



# world revolution

## US election

# Trump and Biden: the false choices of capitalist democracy

Capitalism, the system of production which dominates the planet and every country on it, is sinking into an advanced state of decay. A century of decline is reaching its ultimate stages, threatening the survival of humanity with a spiral of insane wars, economic depression, ecological disasters and devastating pandemics.

Every nation state on Earth is committed to maintaining this dying system. Every government, whether clothed in democratic or dictatorial garb, whether openly pro-capitalist or falsely “socialist”, exists to defend the true goals of capital: the expansion of profit at the expense of the only possible future for our species, a worldwide community where production has only one aim - the satisfaction of human need.

Therefore the choice of which party or president takes the reins of government is a **false choice** that cannot turn capitalist civilisation away from the path towards catastrophe. This applies to the coming US elections as much as to any other electoral circus.

### Trump is not the workers’ friend...

It is clear to many that Trump is an avowed defender of everything that is rotten about capitalism: from his denials of the reality of Covid-19 and of climate change, to his apologies for police brutality in the name of law and order, to his dog-whistle appeals to racism and the extreme right, to his disgusting personal treatment of the women who come into his sights. But the fact that he is, in the words of his former legal hit-man Michael Cohen, “*a liar, a con-man and a racist*” doesn’t prevent important factions of the capitalist class from backing him because his policies of overt economic nationalism and deregulation of environmental and health services serve to increase their profits.

At the last election Trump conned many American workers into believing that “America First” protectionism would save their jobs and revive traditional industries. But even before the Covid crisis the world economy - including China - was already heading for a new recession and the economic consequences of the pandemic are going to be even more brutal. Protectionism is an illusion

because no economy can cut itself off from the remorseless laws of the world market.

### ...but neither are the Democrats

According to Trump, Joe Biden threatens to turn America into a “socialist utopia”, because he’s a mere puppet in the hands of the “radical left” personified by the likes of Bernie Sanders and the “Squad” around Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar and others.

In reality, Biden was chosen as the Democratic candidate because he represents the continuation of the mainstream Democratic policies of Obama and Clinton, which have much in common with those of Trump: the “pivot to the East” to confront Chinese imperialism was begun under Obama, who was also known as the “deporter in chief” because of his ruthless approach to “illegal” immigrants. Of course the Democrats have their differences with Trump: they are more closely linked to the military and security establishment which is deeply suspicious of Trump’s fawning approach to Putin’s Russia, and they are embarrassed by his reckless breaking of international treaties and alliances because it undermines the USA’s diplomatic credibility. But these are differences over the best strategy for American imperialism. Likewise, they object to Trump’s scant respect for the norms of “democracy” because they know how important the democratic illusion is to the preservation of social order. That’s the real reason they – and important representatives of the military – opposed Trump’s threat to use federal troops against protesters in various US cities.

The Democratic Party has never been anything more than the alternative party of US capitalism. It’s true that recently there has been a growth of groupings like the Democratic Socialist Alliance and advocates of the Green New Deal, Black Lives Matter and the various forms of identity politics in or around the official party. But this “radical left” offers only a more left-wing version of **state-run** capitalism, which all factions of the ruling class – including the right and the fanatics of free enterprise – are obliged to adhere to in a world ravaged by crisis and war. None of the policies of the left question the existence of the nation state, produc-



**“So we agree - both of them defend the interests of capitalism?”**

tion for profit, the wages system – which are the essence of capitalism and the source of its insoluble contradictions. This is why, for example, the plans for a Green New Deal won’t halt the capitalist destruction of nature, which has its source in capitalism’s insatiable drive to accumulate.

### The working class holds the key to the future

No capitalist politician or party can offer a way out of the crisis of their system. The world’s future lies in the hands of the class which produces everything we need to live, which is exploited by capital in every country, and which everywhere has the same interests: to unite in defence of its working and living conditions, to develop the self-organisation and consciousness needed to confront the capitalist system and put forward its own historic solution: authentic socialism, or as Marx preferred to call it, communism, where humanity will at last be free of the state, borders and wage slavery.

This may seem to be a very distant prospect. In its day to day existence the working class is divided in a thousand different ways: in the competition for jobs, by national borders, by gender, and by “race”, above all in a country like the US with its poisonous legacy of slavery and racism.

But the working class is also the class of association, which is compelled to work collectively, and to defend itself collectively. When it raises

its head, it tends to overcome the divisions in its ranks because it has no choice if it is avoid defeat. Racism and nationalism are perhaps the most potent tools for dividing workers, but they can and must be overcome if the class struggle is to move forward. When the Covid-19 pandemic first struck, US workers reacted against being forced to work without protection in car plants, hospitals, supermarkets or warehouses; and every worker, “white” “black”, “Latino” or other stood shoulder to shoulder on the picket lines.

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2 Loss of control by the ruling class

The two articles under this heading examine different aspects of the bourgeoisie’s growing lack of control over its own political and economic system. This tendency is world-wide, but among the most ‘developed’ countries it is exemplified by the increasingly evident incoherence of the Johnson government in the face of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the accelerating economic crisis.

