

An IMF Study on the Global Class Struggle

On the analysis of a key imperialist institution about the development of the international mass protests in the last years

Article (with one Figure) by Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 23 May 2022, www.thecomunists.net

A few days ago, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – one of the key financial institutions of global imperialism – published an interesting assessment about the development of the class struggle in the past years.¹ As Marxists, we understand the central role of class struggle as a “*motor force of history*”. The IMF study – as well as similar publications issued in the last years – reflect that the ruling class is also fully aware of the central role of mass struggles and closely observes their development.²

Of course, the analysts of the monopoly bourgeoisie observe the global class struggle not because they want to change the world but – rather the opposite – because they want to safeguard the existing capitalist world order against popular uprisings. In addition, they know that such mass protests are bad for business. To put it in the words of the IMF analysts: “*Any rise in social unrest could pose a risk to the global economy's recovery, as it can have a lasting impact on economic performance. (...) As a result, 18 months after the most serious unrest events, gross domestic product is typically about 1 percentage point lower than it would have been otherwise. Although social unrest remains low relative to pre-pandemic levels for now, the lifting of pandemic-era restrictions and the continued cost-of-living squeeze mean that protests may yet increase. This could impose significant economic costs.*”

So, what does the IMF study show? Basically, the authors analyse the effects of the pandemic and the COVID Counterrevolution on the development of the class struggle. Furthermore, they assess the latest developments and make a prediction about the next period. In the following, we will briefly present the main results of the study.

¹ IMF: Reported Social Unrest Index: March 2022 Update, Prepared by Philip Barrett, IMF Working Paper 22/84, Research Department, May 2022; A short article summarizing the results of the study: Philip Barrett: Social Unrest Is Rising, Adding To Risks For Global Economy – Analysis, IMF, May 20, 2022, <https://blogs.imf.org/2022/05/20/social-unrest-is-rising-adding-to-risks-for-global-economy/>. All quotes are from these documents if not indicated otherwise.

² See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: COVID: The Global Elite is Worried! Some interesting insights from the latest edition of the WEF's “Global Risks Report”, 13 January 2022, <https://www.thecomunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-the-global-elite-is-worried/>; by the same author: Interesting Assessments of the Global Class Struggle by a Bourgeois Think Tank. A commentary on the findings of the latest issue of the “Global Peace Index” by the “Institute for Economics & Peace”, 21 June 2021, <https://www.thecomunists.net/worldwide/global/interesting-assessments-of-the-global-class-struggle-by-a-bourgeois-think-tank/>; A Powerful Confirmation. A bourgeois study on the revolutionary character of the current historic period, 12 March 2020, <https://www.thecomunists.net/worldwide/global/confirmation-of-revolutionary-character-of-historic-period/>

The revolutionary upsurge in late 2019 and the consequences of the COVID Counterrevolution

The study contains an interesting figure which graphically demonstrates the development of the global class struggle in the past five years (see the appendix at the end of this article). As readers can see, mass protests dramatically increased in the second half of 2019.

We note in passing that the IMF report mistakenly emphasis only two regions as centres of these struggles – Latin America and the Middle East. In fact, long-lasting mass struggles did also take place in this period in South and East Asia – most importantly in India and Hong Kong.

The RCIT analysed these developments at that time in much detail and arrived at the conclusion that these events had opened a *pre-revolutionary world situation*.³

However, the global situation changed dramatically in spring 2020 when the ruling class all over the world exploited the pandemic as a pretext for launching an authoritarian policy with numerous lockdowns and restrictions for the popular masses. The RCIT has analysed this offensive of chauvinist state bonapartism in much detail and characterized this policy as *COVID Counterrevolution*.⁴

It is interesting to see that the IMF – an institution which has fully supported and advocated this bonapartist policy – also draws attention of the link between the authoritarian COVID policy and the retreat of global class struggle. “... *unrest was rising around the world prior to the pandemic. (...) At the start of the pandemic, unrest declined suddenly. The timing of the decline coincided very closely with the start of the pandemic, which saw an increase social distancing, both voluntary and mandatory.*”

The study also reproduces a figure which shows the closely interlinked development of massive drop of people’s mobility – calculated on the basis of the so-called “Google mobility data” – and the collapse of “social unrest” in spring 2020.

