citizens in the wealthy West will call for a strong state that can provide better protection — and their calls will be louder than ever because only the state can fight pandemics. (...) Economically, the state has to resolve the current problems and save as many companies and jobs as possible. It will have to provide generous loans, provide tax breaks and support struggling companies. Many governments — in the EU, Britain, the US and Canada — have already introduced key measures. With each passing day of this crisis, trust in the markets decreases and their desire for a protective state increases. There is another important lesson the state needs to learn when it comes to access to medication. In the future, governments will have to be stricter about where medicine is produced. (...) And this applies to more than medicine. Other products and services essential for the functioning of a society and economy, assets that belong to the critical infrastructure need protection. For some time, Germany has been unclear about what these assets actually are. In the future, production may have to happen inside a country’s borders. (...) A larger, more involved state does not automatically create protection for its citizens. In a real democracy, responsible and informed citizens have to join forces with the state to fight crises such as this one.*”<sup>59</sup>

It is telling that a few months ago even the *World Bank* – a core institution of global capitalism – issued a thick volume called “*Exploring Universal Basic Income*”. In this book, a number of authors explore in a favourable way the feasibility of introducing a *Universal Basic Income*.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, we will quote a leading representative of another important institution of global capitalism – the United Nations. In a public statement in March 2020, Kanni Gignaraja – the UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific – expressed his support for state-capitalist policy and, in particular, the introduction of a *Universal Basic Income*. It is highly no-

ticeable that the UN representative argues for the UBI by warning that failure to do so might result in “*social unrest, conflict, unmanageable mass migration, and the proliferation of extremist groups.*”

“*In the COVID-19 outbreak frenzy, several countries are considering massive fiscal stimulus packages and printing money, to blunt the concurrent crises underway: the pandemic and the unraveling economic depression. These plans are essential, but they need to be strategic and sustainable. Because in addressing the current crises, we must avoid sowing seeds of new ones, as the stakes are incredibly high. It is time to add a new element to the policy packages that governments are introducing, one we know but have abandoned: Universal Basic Income (UBI). It is needed as part of the package that will help us to get out of this yawning pit. (...) Moving to such a system would need to ensure that the incentives to have a job remain intact. That is relatively simple to do: A UBI should be sufficient, to sustain a person at a modest minimum, leaving sufficient incentives to work, save, and invest. Finally, good arguments can be made for having it linked to very selective conditions, some that relate to public goods, such as vaccinating all children and ensuring they attend school. Such selective conditions would not undermine the main purpose of eliminating poverty and allow low-income people to take calculated risks, to try to lift themselves out of poverty. The alternative to not having UBI is the rising likelihood of social unrest, conflict, unmanageable mass migration, and the proliferation of extremist groups that capitalize and ferment on social disappointment. It is against this background that we seriously need to consider implementing a well-designed UBI, so shocks may hit, but they won’t destroy.*”<sup>61</sup>

Such a concept of “strong state”, state-capitalist policy combined with some “social reforms” – a kind of “caring state” to use the above-mentioned category – is nothing new in the history of capitalism. Already the Roman Empire – since the days of the dying *Republic* and its transformation into the *Principate* (and later the *Dominate*) – established a system where the poorest sectors of the capital city were kept in line by “*bread and circus*”. This system included free or cheap wheat, free access to water etc. for 200-300,000 people. Naturally, this was part of a system (and had to be part of such a system) which was based on the barbaric super-exploitation of large numbers of slaves as well as tributary peoples.<sup>62</sup> In order to maintain such a system, the Roman Empire had to regularly wage wars and to brutally suppress all forms of popular resistance (like e.g. the two slave wars in Sicily and the Spartacus Uprising, the uprisings of the *Agonistici* and the *Bagaudae*, to name just a few examples).<sup>63</sup>

A more actual version of authoritarian state combined with some handouts for the poor was successfully established by Otto von Bismarck, the famous conservative statesman who engineered Germany’s unification and growth to a world power in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>64</sup> Later, in the 1930s President Roosevelt implemented the policy of the *New Deal* which helped to prepare the U.S. for World War II and to become the absolute hegemonial power in the imperialist camp for nearly seven decades. The economic concepts of John Maynard Keynes also contributed to this development.

In fact, we see a lot of similarities in the new ideology of the ruling class with the predecessors in the run-up for World War or during the height of the Cold War. It is a combination of militarized bonapartism with rhetoric of



“national unity”, “caring” and “social” reforms. It is characteristic that a number of state leaders “declared war” in explaining and justifying their Lockdown policy in spring 2020. China’s President Xi called for a “people’s war” against the virus.<sup>65</sup> 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.”<sup>66</sup>

In the same spirit did Spain’s Prime Minister declare “war” against the virus and called for a “war economy”. In an “Open Letter”, he called for the European Union to set up a new version of the Marshall Plan to stimulate the re-launch of the European economy after the coronavirus crisis. “Europe is living through its deepest crisis since the Second World War. Our people are dying or fighting for their lives in hospitals that are overrun by a pandemic – a pandemic which is the biggest threat to our health care systems since the flu of 1918. (...) Europe is now at war with an enemy of a totally different kind that the wars we have managed to avoid for the last 70 years: a war against an invisible enemy which threatens the very future of the European project. (...) “Europe must establish a war economy and initiate resistance, reconstruction and economic recovery. To do this, we must mobilise significant resources through a plan that we have called the new Marshall Plan. This requires the support of all EU member states.”<sup>67</sup>

In addition, as we have pointed out repeatedly, a growing number of figures in the Western monopoly bourgeoisie are impressed by China and its successful rise as an imperialist Great Power. They are also particularly struck by the successful methods of their Chinese rivals in monitoring and controlling the popular masses. Hence, an increasing number of these rulers want to introduce similar methods in their own countries. So when the Xi regime reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic with draconic curfews for the whole population and demonstrated to the whole world

how Beijing can control its people in such a crisis, it is easy to imagine how this inspired Western leaders to copy at least some elements of this policy.<sup>68</sup>

In general, one can say that to a certain degree China represents the “ideal model” of the state-capitalist bonapartist social formation. It combines a policy of brutal exploitation of the working class resulting in high profits for the big capitalists with rhetoric of “social cohesion” and “patriotic unity”. It mercilessly suppresses national minorities like the Uyghurs and democratic upheavals like in Hong Kong under the cover of “enlightening”, “socialist” and “anti-imperialist” phrases.<sup>69</sup>

For Marxists, the connection of war rhetoric, militarized bonapartism and the expansion of the police state with using the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic is pretty clear. However, it is noteworthy that there are also bourgeois academics who recognize this connection albeit in cautious language. “Finally, the war metaphor has given license for an unprecedented level of control of the daily lives of citizens. Has the metaphor given justification to an era of technological interference with people’s freedoms for the sake of survival? Can democracies withstand a proliferation of similar means of controlling future pandemics? Many offer dire predictions.”<sup>70</sup>

In summary, we see the process of formation of a social-liberal bonapartism which has as its core elements a stronger role of the capitalist state both in economy as well as politics. It shall more intervene in the market with state-capitalist regulations (in the service of the interests of the monopolies) – a kind of new version of New Deal and Keynesianism. It will massively regulate social life and restrict personal freedoms under the pretext of public health and social cohesion (“Caring State”). It will “defend liberal democracy” by attacking national, religious and political minorities and by waging aggression against enemies abroad.