Britain ruled by the waves

British patriots have been singing “*Britannia rules the waves*” since the 18th century. But in 2020 the situation has completely changed: the waves of the pandemic, of divisions within the bourgeoisie, of the international trade war, and imperialist tensions all wash over British capitalism. With the decision to opt for Brexit and turn away from the EU, by far its largest trading partner, and by the absence of any real alternative options, the UK is sailing without a map or compass and is completely at the mercy of the waves.

As we have written in many previous articles, since the Second World War the UK has lost its status as an imperialist power of the first rank<sup>1</sup> while membership of the European Union did not mean a recovery of the status that the British bourgeoisie desperately longed for. Isolated, weakened and divided, the UK is faced today with several serious challenges which it will have to face between now and 2021.

The irresponsible ‘return to normality’ ... before a return to semi-lockdown

Test, track and trace. This was the mantra for the UK government for fighting the coronavirus, easing the lockdown restrictions and returning the country to ‘normal’ conditions. Both the app and the manual contact tracing are part of the larger strategy to contain the virus. However, up to now, all the experiments with the app have failed and massive testing has not been followed up by a rigorous contact and tracing operation. Shortages in human contact tracers and a permanently overwhelmed system - it has been completely inadequate.

Moreover, the number of infected people that are prepared to cooperate with the NHS to trace the source of the infection has fallen well below the level of what is needed. This is certainly linked to decreased confidence in the government, especially after May when chief adviser Dominic Cummings spectacularly broke lockdown rules and travelled hundreds of miles away from London. The inclination to comply with government instructions was seriously undermined by this. After six months the government has not yet succeeded in implementing an effective strategy against the virus and has to resort to on/off local lockdown measures, rule of six, bars closing at 10 pm etc.

On 2 September infections were on the rise and the R factor in the UK stood at 0.9-1.1, which is a risky figure to ‘return to normal’. The government nevertheless decided that restrictions should be eased and workers pushed to get back to the workplace. But this decision was met with resistance by local authorities in Northwest England who were faced with a new rise in Covid-19 cases. At the last minute it was decided to keep the local lockdown rules in place after all, which signified yet another U-turn by the government, aggravating the chaos and showing the lack of control of the pandemic.

The completely irresponsible strategy of the government became apparent on 22 September when the UK recorded nearly 5000 new lab-tested cases of coronavirus, the highest daily spike in infections since May 7, and Johnson’s government was forced to abandon its campaign to ‘reopen the economy’. Between mid-August and mid-September the situation seriously worsened as the number of daily virus infections quadrupled and the R factor rose from 1.1 to 1.4. The appeal by the government to return to work in early September had been a big ‘adventure’ with a lot of casualties. The growth of a second wave of infection appears to be a direct result of the failed attempt to ‘return to normal’.

The endangering of public health for sordid economic interest, along with the overall incompetence of the government’s response to the pandemic, which has cost already at least 60,000 deaths (taking the excess deaths estimate) - these are striking expression of the decline of the capitalist state’s ability to manage society.

1. See: Report on the National Situation: January 2019; on our website

On a collision course with the European Union

In September the UK and the EU had their eighth round of negotiations with zero result. Both sides have entrenched themselves and do not intend to budge an inch, while accusing each other of sabotaging the talks.

After the Withdrawal Agreement was concluded in October 2019, and signed on 24 January 2020, it opened up a transition period in which negotiations could start on the terms of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. They agreed a broad ‘economic partnership’ between them, with a ‘level’ playing field’ in terms of trade and for ‘open and fair’ competition. This agreement was approved in parliament with all Tories voting in favour. The ink on the agreement had barely dried when the campaign started against certain clauses in the Withdrawal Agreement which supposedly infringed on UK sovereignty.

A notable moment in the campaign came in July when a report by the Centre for Brexit Policy (CBP) warned that the Withdrawal Agreement could jeopardise Britain’s freedom from Brussels’ control since it contains “*poison pills*” which will undermine British sovereignty and could leave the country with a debt of £165 billion. The CPB report advised Boris Johnson to renegotiate the agreement. At the beginning of August the European Research Group insisted that the closing deal with the EU should include revisions to the Withdrawal Arrangement. This was followed by a statement from ex-Tory Leader Iain Duncan Smith, leaving no doubt whatsoever about the intentions of hardline Brexiters toward an eventual deal with Europe. “*We became a sovereign country earlier this year and the EU must start treating us as such.*” The populist agenda is still being followed, regardless of its impact on relations with the EU.

The UK now calls, in the words of chief negotiator David Frost, for “*sovereign control over our own laws, borders and waters*” which includes the Irish Sea, as laid down in “The UK’s Approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol”. This document simply denies the fact that, according to the Withdrawal Agreement, the Irish Sea will become the EU’s external border, since, post-Brexit, Northern Ireland would continue following European customs rules.