The findings of the IMF study confirm the thesis of the RCIT which we have emphasized since more than two years that there has been a close relation between the pandemic policy of the monopoly

³ See on this e.g. RCIT: World Perspectives 2020: A Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 8 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2020/>; For an overview and a characterization of these events see, in addition the relevant statements on the individual countries, Michael Pröbsting: Are We Nearing a New “68 Moment”? A massive upsurge of global class struggle in the midst of a dramatic shift in the world situation 22 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/are-we-nearing-a-new-68-moment/>

⁴ The RCIT has analysed the COVID-19 counterrevolution extensively since its beginning. Starting from 2 February 2020 we have published more than 100 pamphlets, essays, articles and statements plus a book which are all compiled at a special sub-page on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/collection-of-articles-on-the-2019-corona-virus/>. In particular we refer readers to the RCIT Manifesto: COVID-19: A Cover for a Major Global Counterrevolutionary Offensive. We are at a turning point in the world situation as the ruling classes provoke a war-like atmosphere in order to legitimize the build-up of chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes, 21 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-a-cover-for-a-major-global-counterrevolutionary-offensive/>. In addition, we draw attention to our book by Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution: What It Is and How to Fight It. A Marxist analysis and strategy for the revolutionary struggle, RCIT Books, April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-covid-19-global-counterrevolution/>. See also our very first article on this issue by Almedina Gunić: Coronavirus: “I am not a Virus”... but WE will be the Cure! The chauvinist campaign behind the “Wuhan Coronavirus” hysteria and the revolutionary answer, 2 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/wuhan-virus/>.

bourgeoisie and the development of the class struggle. The fact that such leading imperialist institutions are fully aware of such correlation even more supports our argument that the unprecedented bonapartist policy of mass lockdowns was not primarily motivated by public health considerations but rather by power political motivations.

In our book about this historic event, published in April 2020, we noted: "*This development [the opening of a pre-revolutionary world situation in autumn 2019, Ed.] was the single most important factor which caused the ruling classes to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a cover for launching a counterrevolutionary offensive with mass lockdowns and the build-up of chauvinist state bonapartist regimes.*"⁵

It would be wrong to ignore the profound setback in the global class struggle as it also weakened the traditional working-class organizations – whose bureaucratic leadership uncritically supported the capitalist COVID policy – and confused the consciousness of the popular masses.

Nevertheless, as we have emphasized from the beginning, the reactionary offensive of the ruling class would and could only deepen the contradictions of the capitalist world system and provoke a new wave of mass struggles. In fact, the upsurge of mass protests in late 2021 – in combination with the sharp acceleration of Great Power rivalry since early 2022 (which the Western leaders present as confrontation between "*democracy versus autocracy*") – has resulted in a temporary pause of the ruling class policy of mass lockdowns and compulsory vaccination (except in China).

Outlook for the global class struggle

As we outlined in several documents, the RCIT assumes that the capitalist world economy entered a Second Slump by the end of 2021. The Ukraine War and the wave of sanctions have drastically accelerated this crisis, resulting in global inflation as well as dramatic increase of energy and food prices. This in turn will provoke hunger crisis and unemployment around the globe. We therefore expect a series of popular uprisings on all continents – a development which started already in Sri Lanka, Peru and other countries.⁶

The IMF study – looking at this process from the point of view of the worried imperialist bourgeoisie – arrives at similar conclusions. They are aware that the (temporary) end of lockdowns and restrictions improves the conditions for mass struggles. At the same time, they recognize that the accelerating economic crisis pushes the workers and poor peasants to join the class struggle in order to defend their interests. "*In coming months, two important factors could lead to an increased risk of future unrest. First, as governments relax restrictions and public concerns about catching COVID in crowds diminish, pandemic-related disincentives for protest might abate. And second, public frustration with rising food and fuel prices may increase.*"

This statement is of interest not only because of its prediction of an upsurge of class struggle. It is also remarkable that the IMF analysts explicitly acknowledge that the lockdowns and restrictions are

⁵ Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution: What It Is and How to Fight It, p. 18