## Publications of the RCIT

# The Second Wave of the COVID-19 Counterrevolution

*On the ruling class strategy in the current conjuncture, its inner contradictions and the perspectives of the workers and popular resistance*

*By Michael Pröbsting, July 2020*

**Introduction \* The localized version of Lockdown policy is spreading \* New information concerning severity (or not so severity) of the pandemic \* Telling figures for Europe, Sweden and Ischgl \* The worst pandemic in Africa? Really? \* Capitalism and care homes as deadly traps for old people \* The real nature of the ruling class bonapartist offensive under the cover of COVID-19 \* Why is the ruling class opting for a local lockdown strategy? \* Excuse: A crisis characteristic for the present period of capitalist decay \* The nature and inner contradictions of the local lockdown strategy \* Preparing for a new counter-revolutionary offensive \* The Lockdown Left: a never ending embarrassment \* The shameful example of the PSTU/LIT-CI \* The imperialist aristocratism of the Lockdown Left \* Building a Revolutionary World Party \* Footnotes**

*A RCIT Pamphlet, 20 pages, A4 Format*

## 4. THE OBJECTIVE BASIS FOR LOCKDOWN SOCIALISM: CHANGES WITHIN THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PHYSIOGNOMY OF CAPITALISM

**A**s we said at the beginning, it is astonishing to see how leftist forces formally adhering to Marxism, suddenly deploy a comprehensive and naïve trust in the imperialist state. Despite the bourgeois governments openly attacking democratic rights, deploying the army for domestic tasks, working hard to make the use of surveillance apps obligatory for all citizens, etc., despite all this the opportunist left continue supporting the Lockdown policy. Even for the opportunist standards of the opportunist left, such an extraordinary somersault is truly astonishing. For years and decades, these “Marxists” explained – of course usually in academic discourses only! – that police and army are repressive instruments against the working class. And now, suddenly, the same leftists naively trust the same state if it claims to wage “war against COVID-19” and praise its bonapartist operations.

What is the objective basis for this? One could say that these leftists – like many other people – were so shocked in spring 2020 and feared for their lives when the pandemic started. Of course, such confusion and panic was characteristic only for coward capitulators but unworthy of people calling themselves “socialists”. Authentic Marxists – like the RCIT and others – opposed the bourgeois hysteria and the Lockdown policy from the very first day. However, if support for the Lockdown policy could be explained by panic in the first days and weeks, this is hardly possible anymore today, nine months later! But as a matter of fact, the Lockdown Left has still not changed its course and continues its support for the bonapartist policy of the ruling class. If one is in a state of shock for nine months, one is dead. However, the Lockdown Left is only politically dead but physically very alive – only to continue their opportunist service for the ruling class and its bonapartist offensive!

As Marxists know, the reformist labor bureaucracy – so-

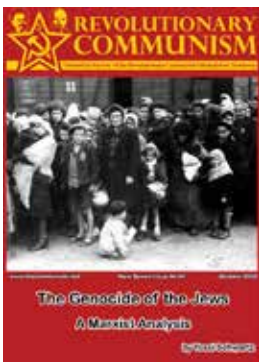
cial democratic and Stalinist parties, trade unions, etc. – serves the bourgeoisie and looks for possibilities to strike deals with it, to enter a national, regional or local government, to get a place in a corporate board, etc. Centrists, in turn, opportunistically adapt to the reformist bureaucracy and hope to find a place somewhere in the wide network of the bureaucracy, in state and educational institutions, etc. Hence, in order to better understand the capitulation of the “left”, one needs to look first to the changes and the development of the bourgeoisie’s policy.

The fundamental reason for the capitulation of the left to bonapartist state policy has to be sought in the *objective changes* in the fundament of capitalism. As mentioned above, capitalism experiences a historic crisis of decay. Its world economy is in tatters, Great Power rivalry and protectionism shatter the whole world order and popular uprisings have taken place on all continents (even in the citadel of old imperialism – the U.S.!). In addition, China – the rising power among the imperialists – seems to serve as an alternative and successful model. These developments, as we explained in various documents, are factors which push more and more forces among the ruling classes of the old imperialist powers in the West to turn away from neoliberalism – the capitalist model which was dominant since the 1980s.

So where is capitalism heading towards? As we explained in our book on the COVID-19 Counterrevolution, “we think that the broad lines of development of capitalism are the following:

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

(...) We think that these four characteristics are inseparable from each other. An economic catastrophe of 1929 dimensions



### *Publications of the RCIT*

## The Genocide of the Jews A Marxist Analysis

By Yossi Schwartz

**Introduction \* The Conditions of the Jews on the Eve of World War II \* The Pseudo-Scientific Racist Theory of Social Darwinism \* Anti-Semitism as a Branch of Social Darwinism \* The Nazi Labor-Death Camps \* Zionist Ideology as a Branch of Social Darwinism \* The Genocide of the Palestinians \* Who Are the Guilty Parties for the Genocide of the Jews? \* The Uniqueness of the Genocide of the Jews \* The Use of the Holocaust \* So What Is Unique About the Genocide of the Jews? \* Conclusions \* Footnotes**

*A RCIT Pamphlet, 24 pages, A4 Format*

*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 different 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.”*<sup>71</sup>

We limit ourselves to this brief characterization and refer readers to our documents on this issue for more details. At this point it is sufficient to say that the objective trend of capitalism is – politically and economically – towards state-monopoly capitalism and chauvinist state bonapartism. We see a qualitatively expanded role for the imperialist state both in the sphere of reproduction of capitalist value production (i.e. in the economy) as well in the in the sphere of reproduction of capitalist production relations (i.e. in education, health, public service, etc.).

Under such conditions, the opportunist left welcomes the ideological breadcrumbs of the bonapartist handout policy which the ruling offers them. Blindly trusting in the empty phrases of the bourgeois governments about “solidarity” and “social cohesion”, the Lockdown Left volunteers as “critical” (or not so critical”) cheerleaders for the anti-democratic offensive of the ruling class.

Of course, all this does not come out of the blue. Such a political *salto mortale* of the opportunist left is rather a continuation of their long-time adaption to imperialism – applied to the current new conditions of the COVID-19 Counterrevolution. Or, to be more precisely, it is a further

development where quantity transforms into quality.

As we did outline in our works, the opportunist left did already adapt to imperialism on a number of occasions. To give just a few examples. During the Malvinas war in 1982, the Grantite CWI (which at that time combined what is today Peter Taaffe’s CWI, the ISA with Socialist Alternative in the US and Alan Woods’ IMT) de facto sided with its imperialist motherland against Argentina. Likewise most “Marxists” failed in 1991 and 2003 to defend Iraq or Afghanistan in 2001 against the imperialist powers. In Britain, many “Marxist” organizations (like the Stalinist CPB, the centrist CWI and IMT, etc.) supported for the chauvinist “*British Jobs for British Workers*” strike in 2008 when British workers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery wanted to stop the hiring of migrant workers. In France, large sectors of the French left (e.g. LCR/NPA, LO, Lambertists) support the chauvinist ban of headscarves for Muslim women in schools.<sup>72</sup>

In France we can see currently the capitulation of large sectors of the left when they are faced with Macron’s declaration of war against Muslims. Most of them rallied in support for the Islamophobic teacher Samuel Paty and call for the defense of the racist magazine *Charlie Hebdo* which is despised by all Muslim around the world for its extreme hatemongering.<sup>73</sup>

These are just a few examples of the inherent social-chauvinism of larges sectors of the “left” and the loyalty to “their” imperialist state in the past years. Today, when the crisis of capitalism has massively deepened and the monopoly bourgeoisie is dramatically shifting to the right, the “left” automatically follows hard on them. Their episodic social-imperialism (or adaption to social-imperialism) transforms into a full-fledged social-bonapartism in the service of the imperialist ruling class.