Negotiations with the EU look doomed to fail and as the end of the year approaches the no-deal option becomes even more likely. Frost “*is ‘in complete lockstep’ with Mr Johnson’s view that the UK doesn’t have something to worry from no-deal*”. But the failure to reach an agreement with the EU will certainly provoke heightened tensions in the UK, disruptions to the closely integrated all-Ireland economy, and an increase in tensions between the UK and the Irish Republic. A no-deal Brexit will lead to a hard border between the South and Northern Ireland, creating an extremely complex and explosive situation.

Increasing disputes and clashes between England and Scotland

Despite an initially shared approach, in the course of the lockdown Scottish policy began to differ from England, leading to great internal differences in a way not seen before. Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, increased the fissure between Edinburgh and London by refusing to ease lockdown measures, when Boris Johnson first announced his plan for a gradual ‘return to normality’. From that moment on the different parts of the UK followed four separate ‘roadmaps’ out of the lockdown, with different rules for everything from working to schooling to shopping. Crossing the UK’s internal borders has become a constant cause of confusion...

At the end of June, a petition signed by several thousand people in Scotland called on Edinburgh to close the border as a precaution. Sturgeon replied that there was “*no plan*” for such a measure, but was prepared to “*consider all possible options*”. Her declaration that she did not rule out quarantine measures on other British citizens coming to Scotland provoked huge protests.

Johnson rejected the idea of quarantine for visitors to Scotland coming from other parts of the UK. He said it was “*deeply irresponsible, damaging and divisive talk*” and that there was no such a thing as “*a border between Scotland and England*” as he dismissed any move towards an independent Scotland or a new Scottish referendum.

When Johnson visited Scotland in July, he said that the “*sheer might of our Union*” had helped to protect Scotland and saved 900,000 jobs in Scotland during the pandemic. Since he did not meet with Sturgeon, she replied to him in a tweet saying that “*one of the key arguments for independence is the ability of Scotland to take our own decisions, rather than having our future decided by politicians we didn’t vote for; taking us down a path we haven’t chosen.*”

Another cause of tension is the intention of the UK government to refuse any say to the other parts of the UK in industrial subsidies and to deny any jurisdiction over state aid policy once the Brexit transition period expires, as laid down in the UK Internal Market Bill. As Scotland is keen to remain aligned with EU rules, it puts the country on another collision course with the government in London. Sturgeon called the idea of the UK government a “*direct assault on devolution*” and that “*if the Tories want to further boost support for independence, this is the way to do it*”.

Both Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic have exacerbated the longstanding tensions within the UK and seriously put the Union under threat. As John Curtice, Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde, put it “*While Brexit has degraded the British governments reputation for competency and sound judgement, managing coronavirus has built up the Scottish government’s.*” All recent polls since early June have shown a majority of people in Scotland backing independence. If this trend continues it will further contribute to the growing chaos in the whole Union.

U-turns and Tory splits

The Johnson government is heading for the Guinness Book of Records for the number of U-turns it has made since May of this year. One of the most remarkable U-turns concerned the A-level grades for students which took place in August. At first Johnson said that the algorithm statistical model, used to determine the exam results, was “*robust*” and “*dependable*”. But a few days after the exams the government had to withdraw its decision and grant students the A-level grades that teachers had predicted for them.

The government’s increasing loss of control of the political game means that it has no choice other than to impose a greater centralisation and to tighten political control of various state institutions. At the same time Cummings’ wants to ‘shake up the civil service’. When Frost was

named as chief Brexit negotiator, this turned the civil service post into a political appointment. When he was subsequently chosen as National Security Adviser this took it a step further.

Both nominations were met with resistance from within the Tory Party and beyond. The most open dissatisfaction was expressed by Theresa May. She made no attempt to hide her anger. The decision of the government to replace a civil servant with a political appointment made her furious. The Johnson government had chosen “*a political appointee with no proven expertise in national security*”.

A more recent example was the election of the chairmanship of the House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee where Julian Lewis won out over the government’s preferred candidate. After his election he was thrown out of the Tory parliamentary party for ‘colluding’ with Labour and the SNP to get the job. Almost immediately the same Intelligence Committee decided to release a report on Russian interference in the Referendum and the general British election of 2016, a release that Johnson’s government had desperately tried to prevent for months.

Social dislocation in Global Britain

The perspective for the situation in the coming months was sketched out in the *Independent* (13/7/20): “*Four years on from the referendum with endless debates about customs arrangements and at least three campaigns to ‘Get Ready for Brexit’, Britain still isn’t prepared... for the changes soon to come from Brexit. (...) The cumulative economic dislocations of Covid-19 and Brexit will be unprecedented, and will test the fabric of society and the Union to the very limit.*”

What does all this mean for the working class? Workers must be prepared for increasing chaos, in which the fabric of society is tested to the very limit while the Johnson government loses its grip. At the same time we can expect an avalanche of measures varying from bankruptcies, to job losses, to an onslaught of attacks on salaries and benefits. As the second wave is underway, workers must be prepared for a further spreading of the virus because of the lack of precautionary measures and the growing pressure by the state to return to the workplace - alternating with temporary and partial lockdowns