⁶ See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: World Situation: In the Midst of a Global Political Tornado. Notes on global developments characterized by the Ukraine War, inter-imperialist rivalry, global energy and food crisis as well as spontaneous mass protests, 13 April 2022, <https://www.thecomunists.net/theory/world-situation-april-2022/>

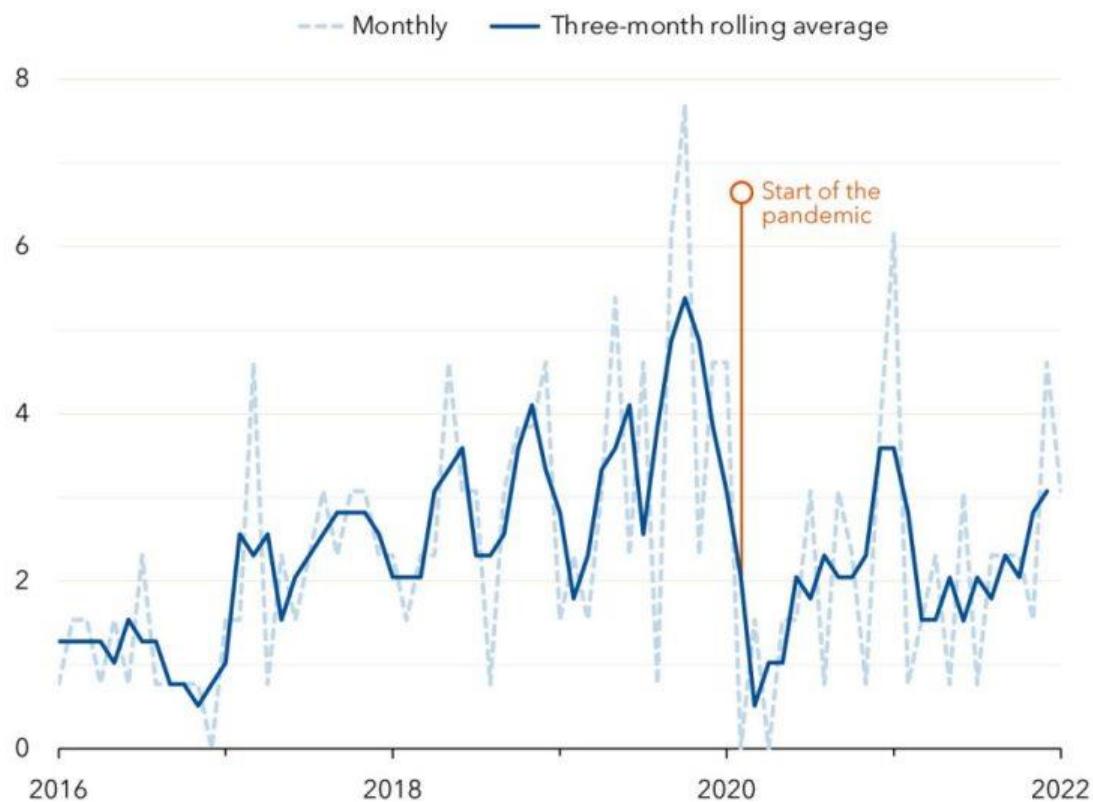
important obstacles for the class struggle. The RCIT has pointed out this crucial relationship from the very beginning of the COVID Counterrevolution. Shamefully, the opportunist left never understood this connection. Such ignorance served them as an excuse to basically support the bonapartist lockdown policy!

We would not be surprised if the ruling class will again impose similar mass lockdowns and restriction in the course of this year in reaction to an increase of mass protests provoked by the economic crisis. We will see if the so-called “left” will become again cheerleaders for this state bonapartist policy.

The task of authentic socialists is to prepare for looming upsurge of mass protests and to provide political leadership for the vanguard in these struggles.

Taking to the streets

Social unrest events are rising but remain below pre-pandemic peaks.
(percent of countries with Reported Social Unrest Index-identified events)



Source: IMF staff calculations.

Note: Due to differences in media coverage and perception across countries, social unrest events (defined as large peaks in country-specific series) are a more robust measure of international trends in unrest.

IMF