## Books of the RCIT

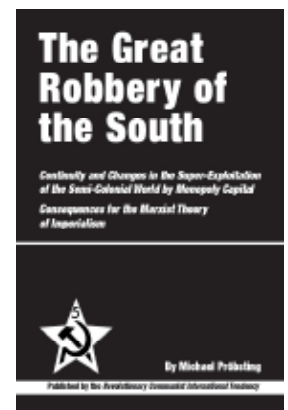
### Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *THE GREAT ROBBERY OF THE SOUTH*. The book’s subtitle is: *Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*. The book is in English-language. It has 15 chapters, 448 pages and includes 139 Tables and Figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who is the International Secretary of the RCIT.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting analyses the super-exploitation and oppression of the semi-colonial world (often referred to as the “Third World”) by the imperialist powers and monopolies. He shows that the relationship between the small minority of rich capitalist countries and the huge majority of mankind living in the semi-colonial world forms one of the most important elements of the imperialist world system we are living in. The Great Robbery of the South shows that the past decades have been a complete confirmation of the validity of Lenin’s theory of imperialism and its programmatic conclusions. *The Great Robbery of the South* demonstrates the important changes in the relationship between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries. Using comprehensive material (including 139 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that never before

has such a big share of the world capitalist value been produced in the South. Never before have the imperialist monopolies been so dependent on the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world. Never before has migrant labor from the semi-colonial world played such a significant role for the capitalist value production in the imperialist countries. Never before has the huge majority of the world working class lived in the South – outside of the old imperialist metropolises.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting argues that a correct understanding of the nature of imperialism as well as of the program of permanent revolution which includes the tactics of consistent anti-imperialism is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future. Order your copy NOW! \$20 / £13 / €15 plus p+p (21\$ for US and international, £9 for UK, €10 for Europe)





## 5. A HISTORICAL ANALOGY: THE MOBILIZATION OF THE IMPERIALIST STATE FOR WORLD WAR I

We have pointed out in various RCIT documents on the COVID-19 crisis that the current developments bear strong similarities with the situation in 1914, at the beginning of World War I.<sup>74</sup> Similar to the weeks after 4 August, the governments have launched a massive shock-and-awe campaign. They identified an enemy which threatens the whole country – in 1914 it was foreign invaders, today it is the invisible virus (and those people who refuse subordination to the governments' restrictions). Similar to today, the governments managed to take the society by surprise and paralyzed it for a whole period. De facto all media were brought into line. In addition, the bourgeois governments created an ideology of "national unity" (today this is called "solidarity" and "social cohesion"). The German Kaiser Wilhelm II famously said in a speech at the beginning of the war: "*I don't know parties any more, I only know Germans.*"

Another similarity seems to be that while the imperialist governments had prepared and armed for the war (as well as for the pandemic), the sudden development of the concrete events took most of them by surprise and they had to react in an improvised, ad-hoc way.

After the first period of the war, when it turned out that the mass slaughter will not be over "*by Christmas*" (as most of the rulers naively imagined in August 1914), the governments – with Germany being the first among them – were forced to turn towards state-capitalist regulation in order to organize an efficient war economy. In such periods of uncertainty and scarcity, it was essential for the capitalist class to mobilize all efforts for the single purpose of war and to concentrate and regulate all economic resources of the country.<sup>75</sup> This has been sometimes called "*war socialism*".

The state mobilized its repression apparatus, imposed censorship on the media, banned mass assemblies and took control of the streets. This does not mean that all forms of dissent were suppressed. It would be a mistake to imagine that governments in Germany, France, Austria and Britain abolished every shade of democratic rights in 1914. In fact, different parties – from right-wing militarists, center parties to pro-war social democrats continued to exist, published papers and books, and publically debated their differences. Even anti-war socialists found sometimes ways to publish their views (e.g. the *Bremer Bürger-Zeitung* of the local "Left Radicals").

In Russia the situation was different due to the arch-reactionary nature of the absolutist Tsarist regime and also because in the weeks before the outbreak of the war, the country experienced – in particular in the capital Saint Petersburg – a militant workers uprising which was about to transform into a pre-revolutionary situation.<sup>76</sup> Hence the ruling class was relieved to use the war for deflecting public attention by instigating patriotic chauvinism. Soon the regime banned the daily paper of the Bolsheviks ("*Pravda*"), arrested thousands of their activists and smashed many of their cells. In November, police also arrested the five Duma deputies of the party as well as other underground leaders.

Despite all this repression, we note in passing, did the Bolsheviks succeed in organizing a series of anti-militarist activities already in the first weeks and months of the war. In addition to refusing support for the war in the Duma vote, they distributed illegal leaflets in Petersburg and other cities in July, August and September 1914. Furthermore, they attempted to organize street demonstrations and protests of conscripted soldiers. In their propaganda the Bolsheviks advocated slogans like "*Down with the War!*", "*Down with the Tsarist Regime!*" and "*Long live the Revolution!*". They also raised slogans like "*Get politically organized!*" and "*Get Yourselves Weapons, Time is Running Out!*"<sup>77</sup>

Continuing our comparison of 1914 and 2020, we refer to the fact that governments have worked hard (and succeeded) in spring 2020 to win the support of the labor bureaucracy so that the trade unions, reformist and left-populist parties and nearly the whole left joined the governments' COVID-19 Counterrevolution. It was similar in 1914 when the governments of Germany, France, Austria and Britain undertook great efforts to secure the support of the reformist leaderships of the trade unions and the social democratic parties. In several countries, social democratic leaders even became members of the imperialist government.

There exist, we note as an aside, highly interesting documents which show how the German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg strongly opposed the right-wing Prussian militarists (around the Generals Moltke and Hindenburg) who wanted to use the war for suppressing the social democratic party. Bethmann Hollweg assured them that if the government manages to present the war as a "defensive war" against the threat of Russia, he could succeed in winning the support of the SPD. He knew that also because he had already established secret contacts with the revisionists within the party leadership (like Ebert and Scheidemann). Bethmann Hollweg tactic proved successful and the social democrats enthusiastically joined the imperialist camp of war advocates.<sup>78</sup>

For all these reasons it is not accidental that so many governments have used the war metaphor in their propaganda in recent past as we showed in previous chapters. They declare "*war against the virus*", "*war against political Islam*", "*war against terrorism*", etc. They do so because today – from the point of view of the goals of the ruling classes all over the world – there exists a situation similar to 1914 resp. the years before. Economic and political instability is increasing dramatically and popular unrest is looming or is already taking place. The bourgeois society is in a high state of insecurity, threatened with crisis and collapse. In such a situation – similar to a war scenario – the ruling class looks for a way out of the impeding catastrophe via the total mobilization of the society in order to create "*national unity*" led by a "*strong state*".

We have repeatedly pointed out in our works that the current crisis has been accelerated and shaped but not caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We emphasized that the ruling class was in a highly insecure state in late 2019 and early 2020 and for this reason it utilized and exploited the

pandemic as an instrument to justify and mask its counter-revolutionary response to this crisis.

A recently published report of the *Deutsche Bank* – on of the leading monopolies in the global financial sector – provides us with interesting conclusions from the camp of the class enemy which indirectly confirm the RCIT's analysis. In their study, the *Deutsche Bank* authors state that the era of globalization has ended and a new “*Age of Disorder*” (this is the title of the study!) has begun. They explain that this development has evolved in the previous decade – after the Great Recession in 2008/09 – and that the Cold War between the U.S. and China since 2018 was a turning point. The authors emphasize that the COVID-19 crisis has accelerated these tendencies but is not their fundamental cause. “*We think a key moment that marked the beginning of the coming decade of disorder occurred towards the end of the 2010s when US and China ramped up their trade war. Such a schism was probably on the cards for some time and will likely now be accelerated and amplified by the Covid shock. Covid-19 has been a caffeine shot for regime change, hastening the inflection points in demographics, globalisation, liberalism, domestic politics, geopolitics, and asset prices.*”<sup>79</sup>

When researchers of one of the leading capitalist monopolies arrive at such conclusions, it is pretty clear that such deliberations must have existed within the ruling class all over the world for some time. And if the leaders of Great Powers recognize that we have entered an “*Age of Disorder*”, is it not obvious that they will turn to a form of rule (i.e. state bonapartism) which helps them to better navigate through such difficult times?! And is it not obvious that they will utilize a pandemic in order to deflect public attention and to legitimize the expansion of the bonapartist state apparatus?!