Such a situation will be a real test of solidarity in the working class. In the past months the class has expressed its solidarity with the ‘heroes’ of the NHS, but in the coming period that will not be enough. For the struggle in the defence of its living conditions to be effective and not to get drowned in growing social dislocation, it has to unify its forces by actively seeking solidarity with the workers of other sectors as well as with the unemployed. **Dennis 30/9/20**

Johnson government: a policy of vandalism

Boris Johnson’s penchant for double-think reached new heights in September. In defence of the Internal Market Bill to Parliament he tried to justify taking legal powers that would break national and international law and turned reality on its head: “*As we debate this matter the EU has not taken that particular revolver off the table. And I hope they will do so and that we can reach a Canada-style free trade agreement as well. Indeed it is such an extraordinary threat and it seems so incredible the EU can do this, that we are not taking powers in this bill to neutralise that threat, but obviously reserve the right to do so if these threats persist*”.

The Withdrawal Agreement (the so-called revolver) is the exact same weapon he armed himself with during the 2019 general election, claiming it was an “*oven ready*” deal that would “*get Brexit done!*”. During its passage through parliament 20 Tory MPs were thrown out of the parliamentary Party for voting against it. The government has even spent months and millions of pounds setting up the infrastructure for putting in place the internal trading border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK: the provision that the government now says was unacceptable.

Britain’s contribution to breaking up the old international order

Hardline Brexiters claimed that tabling the Internal Market Bill was a display of British pluck, a refusal to be bossed around by the EU, and an example of “*taking back control*”. For those parts of the bourgeoisie opposed to Brexit it was another expression of the total irresponsibility of the government. All five living Prime Ministers spoke out against it. Even some long-term Brexiters such as Norman Lamont and Michael Howard found that this brazen threat to break international law was a bridge too far.

The government’s resort to such a desperate act, which amounts to holding a gun to its own head, expresses the further weakening of the whole of the British bourgeoisie. Only a few years ago the British bourgeoisie was a symbol of intelligence and experience; now it is reduced to threatening to inflict long-term damage on its international political, economic, military relations in order to somehow intimidate its European rivals.

The bourgeoisie has no hesitation in disregarding the law, but to do this so blatantly is not at all an expression of strength. Johnson is not the first Prime Minister to openly break international law. The US invasion of Iraqi in 2003, with the support of the Blair government, was declared il-



# Protests in the health sector: putting “national unity” into question

August 8<sup>th</sup> and subsequent weekends throughout the month saw thousands of UK health workers take to the streets of major towns and cities protesting angrily against low pay, high tuition fees, increased and open-ended workloads and shift hours, lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) against the spread of Covid-19, systemic under-funding and the government’s presentation of their ‘heroic sacrifice’ as a deadly burden happily shouldered.

In previous periods, such expressions of militancy by groups of workers attempting to defend their living and working conditions may have appeared routine, ‘par for the course’. However, in the context of a global and generalised retreat in combativity in recent decades<sup>1</sup> – and in particular the ‘social peace’ demanded by governments in the face of the Covid crisis – these expressions of class struggle are noteworthy.

Largely organized at local level by nurses, ‘care home’ workers and other health sector staff but coordinated and corralled by union committees and Labour Party fringe groups, staff spoke at dozens of demonstrations including Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow of the stress induced watching colleagues and patients die (over 540 health care staff at this point had perished), of not knowing if they were themselves infected or transmitting disease to their families; of the struggle to survive facing training debts of up to £60,000 or even £90,000 and of trying to live on real wages which in many cases had fallen 20% over the last decade, despite strikes by 50,000 junior doctors in 2016 and a three year pay ‘deal’ for other staff in 2018.

Above all they were and remain furious to have been excluded from pay ‘rewards’ granted in July by the government to some 900,000 ‘key’ public sector workers including members of the armed forces, civil servants, elements of the judiciary and senior doctors for their part in the ‘battle’ against Covid, but ignoring nurses and care workers. We’ll return to this aspect below.

The ad-hoc nature of the protests – the fact workers didn’t wait for ‘their’ unions to give voice to the evident anger – was further emphasized by parades of largely home-made placards bearing statements such as : *“Heroes to 0%”* (ie: heroes to zeroes) , *“Claps don’t pay the bills,”* *“Pay NHS a fair wage - you owe us”*, *“Some cuts don’t heal,”* *“Stop clapping start talking”* and *“A nurse is for life, not just for Covid19.”* The protests –

1. See “Report on the class struggle: Formation, loss and re-conquest of proletarian class identity”, *International Review* 164

100 in Cambridge, 100 in Bournemouth, 2000 in London and so on around the country – attracted predominantly young workers who’d never demonstrated or entered a proletarian struggle before, together with a few ‘old hands’ reaching the end of their service who wanted to show solidarity with colleagues facing increasingly intolerable pressures. Mostly, they’d used social media such as Facebook groups of health workers with titles like *NHS workers say NO! To public sector pay inequality*, which claims 80,000 Facebook members, *NHS Pay 15* which demands a 15% pay rise (a call echoed at an August 26 demonstration by workers from Guy’s and St Thomas’ hospitals in London), and *Nurses United UK*, in order to rally support. Union banners were largely notable by their absence, although there was no shortage of ‘radical’ political groups arguing that demonstrators should aim to make the unions ‘fight better’.