For all these reasons we can state safely that what the rul-

ing class has done in the most recent past is declaring war against the popular masses in their own countries in order to improve the conditions of profit-making for the monopolies as well as to prepare for future imperialist wars abroad.

Pointing to all these similarities between 1914 and 2020 does not mean that we suggest that the situation today is *identical* with that a century ago. Until now, repression in bourgeois (semi-)democracies is less than it was in World War I. One reason for this is certainly that at that time the revolutionary workers movement was much stronger than today – in particularly the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and the German “*Linksradikalen*” (“*Left Radicals*”) with Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Zetkin and Mehring at their most important representatives.

Another important difference is that the COVID-19 crisis and the counter-revolutionary offensive of the ruling class all over the world have certainly emerged more surprising, more unexpected for the workers movement and the popular masses than the outbreak of the World War in 1914. The issue of a major war on the continent had been a constant theme at the congresses of the Second Internationals in the years before the war. In particular the Stuttgart congress in 1907 as well as the meeting in Basel in 1912 discussed and adopted resolutions explicitly warning about such an event. These resolutions, as Lenin would later point out repeatedly, took a strong and clear anti-militarist stance and called socialists to do everything possible in order to oppose such a war and to utilize it in order to overthrow capitalism.<sup>80</sup> In contrast, the event of a pandemic was discussed (and prepared) by various Think Tanks and leading institutions of ruling class but it was hardly an issue in the public and even less so within the workers movement.<sup>81</sup>

## Books of the RCIT

### 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

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting analyses the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers – the U.S., China, EU, Russia, and Japan. He shows that the diplomatic rows, sanctions, trade wars, and military tensions between these Great Powers are not accidental or caused by a mad man in the White House. They are rather rooted in the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system. This rivalry is a key feature of the current historic period and could, ultimately, result in major wars between these Great Powers.

*Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* demonstrates the validity of the Marxist analysis of modern imperialism. Using comprehensive material (including 61 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that a correct understanding of the rise of China and Russia as new Great Powers is crucial for assessing the character of the current inter-imperialist rivalry.

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting critically discusses the analysis of modern imperialism by a number of left-wing parties (left social democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and others). He demonstrates that most of these orga-

nizations fail to understand the nature of the Great Power rivalry and, consequently, are not able to take an internationalist and revolutionary stance.

The author elaborates the approach of leading Marxist figures like Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg to the problems of Great Power rivalry and imperialist aggression against oppressed peoples. He outlines a Marxist program for the current period which is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future.

The book contains an introduction and 29 chapters plus an appendix (412 pages) and includes 61 figures and tables. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

#### 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



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the Revolutionary Communist International of Today

## 6. WAR SOCIALISM IN 1914: THE SOCIAL-CHAUVINIST LENSCH-CUNOW-HAENISCH GROUP IN GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

As it is well-known the large majority of the leading circles of social democracy in Germany, France, Austria and Britain capitulated at the beginning of World War I and supported the imperialist war efforts of their respective government. This was particularly shameful in the case of the German SPD as it was the strongest and politically most developed of the Western European parties of the Second International.<sup>82</sup>

In the internal discussions of the social democratic parliamentary faction in the German Reichstag, a minority of 14 deputies (among them Karl Liebknecht) opposed support for the war credits. However, they subordinated to the majority and voted in favor of it on 4 August. However, at the next parliamentary debate on 1 December, Liebknecht broke discipline and voted – as the only deputy – against the war credits (three months later he was joined by Otto Rühle). This became a powerful symbol for the formation of the Marxist opposition against the imperialist war which later culminated in the formation of the *Spartacus League* and then the *Communist Party of Germany*.<sup>83</sup>

In the previous chapter we have already mentioned some parallels between the war situation at that time and the current COVID-19 Counterrevolution. At this point we want to draw attention to another highly interesting analogy: a group of social democrat intellectuals who tried to reconcile “orthodox Marxism” with support for the imperialist war efforts. Concretely, we talk about a current of German social-imperialists which are hardly known today even by Marxists: the so-called *Lenisch-Cunow-Haenisch Group*.<sup>84</sup>

As mentioned above, the huge majority of the social democratic leadership supported Germany’s war efforts. However, these social-patriots consisted of two groups. The larger part was the old reformists linked to the traditional right-wingers and revisionists within the party as well as to the trade union bureaucracy. Their leaders and best known representatives were Friedrich Ebert, Gustav Noske, Philipp Scheidemann and Eduard David and their organ was called “*Sozialistische Monatshefte*”. They did – to use an apt characterization at that time written by the revolutionary Marxist Franz Mehring – “cast off socialism under the impression of the 4 August, a socialism which was never deep-seated. They did what they did not always say in the past but what they now claim to have always said.”<sup>85</sup> In short, this group consisted mostly of the traditional reformists within the party.

However, there was also a second, smaller current within the social-patriotic majority. This group consisted of intellectuals who were associated before 1914 with the party’s left wing around Rosa Luxemburg. They were determined opponents of imperialist war and adherents to orthodox Marxism. This group even opposed support for war credits in the internal discussions before 4 August. Paul Lensch, one of the most prominent representatives of them and a member of parliament, is recorded as one of the 14 deputies voting against support for the war credits at the inter-

nal meeting of the Reichstag faction on 3 August.<sup>86</sup> Lensch, we note as an aside, had also been a prominent speaker at previous party congresses advocating resolutions in opposition against imperialism and militarism.

Other important representatives of this group were Heinrich Cunow, a teacher at the party academy and a journalist of the party’s central organ “*Vorwärts*”, as well as Konrad Haenisch, a deputy at the Prussian regional parliament. Together this *Lenisch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* published the weekly paper “*Die Glocke*” which had been founded by Alexander Parvus (another Russian-born ex-revolutionary intellectual who became a decadent business man after the defeat of the Russian Revolution in 1905-07 and later even an agent of German imperialism).<sup>87</sup>

However, soon after the beginning of the world war, these left-wing intellectuals were overwhelmed by the chauvinist spirit of the public. In autumn 1914 they capitulated one after the other and became fervent cheerleaders of Germany’s victory in the war.

However, the *Lenisch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* did not simply adapt to the revisionist ideas of their social-patriotic colleagues in the SPD leadership but developed their own theory. For them, a key development was the state-capitalist regulation in the sphere of distribution (and to a certain degree of production) which the regime was forced to introduce by autumn 1914.<sup>88</sup> Concretely, they praised war rationing and regulating of the production as “*war socialism*”.<sup>89</sup> “*The imposition of maximum prices, the demand for regulation of production and consume by public authorities, the statistic acquisition of inventory and the obligation to sell – what else is this if not the formal recognition that capitalism in incompatible with the benefit of the society, when it is necessary to defend the public good against the world of enemies? And such an organization of economic life which shall promptly replace capitalist anarchy, an organization in the service of the collectivity – what else does this mean if not socialism? (...) The socialization of the society will get a strong impetus from the war.*”<sup>90</sup>

This was not an isolated theoretical construct of a strange intellectual but a wide-spread sentiment among “progressive” war-supporters and reformist bureaucrats. To provide just one example from the early days of the war we refer to an article published on 7 November 1914 in the central organ of metal workers union which stated enthusiastically: “*A new epoch has begun; the war has transformed all of us into different human beings. This is true for the superior as well as the lower, for poor and rich, for private persons as well as public servants. (...) Socialism wherever we look.*”<sup>91</sup>

As mentioned above, the *Lenisch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* justified the appraisal for Germany’s war by referring to the introduction of state-capitalist regulation. They claimed that this would introduce the “*principle of organisation*”. Such a principle – which is inherently “*collectivist*”, i.e. “*socialist*” or at least “*socialising*” – is superior to the “*principle of individualism*”. Hence, the war would objectively – independent of the intentions of the govern-



ment – move the society closer to socialism. *“Here bubbles the gusher of social revolution, which we are going through and which essence is nothing but the collapse of the individualist social formation of private capitalism and the gradual rise of a socialist, this means of a society which is schematically and complete organized in the interest of the collectivity ...”*<sup>92</sup>

As it happened, the *“principle of organisation”* has deep historic roots in Prussia and Germany in general. In contrast, these intellectuals claimed, Britain is the homeland of the *“principle of individualism”*, it is *“the world power of individualism”*<sup>93</sup>. For these reasons, argued the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group*, social democracy is strongest and most organized in Germany and weak in the Anglo-Saxon world. Hence, Germany would represent a higher, more progressive principle than the Entente powers. Consequently, a military victory of Germany, resulting in a *“middle-European alliance of states”*, would represent progress for the German working class, for international socialism as well as for the global development of the productive forces. *“Here the war proves to be the locomotive of world history. Such a middle-European alliance of states would be an extraordinary step forward in the sense of democracy, world peace, freedom of the peoples and socialism. “Yes, and socialism!”*<sup>94</sup>

Lensch even went so far and claimed that it would be in the interest of progress and socialism if Germany defeats Britain and takes over its colonial empire! (*“In the future we want to have a strong, viable German Colonial Empire...”*)<sup>95</sup>

And Johann Plenge – a collaborator of the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* who also published in their organ *„Die Glocke”* – stated in patriotic fever: *“The spirit of English freedom is dying because too many ideas of individualistic freedom can not preserve a state. If England wants to recover, it must convalesce via German spirit and German organization.”*<sup>96</sup> One can not refrain from saying that less than 18 months after these disgusting phrases of chauvinist arrogance were written, Germany had to capitulate to the Entente powers and one year later it was forced to agree to massive reparation payments. So, yes, to a certain degree Germany did help England to recover but it so much via its spirit and its organization but rather with its money which it had to pay due to the Versailles Treaty!

Such a “Marxist” world view of Germany’s superiority as a “socialist”, or at least a “collectivist”, power had profound consequences for the characterization of the Kai-

ser’s war. Of course, given their Marxist past and formal continuing adherence to similar-sounding phrases, the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* was forced to admit that the world war had an imperialist character. *“What is the character of this war? Undoubtedly, it is an imperialist war.”*<sup>97</sup> However, these “Marxist” social-patriots claimed, this would be only half of the truth. In addition, Germany would defend its national existence against the combined threat of Britain, France and Russia. *“[W]e have dealt with the world political situation which has caused the world war. The more one thinks about the situation, the more it becomes clear that the war was inevitable. The driving forces of the war were the tendencies of capitalist expansion. However, once the war started, the issue was more than this. (...) For Germany, by which we mean the German Empire and Austria-Hungary, the question of capitalist expansion has become a question of national existence.”*<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Germany would be a more socialist power and, hence, it would represent the historically progressive camp. Consequently, the group characterized the war-related state-capitalist measures in Germany as a *“revolution”*. *“What we are experiencing is a revolution”*<sup>99</sup> Hence, the central powers were *“the proletarians among the world powers”*<sup>100</sup> and the Kaiser’s war was a *“revolutionary world war”!* *“The current war is the first war in which the working class plays an important active role (...) We see the spectacle that the rise of this class is taking place, it is true, amid the thunder of a revolutionary world war, but without the lightning of a revolutionary civil war.”*<sup>101</sup>

A formula which encompassed the supposed German principles of *“patriotic enthusiasm”*, *“national unity”* and *“war socialism”* was the phrase of the *“ideas of 1914”*. Unsurprisingly, the formula of *‘ideas of 1914’* was repeatedly and enthusiastically used by numerous German patriots (social and not so social). In the words of Konrad Haenisch *“the ‘ideas of 1914’”* represented *“the ideas of the great transformation and reshaping through the power of organization.”*<sup>102</sup>

In summary, the social-chauvinists a la *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch* were ardent supports of German imperialism and its war efforts. They supported the expansion of the capitalist state machinery, they supported *“national unity”*, and they even supported building a colonial empire. All this was done with the unscrupulous use of *“Marxists”* phrases which they, of course, robbed of any revolutionary spirit.

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## 7. LENIN AND OTHER MARXISTS DECLARE WAR ON WAR SOCIALISM

Naturally, these “Marxist” social-imperialists were unreservedly condemned by all Marxist internationalists. Rosa Luxemburg, the great leader and theoretician of German as well as Polish Marxism, denounced the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* of treason. *“The Haenisch, Lensch, Heinemann are praised by the bourgeois media and presented as model boys. Exactly because of this do all these men, so beloved by the government and the bourgeoisie, bear the stigma of their treason against the interests of the people.”*<sup>103</sup>

Karl Radek, a leading figure of the left wing of Polish and German social democracy and later a leader of the Bolshevik Party and the Left Opposition against the Stalinist bureaucracy, referred to Lensch as *“the new armor-bearer of the social-imperialists.”*<sup>104</sup>

Another Marxist leader of Polish and German social democracy, Julian Marchlewski, correctly ridiculed the idea of *“war socialism”*. *“It would be more appropriate to talk about ‘war capitalism’ instead of ‘war socialism’, because it will become evident that these ‘not-for-profit’ war companies are resulting in monopolistic tendencies among the capitalists.”*<sup>105</sup>

And Franz Mehring pointed out sarcastically in his above-mentioned article that the so-called socialist *“principle of organization”* which is supposedly unique to Germany is in fact implemented by *“the fighting armies”* of all Great Powers. Otherwise, he asked, how could these armies launch large and complex operations, organize supply for millions of men, etc. for such a long time?! And he continued asking, if the English are so individualistic and opposed to the *“principle of organization”*, how on earth could they have built the biggest colonial empire in history and keep it for centuries?<sup>106</sup>

As so often, Lenin wrote the sharpest and most elaborated critique of these social-patriots. He denounced *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* unreservedly:

*“... undisguised servants of the bourgeoisie”*<sup>107</sup>

*“... the socialchauvinist Lensch, who defends chauvinism more candidly, publicly and honestly than the hypocrites Cunow, Kautsky, Plekhanov and Co.”*<sup>108</sup>

*“... the outspoken imperialists of the Lensch and Haenisch variety.”*<sup>109</sup>

*“The German chauvinists (who include Parvus, the publisher of a little magazine, called Die Glocke, among whose contributors are Lensch, Haenisch, Grünwald and all the rest of the crew of “socialist” lackeys of the German imperialist bourgeoisie) ...”*<sup>110</sup>

To their organ *“Die Glocke”* he referred as *“nothing but a cesspool of German chauvinism covered over with a coarsely painted signboard.”*<sup>111</sup>

Lenin also denounced the idea of *“war socialism”* and said that in reality it means *“state-monopoly capitalism”*. *“And what is the state? It is an organisation of the ruling class – in Germany, for instance, of the Junkers and capitalists. And therefore what the German Plekhanovs (Scheidemann, Lensch, and others) call “war-time socialism” is in fact war-time state-monopoly capitalism, or, to put it more simply and clearly, war-time penal servitude for the workers and war-time protection for capitalist profits.”*<sup>112</sup>