**Rejecting social peace and sacrifice**

For months, health workers have been lectured about how they were part of a ‘national effort’ - including army units and the recruitment of thousands of ‘volunteers’ (at a time of increasing ‘zero hours’ contracts and the spectre of mass unemployment!) – putting their lives on the ‘front line’ of the ‘war against Covid’, doing ‘whatever it takes’. That appeared to include working endless overtime, forgoing holidays and instructions about PPE (or the lack of it) which changed from day to day. So the angry demonstrations, albeit on a small and limited scale, broke the ‘social peace’ and showed a real resistance to the state’s pressure to work longer for less ‘for the national good’. They attenuated the attempt to invoke the ‘war-time spirit’ of ‘we’re all in it together’. In doing so, they mirrored the struggles by millions of others around the world attempting to collectively oppose the increasing exploitation - and often, repression - demanded by capital. Some examples:

- On the African continent, health workers’ strikes have been documented in, **among other countries**, Kenya, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, with protests in Lesotho and Malawi. *“South Africa has seen by far the largest number of strikes and walkouts, where the government plans to cut nurses’ wages as part of a broader plan to cut the public sector wage bill before turning to the IMF for a loan.”*<sup>2</sup> Striking nurses have been threatened with ‘disciplinary’ actions with some themselves hospitalised by rubber bullets and stun grenades;
- In India, in June and July, staff at two

2. World Socialist Website, July 7, 2020

within capitalism’s political apparatus.

‘Cometh the hour, cometh the man’ - leaders will emerge that fit the political moment. Johnson is the perfect expression of the moment. A politician whose only political ambition was to become Prime Minister. Beyond his ambition, and his image as a political buffoon (the opposite of the series of managerial types who had been previously been Prime Minister: Blair, Cameron, May) and a period as Mayor of London, he has no other political qualities. His adoption of populist demands such as Brexit had nothing to do with any principles but corresponded to his own personal goals, not necessarily in line with the interests of the national capital.

His government is formed by those loyal to him and the Brexit project, not for their political or administrative abilities. These second-rate politicians are dominated by Dominic Cummings along with other special advisors who have no party loyalty and an open disdain for parliament, including the Tory Party. They see the norms and structures of bourgeois rule as obstacles to their project to return to a fantasy world of Britain as a buccaneering free market world leader, and rival to the EU. Central to this aim is a concentration of control in the hands of a small faction, in order to bypass the restraints imposed on government by Parliament and the Civil Service - a system based on centuries of experience.

Rather than political cohesion and authority, British capitalism’s governing team is defined by its chaotic political vandalism. The impact of this

hospitals in the capital, New Delhi, protested against a lack of PPE and the dismissal of 84 colleagues for raising safety concerns. These were a prelude to August’s two-day nationwide strike embracing at least 21 states and an estimated 3.5 million workers from different sectors of the economy, spearheaded by some 600,000 members of the all-women Accredited Social Health Activists, *“workers who travel to low-income, rural areas to provide essential health care”* ...<sup>3</sup>

- In California, USA, *“hospital revenue has fallen more than a third since the beginning of the pandemic, and the losses have forced health care workers to take pay cuts or even furloughs to compensate in some cases.”* (*San Francisco Chronicle*, July 20). A strike by 700 health care workers at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital protesting an inadequate supply of protective gear, benefit cuts and “unsafe staffing levels” was just one regional reaction.

Indeed, *“In at least 31 of the countries surveyed by Amnesty International, researchers recorded reports of strikes, threatened strikes, or protests, by health and essential workers as a result of unsafe working conditions. In many countries, such actions were met with reprisals from authorities,”*<sup>4</sup>

- In Russia, doctors complaining about a lack of PPE were charged under ‘fake news’ laws and faced fines and/or dismissal;
- In Malaysia, *“police dispersed a peaceful picket against a hospital cleaning services company ... and charged five health care workers for “unauthorized gathering”;*
- In Egypt, *“nine health care workers... were arbitrarily detained between March and June on vague and overly broad charges of ‘spreading false news’ and ‘terrorism’.*

**Manoeuvres against the working class**

But outright reprisals and repression are not the main means used by the ruling class to impose their ‘states of emergency’ on the working class. In the ‘old’ centres of capitalism – in Europe, the US and elsewhere – the general tendency is a political game of divide and rule, aimed one way or another at making health workers a ‘special case’, at sowing divisions between them and at dividing them from their class brothers and sisters in other industries.