The leader of the Bolsheviks also pointed out another important aspect. He explained that such a falsifying use of Marxism, i.e. its words and phrases, for the purpose of capitalism and imperialism is not a new invention by social-patriots a la Lensch & Co. It is a weapon of bourgeois intellectuals since a long time. They keep many “Marxist” words and ideas but rob them of the revolutionary spirit. *„There is another “Marxist” theory of social-chauvinism, which runs as follows: socialism is based on the rapid development of capitalism; the development of capitalism in my country, and consequently the advent of socialism there will be speeded up by her victory; my country’s defeat will retard her economic development and consequently the advent of socialism. In Russia this Struivist theory has been developed by Plekhanov, and among the Germans by Lensch and others. Kautsky argues against this crude theory—against Lensch, who defends it overtly, and against Gunow, who defends it covertly; his sole purpose, however, is to reconcile the social-chauvinists of all countries on the basis of a more subtle and more Jesuitical chauvinist theory. We need not dwell on this crude theory. Struve’s Critical Notes appeared in 1894, and during the past twenty years Russian Social-Democrats have become thoroughly familiar with this habit of the enlightened Russian bourgeois of advancing their ideas and advocating their desires under the cloak of a “Marxism” purged of revolutionary content. Struivism is not merely a Russian, but, as recent events clearly prove, an international striving on the part of the bourgeois theoreticians to kill Marxism with “kindness”, to crush it in their embraces, kill it with a feigned acceptance of “all” the “truly scientific” aspects and elements of Marxism except its “agitational”, “demagogic”, “Blanquist-utopian” aspect. In other words, they take from Marxism all that is acceptable to the liberal bourgeoisie, including the struggle for reforms, the class struggle (without the proletarian dictatorship), the “general” recognition of “socialist ideals” and the substitution of a “new order” for capitalism; they cast aside “only” the living soul of Marxism, “only” its revolutionary content.”*<sup>113</sup>

In summary, Lenin and other revolutionary Marxists mercilessly combated the social-chauvinists of the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch* type. They denounced the “Marxist” phrases which the later used as justification of their support for the Kaiser’s war and made clear that irrespective of such phrases, this kind of “leftists” were vulgar servants of the imperialist bourgeoisie.<sup>114</sup>

## 8. THE LOCKDOWN LEFT: A WORTHY SUCCESSOR OF SOCIAL-CHAUVINIST WAR SOCIALISTS

As we said above, while there exist significant differences between the early period of World War I and the current stage of the COVID-19 Counter-revolution, one can not ignore important similarities. It is the same with the social-chauvinist current of War Socialists. Here too exist various differences with the social-bonapartist Lockdown Left today. But the similarities are indeed striking!

If we continue operating with our historical analogy, we can introduce the following differentiation. On one hand there are the vulgar reformists and left-populists like PCE, IU and PODEMOS (Spain), SYRIZA (Greece), LINKE (Germany), PCF (France), PCB (Brazil), the South African Communist Party etc. Such forces are part of the bourgeois-parliamentary system since years and decades. Surely, here and there they make some cynical use of "socialist" phrases and quote a few sentences from Marx which won't do any harm to their careers. These are long-standing and tested lackeys of the bourgeoisie. Today, they advocate the bonapartist lockdown policy, expansion of the powers of army and police, etc. Wherever they are in power, they execute such policy without hesitation. If we continue with our historic analogy with the time of the German social democracy in World War I, we can say that these forces resemble the classic revisionist, right-wing faction a la Noske and Scheidemann (with their organ "*Sozialistische Monatshefte*") who enthusiastically joined the governments of their bourgeoisie and closely collaborated with them throughout the whole war.

On the other hand, there are the more left-wing "Marxists" like the above-mentioned "Trotskyists" a la SWP/IST, IMT, PSTU/LIT, PO/CRICI, RF/L5I, etc. They do not only praise the Lockdown policy but even demand its reactionary escalation ("*for a total and indefinite Lockdown*"). Using pseudo-Marxist phrases, they criticise the bourgeois governments for making concessions to the capitalists by not imposing such a total lockdown. They consider the whole concept of draconic curfew for the masses as a progressive step forward and just add that all this should be paid by the bourgeoisie. Within our historic analogy with German social democracy after 1914, these forces resemble not so much the vulgar right-wing revisionists but rather the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* (with their organ "*Die Glocke*").

Naturally, the later current within the Lockdown Left appears as more radical. But exactly for this reason they are in a better position to confuse socialist activists and, in this sense, they are more dangerous for authentic Marxism. This is why it is worth dealing with such forces and their ideological predecessors of 1914.

Let us now summarize the results of our overview in the previous chapters and look at the most important, the most striking parallels between the "Marxist" Lockdown Left and the social-chauvinists a la *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch*.

### i) The threat from outside against all of us against which we have to stand up as a whole society

First, as we saw above, the pro-war social democrats characterized the imperialist war as threat to "the whole nation" against "we have to defend ourselves". Similarly, the Lockdown "Socialists" view the pandemic as a catastrophe which would threaten all of us and hence puts us all "in the same boat". Capitalists and workers, state and opposition, we are all affected by this pandemic which comes from somewhere outside and in order to combat it, we need a collective response as a whole society. If the Lockdown Left has a criticism to the capitalists it is that they do not share such a view and that do not make their contribution to the total curfew of the society.

As we have shown above, the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch* type of social-chauvinists were ready to accept the capitalist causes of the world war and even its imperialist character. But, they claimed, the threat of such a "natural disaster" for the whole nation, for the whole society was so great that in such an hour we must stand together in solidarity against the foreign enemy.

Similarly, the social-bonapartist left today. Sure, they point out the capitalist causes of the pandemic like environmental destruction, the lack of safety measures by the capitalists, etc. But irrespective of all this, the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic is so massive and threatens all of us that we must act together as a society and should all follow the Lockdown rules (except, of course, the "essential workers" who should continue delivering food and all the nice commodities which we order online in the break between the Netflix series).

In other words, the naïve (and criminal) repetition of the bourgeois lies about the unprecedented pandemic and its threat for all of us serves the Lockdown Left as a pretext for supporting the most draconic attacks on democratic rights. These social-bonapartists view the pandemic as a "natural disaster" which would obligate us to subordinate to the decrees of the capitalist state.

### ii) Preaching trust in the "caring" phrases of the ruling class

In the same spirit did the old and do the new opportunists preach trust in the "caring" phrases of the ruling class. In 1914, the Kaiser claimed that he does not know parties anymore but only a people. The war, his government tirelessly stated, is conducted for the benefit of the nation and for the future well-being of the German people.

We see the same today. The governments all over the world claim that their whole approach to the COVID-19 pandemic is guided by concern for public health. Everyone has to make sacrifices, they say. The Lockdown policy, the expansion of the bonapartist state apparatus and the limitation of democratic rights is purely motivated by the desire to overcome the pandemic.

In 1914, the social-chauvinists a la *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch*

picked up the regime's phrases and built their "socialist" ideology on such "principles". They claimed that the Marxist anti-militarists would objectively serve only the interests of British (and Russian) imperialism.

The Lockdown Left continues this opportunist tradition and take the government's claim at face value. They denounce their Marxist critiques as supporters of "conspiracy theories" and "objective allies of Trump".

### iii) The state-capitalist measures are a progressive step forward

Second, as we demonstrated above, the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch* type of social-chauvinists praised the state-capitalist measures like war rationing and regulating of the production as progressive (it even resulted in the creation of the category of "war socialism"). These measures were viewed as the implementation of the "principle of organization", as a step towards collectivity. Likewise, the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* characterized the state regulation policy as inherently anti-capitalist, overcoming free market competition and anarchic price rises. Well, of course, these state regulations indeed epitomized organization and collectivity. But they did so not in a class-neutral sense but rather in the service of the imperialist bourgeoisie and its war efforts! In other words, the social-chauvinists separated the form from the content, the measure from its purpose – instead of recognizing the "necessary connection, the objective connection of all the aspects, forces, tendencies, etc., of the given sphere of phenomena," (Lenin).<sup>115</sup>

We see a very similar approach by the Lockdown Left today. They enthusiastically parrot the liberal phrases that the Lockdown, the "social distancing", the isolation of the people from each other, etc. and claim that this would embody the principles of "solidarity" and "social cohesion". Consequently, the Lockdown Left end up in the absurd situation that they preach the most isolated and atomized form of co-existence between people ... in the name of "solidarity" and "social cohesion"!

They deny the reality that these state decrees are first and foremost instruments of the ruling class to atomize the popular masses and to weaken their resistance in a period of economic depression and revolutionary upheaval. Similarly, they ignore that the Lockdown policy harms some business sectors (in particular the small capitalists and the self-employed) but, at the same time, it is highly advantageous for a number of capitalist monopolies in the retail, drug, high-tech and other sectors! But still, the social-bonapartists daydream about "a total and indefinite Lockdown" with a guaranteed basic income (and the "essential workers" serving us in our homes) as an anti-capitalist step!

### iv) Denouncing the opponents of adhering to individualism

Thirdly, and related to the previous point, the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch* type of social-chauvinists praised the German "principle of organization" and collectivity as superior against the (Anglo-Saxon) principle of individualism. They denounced their opponents as supporters of such a principle of individualism.

It is similar today where the propagandists of the ruling

class as well as the Lockdown Left condemn opponents of the Lockdown policy as "egoistic" and "anti-social individualists" who don't care about public health.

Indeed, in both cases there existed resp. exist individualistic, egoistic opponents of the state-capitalist policy. In World War I these were in particular the traffickers on the black market. And today, there exist also anti-social elements who oppose the Lockdown policy not for democratic reasons but because adhere to various obscurantists and right-wing provocateurs. However, in both cases this could not justify in any way support for the bonapartist state machinery and its draconic regulation!

### v) And all is hypercritically combined with "orthodox Marxism"

As we noted above, both the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* as well as the social-bonapartist "radical" Left today distinguish themselves from the vulgar reformists by combining their support for the state-capitalist policy with an elaborated system of "socialist" phrases and hackneyed ideas of Marxist theory. Surely, in the field of practical consequences both the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* and the Noske-Scheidemann reformists, the "Trotskyists" a la IST, LIT, IMT etc. agree with the Stalinist and social democratic from the PCE, PCB, SACP etc. This reminds one to the honest admission of Karl Kautsky when we stated in his autobiography that despite all their theoretical differences he usually agreed with Eduard Bernstein, the German originator of revisionism, in the field of practical policy. "At that time [after 1914, Ed.], I came into close contact with Bernstein. In the war, our paths crossed again. Each of us retained his own particular theoretical nature, but we now almost always agreed on our practical actions. And so it has remained to this day."<sup>116</sup>

However, the extensive use of "Marxist" phraseology gave the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* and gives the "Trotskyist" Lockdown Left a more radical, more hypocritical character. Hence, it can be more confusing for socialist activists and exactly for such a reason authentic Marxists have to combat such ideological charlatans merciless.

As we quoted above, the German social-patriots introduced the phrase of the "Ideas of 1914" as a formula for their new-found doctrine of "war socialism" and "national unity". It is certainly no exaggeration when we state that in the past nine months we have experienced the emergence of a kind of "Ideas of 2020". Again, we hear the preaches – by the bourgeois media, by VIP's, by the Lockdown Left, etc. – that we have found a new "social cohesion", that we are relearning a spirit of "solidarity" when "we take care of each other", etc. All these appeals for national solidarity and unity only serve to "unite the society" which effectively means to subordinate the working class and the popular masses under the command of the bonapartist state and to the advantage of the monopolies' profits! The task of revolutionaries is to fight these ideologies with the "Ideas of 1917" and to make sure that they will hopefully become the "Ideas of 2021".

## 9. ONCE AGAIN, THE STATE QUESTION: MARXISM VERSUS THE OPPORTUNIST LEFT

We conclude this pamphlet by drawing attention to crucial elements of the theoretical foundation of such kind of opportunism with which we have dealt in the previous chapters. Albeit it is often not made explicit, the theoretical basis of the criminal support of opportunist leftists for imperialist war policy respectively for chauvinist state bonapartism is their total failure to understand the class character of the state.

As we did already point out in our book on the COVID-19 Counterrevolution, these revisionists assume that the bourgeois state could undertake an objectively progressive, or at least not reactionary, not bourgeois, policy in a period of deep crisis of the capitalist system. This is related to the illusion that the state machinery, or at least important parts of it like the parliament, could be utilized for a peaceful transformation towards socialism.<sup>117</sup>

This is an extraordinary revisionist distortion of the Marxist theory of the state as it ignores the fundamental class character of the state. As Lenin emphasized in his famous book *“State and Revolution”*: *“The state is a special organisation of force: it is an organisation of violence for the suppression of some class.”*<sup>118</sup> In his *Theses* for the first founding congress of the Communist International in March 1919 Lenin emphasized that this fundamental character is true for every form of the state as it always serves the ruling capitalist class. *„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”*<sup>119</sup>

Hence, a peaceful transformation towards socialism – as it is preached by the left social democrats, the Stalinists and centrists like Peter Taaffe’s CWI and Alan Woods’ IMT – is simply impossible. *“The supersession of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution.”* (Lenin)<sup>120</sup>

It is therefore a tremendous deception by the reformists and centrists if they claim that the capitalist government could impose a state of emergency and wage a public health program which would *not* serve the interests of the ruling class, which would objectively serve in one way or another the interests of the popular masses and, in general, the public health of the society. Such a revisionist theory reflects the idea that the policy of the state can have

a “class-less” character, that it originates from the planning departments of the capitalist state, that it is imposed by the capitalist state and that it is executed by the police and the army of the capitalist state – but still it supposedly would not serve the interests of the capitalist class but rather those of the popular masses. Or, a slightly modified version of the same revisionist nonsense: that it would serve *both* the interests of the capitalist class *as well as* those of the popular masses.

However, the reality is that the Lockdown policy serves solely the interests of the monopoly bourgeoisie and the bonapartist state! Amazon, Google, Bill Gates, Chinese High Tech corporations, etc. – they are all gaining record-profits! The state and its police and army get more and more power. At the same time, unemployment and misery is rising all over the world. And despite all the lockdowns the pandemic is still around and kills people.

For all these reasons a correct understanding of the role of the capitalist state is essential for Marxists. It is even more essential, we note in passing, as the role of the capitalist state is constantly increasing in the epoch of imperialism as we pointed out in another pamphlet. The acceleration of the political, economic, social and military antagonism in decaying capitalism make a strong bourgeois state with an extensive network of departments and sub-departments more and more indispensable for the ruling class in order to keep such a highly explosive totality under control.<sup>121</sup>

As a result we a massive expansion of the state apparatus – the *“New Leviathan”* as Nikolai Bukharin rightly called it.<sup>122</sup> Below we show some figures which reflect the massive growth of the imperialist state apparatus since the beginning of the epoch of monopoly capitalism 140 years ago. While the range of state spending was the equivalent of only 9–11% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1880, this figure grew to 46–63% by today. (See Table 2)

In other words, we can say that if the state question was highly important in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, it is even more so today! We consider this issue as highly important and hope to elaborate more on this in the near future.