- In Belgium, ‘Emergency Powers Decree

3. *Workers’ World*, August 13

4. ‘Global: healthworkers silenced, expelled and attacked’ on amnesty.org 13.7.20

vandalism on the traditional procedures of the Establishment has been clear in the pandemic. The incompetence of the government and its chaotic response to the health crisis has led to tens of thousands of extra deaths.

The government’s imposition of more centralised control, political and economically, is an attempt to try and contain this damaging loss of control. The collapse of the old imperialist blocs let loose imperialist, economic and political tensions that had been held in check by the threat of the other bloc. Today we are witnessing the acceleration of this process through the breaking up of the imperialist, economic and financial structures of the old bloc. Both internationally and within each nation state, the inevitable factional tensions within the bourgeoisie have been set free. The fear of the Russian bloc has gone, whilst at the same time the norms of the political apparatus are being cast aside. Instead of the usual jockeying between factions through long-agreed conventions, there is cage fighting.

The bloodletting in the Tory party around Brexit and the pandemic, or in the Labour Party around Corbyn’s leadership, are examples of these conflicts. Factional interest, short-term political and personal gain, and naked corruption are replacing the defence of the national interest.

**Economic decline accelerated by the pandemic and Brexit**

The Internal Market Bill is a provocation based on illusions about the EU being intimidated, on

No 14’ envisaged forcing private and state health and other employees into unpaid overtime without time off in lieu. These clauses were dropped after opposition from angry workers but it was the trade unions which strengthened themselves by taking over the fight, threatening strikes which never materialised, while all other conditions of work continued to deteriorate;

- In France the recently trumpeted ‘Ségur de la Santé’ plan to ‘reward’ health sector workers in fact divides private from public staff, envisages a decrease in rest times between shifts and is a further step in the dismantling of responsibilities shouldered by the state regarding health provisions;<sup>5</sup>
- In the UK, the above-mentioned pay award was an evident kick in the teeth for nurses but it also had the intended effect of dividing junior from senior doctors, nurses from other ‘public sector’ workers, etc.

The tendency to see the health sector as the be all and end all of the struggle – the curse of corporatism which crippled the miners and steel strikes in the UK in the 1980s – is one real weakness expressed by the August protests in the UK, even if one meeting raised a chant of “the firemen deserve a pay rise too”. Another is the inclination to blame the Tory Party for ‘privatising the health service’ when in fact all parties everywhere have for decades been paring down to the barest minimum the health services provided to ensure the expanded reproduction of capital and the labour power required for this purpose. It was the last Labour government’s embrace and expansion of the Private Finance Initiative which truly put the ‘NHS up for sale’ and eroded workers’ conditions.

The militancy shown in the UK and elsewhere over the summer<sup>6</sup> is in marked contrast to the prevailing atmosphere of fear and uncertainty generated by the Covid crisis and the mass layoffs and lockdowns which ensued, factors which reinforced the pre-existing lack of confidence in the class. The struggles provided a welcome reminder that the working class has not been crushed by exhaustion nor the siren songs of self-sacrifice. The necessary politicisation of that struggle - the recognition of what historically the working class is and what it can and must become – remains to be re-appropriated by the majority of the proletariat.

**RF, 10/9/2020**

5. See *Révolution Internationale*, no 484, ‘Ségur de la Santé: un nouveau coup porté à la classe ouvrière’ on our website.

6. Other sectors in struggle during the spring and summer included university lecturers and large-scale protests by British Airways employees with thousands sacked and others re-hired on lower wages and inferior terms and conditions. For further coverage of worker’s strikes and resistance earlier in the Pandemic, see “Despite All Obstacles, the Class Struggle Forges Its Future”, *World Revolution* 386

the idea that if Trump can threaten to rip up deals the Johnson government can too, and on a short-term political vision that the UK is too much of an important market for others not to make trade deals with it. All of which is fuelled by a fanatical believe in Brexit’s ability to breathe life into the UK’s economy. **The contrary will be the case.** Britain’s economy has already shrunk by a fifth this year owing to the coronavirus pandemic. A report from the London School of Economics warns that *“the most immediate and visible impact of a no deal with the EU will be seen at the border, with risks of queues and shortages of food”*. On top of this, *“the total cost to the UK economy over the longer term will be two to three times as large as that implied by the Bank of England’s forecast for the impact of COVID-19.”* The cumulative effect of the Covid crisis, a No Deal Brexit and the increasing internal chaos will be devastating. International confidence in the probity of the government has been severely damaged. Trade deals will be more difficult to negotiate and will be to the disadvantage of British capitalism: distrust of perfidious Albion will escalate.

The government’s inability to provide any coherent policy around Brexit or the pandemic (apart from the initial funds provided by the Chancellor) is frightening not only the more coherent parts of the ruling class but former supporters. What gives them nightmares most of all is that this increasingly chaotic mess is the best they could come up with given that Brexit has already profoundly undermined its political coherence. **Phil, 3.10.20**

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legal. Then as now, such an open flouting of international law was an act of weakness. The US had to try and impose its imperialist dominance after years of decline. Blair supported the action in the hope of improving the standing of British imperialism. The Johnson government’s threat to break international, and even national, law marks a qualitative acceleration of its decline.