Related to this is another characteristic of the Lockdown Left’s revisionism. They justify their support for the state bonapartist policy by referring to the supposedly hard evidence for such by *“the science”* and *“the scientists”*. In reality they are just worshipping those *“scientists”* – a la Neil Ferguson and Christian Drosten – and their false pre-

**Table 2. State Spending of Selected Imperialist Countries, 1880–2020 (Percentage of GDP)**<sup>123</sup>

	1880	1913	1950	1973	1992	2012	2020
France	11.2	8.9	27.6	38.8	51.0	56.8	63.1
Germany	10.0	17.7	30.4	42.0	46.1	44.2	52.2
Britain	9.9	13.3	34.2	41.5	51.2	47.0	51.3
Japan	9.0	14.2	19.8	22.9	33.5	41.8	45.9
USA	-	8.0	21.4	31.1	38.5	40.1	47.6



tences which serve as justification for public fear and for bonapartist state policy.

All these Marxist “intellectuals” who like to present themselves as “very critical thinkers”, they all fall for the bourgeois propaganda in “scientific” disguise! These “Marxists” do not begin to think independently even now when it becomes more and more obvious that these virologists, statisticians, etc. who serve the capitalist governments as “scientific” support got the character of the pandemic wrong and continue as whips for the Lockdown policy. These “Marxists” ignore those scientists who contradict the bourgeois government propaganda and who often face harassment by the state for their courage. In other words, these “Marxists” do not only believe that the state can act “above the class interests”, they also believe that those scientists paid and sponsored by the bourgeois state act above and independent of the interests of their employers, above and independent of their career interests! Such a naivety has nothing to do with Marxism and everything to do with petty-bourgeois revisionism! No doubt, these Marxists have forgotten (or repressed their memory) what Lenin said about the role of science: “*Socialism alone will liberate science from its bourgeois fetters, from its enslavement to capital, from its slavery to the interests of dirty capitalist greed.*”<sup>124</sup>

In the Middle Ages of feudalistic Europe there was a famous saying about the role of science: “*Philosophia ancilla theologiae*” (philosophy is the servant of theology). This formula reflected the domination of the Catholic Church and its demand that the different departments of science must under no circumstances contradict theology, i.e. the dogmatic articles of faith decreed by the Vatican. As it well known several courageous intellectuals rebelled nevertheless against this system of intellectual servility (and often paid for this with their arrest or even with death like Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei).

The current situation bears certain similarities with this dark period of humanity as the capitalist state pressurizes scientists to either confirm its official doctrine – about the “unprecedented nature” of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of the Lockdown policy – or to shut up. But woe betide anyone who publicly contradicts this reactionary nonsense!

In summary, the Lockdown Left preaches “Marxist” phrases in theory and serves the bourgeoisie in practice. Objectively the policy of Lockdown “Socialism” (in combination with the slogan for Universal Basic Income) aims at pacifying and atomizing the working class and the oppressed. Stay home – i.e. stay isolated from your class brothers and sisters; don’t fight for jobs but hope for a UBI – i.e. renounce the struggle for work which would give you a basis for a regular income and a better opportunity to meet and organize with others on a daily basis.

Such a pacifying and atomizing strategy hurts the working class and serves the bourgeoisie. This is even more the case as we are living in a revolutionary historic period. In such a period the ruling class wants the workers and oppressed to stop fighting for their rights, they want them to have no possibility to meet and organize! In short, *Lockdown “Socialism”* is *Police State “Socialism”* – an ideology of the petty-bourgeois left in the service of the monopoly bourgeoisie.

The task of Marxists is to expose the poverty of such *Po-*

*lice State “Socialism”* and to combat it politically and ideologically. We do not doubt that the social-bonapartist left currently feels emboldened. Nearly all capitalist governments, the bourgeois public, their promoted scientists, the media, etc. – they all agree on the “unprecedented pandemic” and the necessity of the Lockdown policy. “There is no alternative” – this is what they say and this is what the opportunist left is eager to believe.

But every critical observer can see that times are changing and popular resistance is growing. Below the climate of fear, popular anger and hatred is silently accumulating. Sooner or later, this will explode. There have been already demonstrations in Madrid, Naples and other Italian cities, in Prague, in several German cities, etc. which expressed mass unrest against the anti-democratic Lockdown policy.<sup>125</sup> There can be no doubt that more, larger and more militant actions will follow.

Historically speaking, the global shift towards bonapartism means that we hear the passing bell of bourgeois democracy. Capitalism is in the period of decomposition and is ridden with such explosive contradictions that it needs the “iron fist” of a chauvinist-bonapartist state – a “*new Leviathan*” – to avoid its collapse. Revolutionary explosions and counter-revolutionary strikes are inevitable in the coming period which the *Deutsche Bank* aptly calls “*Age of Disorder*”. There will be space for revolutionaries as well as for counterrevolutionaries. But there is hardly any place for the professional waverers who forget what they did say yesterday and who have no idea what they will say tomorrow. Such an opportunist left has always been closely interwoven with bourgeois democracy. Hence we also hear the passing bell of the petty-bourgeois left.

The task of authentic revolutionaries is to oppose the chauvinist bonapartist wave and to aid the vanguard to understand the true nature of this attack. In addition, it is also our responsibility to explain to new activists as well as old militants that the capitulation of the Lockdown Left is not accidental. It is the inevitable result of their opportunistic sins which we have pointed out so many times.

We have entered a new era of explosive crises, popular uprisings and counterrevolutionary dangers. It is crucial that authentic revolutionaries unite in such a period on the basis of a serious program of action. Only such honest unity can advance the struggle to build a new Revolutionary World Party. The RCIT calls all revolutionaries to join us in this task!

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84 In general, there exists little literature about the *Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch Group* and even less so in English language. See e.g. Mike Macnair (2014) *Die Glocke or the Inversion of Theory: From Antiimperialism to Pro-Germanism*, Critique, 42:3, 353-375, DOI: 10.1080/03017605.2014.972136; Ben Lewis *World War I: SPD left's dirty secret*, 26.06.2014, Weekly Worker No. 1016, <https://weekly->

- [worker.co.uk/worker/1016/world-war-i-spd-lefts-dirty-secret/](http://worker.co.uk/worker/1016/world-war-i-spd-lefts-dirty-secret/) and, by the same author, Tied to the national state, 02.10.2014, Weekly Worker No. 1028, <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1028/tied-to-the-national-state/>. While these articles are informative we note that we do not agree with all assessments of the authors who lean too much on Karl Kautsky – the German originator of the theory of centrist revisionism. The best study of this issue is (in German language): Robert Sigel: Die Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch- Gruppe. Eine Studie zum rechten Flügel der SPD im Ersten Weltkrieg, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1976.
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- 89 In his first article mentioning this category, Lensch spoke about “*democratic war socialism*”. Quoted in: Robert Sigel: Die Lensch-Cunow-Haenisch- Gruppe, p. 47. Later he would claim authorship for this category: “*I called this system war socialism in an article for the Frankfurter Volksstimme, and the term meanwhile has acquired international legitimacy.*” (Paul Lensch: Die Sozialdemokratie, ihr Ende und Glück, Verlag Hirzel, Leipzig 1916, p. 188 (our translation))
- 90 Paul Lensch: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und der Weltkrieg, Verlag Buchhandlung Vorwärts Paul Singer, Berlin 1915, p. 63 (our translation)
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- 92 Paul Lensch: Die Sozialdemokratie, ihr Ende und Glück, pp. 182-183 (our translation)
- 93 Paul Lensch: Die Sozialdemokratie, ihr Ende und Glück, p. 184 (our translation)
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- 95 Paul Lensch: Der Arbeiter und die deutschen Kolonien, Mittler & Sohn, Berlin 1917, p. 16 (our translation)
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