Brexit is a humiliating experience for the British ruling class. For all its centuries of experience of ruling an Empire, and then boxing above its weight internationally even when the Empire had collapsed, it failed to contain its Brexit-supporting factions. A minority of the ruling class was able to use the growth of populist sentiment within the population, faced with decades of economic decline and a government that promised much but actually delivered even worse conditions – in a context exacerbated by the migration crisis of the mid-2010s - to win the recklessly called referendum. German imperialism’s growing domination of the EU weakened the influence of Britain; and this along with the economic impact of the 2009 economic crisis promoted support for Brexit within parts of the bourgeoisie. Since the referendum a political crisis marked by bitter factional struggles around Brexit has paralysed the bourgeoisie. The appeal to populism in the referendum and in last year’s election produced results for a faction of the bourgeoisie, but it has also deepened divisions



# Belarus: whether the regime is authoritarian or democratic, it’s the same capitalist exploitation!

Since the victory of Alexander Lukashenko in the presidential election of August 9 2020, a victory linked to massive fraud and intimidation, the population has come out onto the street, following calls from the opposition. Tens of thousands, waving the national flag, have been protesting against the regime and demanding “free elections”. Before the election, the main opposition candidate, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, had already been attracting large crowds to her meetings. Shortly after the election results were announced, the trade unions linked to the opposition called for a general strike. As with the demonstrations, strikes have spread across the country, even hitting emblematic plants like Bel AZ (mining machinery) and MTZ (tractors). The “last dictator in Europe”, in power for a quarter of a century, has been brutally repressing the demonstrations, multiplying arrests and beatings (some of which have led to deaths).

Lukashenko, the leader of a country under Russian influence after the implosion of the USSR, is today under siege. Thirty years ago the regimes of eastern Europe collapsed one after the other, a striking expression of the disarray of the state apparatus lyingly called “Soviet”, and of the bankruptcy of its imperialist strategy. But the regime in Belarus has remained in power, mainly through ferocious repression. The fact that the last vestige of Stalinism in Eastern Europe is today being shaken shows that an anachronism is on the verge of coming to an end under the repeated blows of the same process of disintegration of imperialist alliances which led to the disappearance of the Eastern bloc. Once again a country in a strategic situation as far as Russia is concerned is hoping to move closer to the West, and this is generating ever more chaos, in the image of the current dislocation of Ukraine<sup>1</sup>.

The pro-western opposition, led by Tsikhanouskaya, has made use of the calamitous economic situation (mass unemployment, growing job insecurity, etc) and the government’s disastrous management of the Covid pandemic, to bring the population into the street and call for strikes. But the working class has nothing to gain by allowing itself to be dragged into conflicts between factions of the Belarus bourgeoisie, each one supported by imperialist vultures ready to swoop on their prey.

On the contrary! All the so-called “revolutions” to win freedom from “communism” or the Russian big brother have ended up with democratic regimes which are no less bourgeois, regimes of exploitation which, under the whip of the crisis, have made the conditions of the exploited even worse. All the so-called revolutions in favour of democracy have been the theatre of particularly cynical imperialist manoeuvres: when it was not the western bloc using its pawns to weaken the opposing camp, it was the USSR pushing the leaders to move aside

1. We will come back in another article to the imperialist stakes involved with Belarus and the weight of decomposition in these events. The attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny, a pro-European opponent of Vladimir Putin, is part of the same dynamic of imperialist rivalries.



Draped in nationalist flags

in order to hold on to its influence, as in 1989 when the “socialist” Ceausescu was pushed out to make a way for a pro-Russian clique. In 2004, long after the explosion of the USSR, the “Orange Revolution” broke out in Ukraine, bringing to power profoundly corrupt pro-western elements like the apparatchik Viktor Yushchenko and the “gas princess” Yulia Tymoshenko. The “Orange Revolution” led to a civil war, Russian military intervention, the fragmentation of the country and general chaos and poverty. Today, these countries are mostly run by authoritarian regimes presiding over deplorable living conditions and massive unemployment.

In Belarus, the pro-European bourgeoisie is also using the population as a makeweight for manoeuvring against the existing government. On 14 August, having fled to Lithuania, Tsikhanouskaya announced the creation of a “Coordinating Council” to ensure a peaceful transfer of power and the holding of new elections. For the democratic wing of the bourgeoisie, it’s all about removing Lukashenko from power and lulling the working class with the promise of elections. But elections hold nothing for the working class, whether they are carried out according to “international norms” (as demanded by the Coordinating Council) or are openly fraudulent, they remain a pure mystification, whose only function is to reduce the proletariat to powerlessness. In the end, it’s the bourgeoisie and its class interests which win them. The contradictions of capitalism don’t go away; the exploitation of the workers, poverty and war don’t vanish simply because the bourgeoisie has organised “free elections”.

You only have to look at the pedigree of the “praesidium” of the coordinating council to recognise this. Apart from Tsikhanouskaya who has been rushing to make contact with the western chancelleries to back her “revolution”, the most visible personality is none other than Svetlana Alexievitch, formerly a very disciplined writer un-

der Brezhnev and a member of the official Union of Soviet Writers, conveniently changed her tune and denounced the “reds”, which won her the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2015. The council also includes lawyers, a trade unionist (leader of the MTZ strike committee) a former minister (Pavel Latushko, another one who has felt the wind changing) and a leader of the Belarus Christian Democratic Party, an organisation of fanatical homophobes.

But aren’t strikes taking place in the factories? Strike committees and general assemblies – isn’t that the proof that we are witnessing a proletarian movement? This is the argument put forward by the left parties, the Trotskyists in particular?<sup>2</sup> But it’s not enough for workers to be present in a mobilisation to make it a movement of the working class. In reality, the strikes were entirely piloted by the trade unions, in particular the Belarus Congress of Democratic Unions whose goal, concerned with the “*future of the country*”, is to ensure “*a rapid transfer of power*” and to “*help the country emerge from its acute political crisis*”<sup>3</sup>. It was the unions, guard dogs of capital, who called the assemblies and pushed the strikes with the sole aim of forcing

2. Here it is highly regrettable that this deformed vision of the class struggle has been taken up within the proletarian political milieu through statements which see this mobilisation of the workers as a “first step forward” instead of denouncing the bourgeois nature of the movement and the very dangerous trap it represents for the proletariat. In an article “Between imperialist feuds and class movements”, the comrades of the Internationalist Communist Tendency claim that “*the one positive note is the widespread participation of the working class. The stoppage of production and the interruption of the profit chain is the only genuinely class element in the movement; obviously, however, this is not enough. It is a good start, of course, but more is needed*”.

3. Alexander Yaroshuk – On the creation of a national strike committee: procrastination is death!”, from an interview on 17 August on the site Belarus Partisan relayed via the site Médiapart

Lukashenko to step down. The Belarus Congress of Democratic Unions is also linked to many international trade union organisations (International Trade Union Confederation, International Labour Organisation) and benefits from the long experience of these union bodies in controlling the working class and sabotaging its struggles.

These strikes are neither a “step forward” towards nor the premise for a class movement. This is a rotten terrain which disarms the proletariat on all levels, which delivers it with hands tied to the bourgeoisie. Apart from the illusions it is sowing in Belarus itself, the ruling class is also using it everywhere in the world to make workers think that bourgeois democracy is the highest goal of politics.

The working class cannot choose one bourgeois camp against another, it cannot allow itself to be dragged behind the unions or the most “democratic” of bourgeois parties. The attacks against the living and working conditions launched by the Lukashenko regime are the same that democratic governments are imposing across the world. Capitalism is a system in crisis which has nothing more to offer humanity.

The only alternative to capitalism’s slide into barbarism is the world proletarian revolution which is the only route to a truly communist society. But the road that leads to it is long, difficult and tortuous. The working class can only set out on this road by fighting for its own demands, especially against the austerity policies of the state, so that it can arm itself with the experience of confronting the bourgeoisie and the obstacles it constantly puts in its path, such as trade unionism and the defence of democracy. It’s vital for the proletariat to draw the lessons from these struggles if it is to recover its class identity and prepare the ground for future revolutionary struggles.

But to move in this direction, it is also indispensable for the class to re-appropriate the lessons of past struggles, such as the ones in Poland in 1980.

40 years ago, a strike that began at the Gdansk shipyards spread like wildfire across the whole country. The general assemblies were really massive and sovereign. The negotiations with the Jaruzelski government were held in public and not in secret state alcoves. The mass strike was ultimately defeated by the “free and democratic” trade union Solidarnosc which led the workers into the maws of repression. After the fall of the eastern bloc, the first “free” election (and generous American finance) brought the Solidarnosc leader, Lech Walesa, to the presidency of the country. Under his government, austerity policies multiplied.

Democratic or authoritarian, left wing or right wing, all factions of the bourgeoisie are reactionary, even when they are led by an apparently sympathetic teacher of English. Today in Belarus, like yesterday in Poland, the exploited have nothing to gain from supposedly free elections! With Tsikhanouskaya or Lukashenko, it’s the same capitalist exploitation! **EG, 31.8.20**

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## Population lockdown: the bourgeois state shows its brutality

in the social isolation and atomisation of individual members of society.

Therefore, while the bourgeois state has effectively removed large numbers of the elderly from society, it does not treat its future proletarians much better. A large number of them are facing a bleak future of unemployment and a greater precariousness as the economic crisis accelerates and worsens.

### The rise of violence against women and children

For many weeks, or indeed several months, the media has been exerting a lot of pressure on us with: ‘Stay home, act responsibly, protect yourself and others!’ Of course, anyone not following these guidelines was accused of being irresponsible, endangering the health and lives of other people. So all those people not seen as ‘model citizens’, were accused of spreading the virus.

In fact, the lock-down was closely adhered to. Most of the population understood there was no other choice and that it was necessary to self-shield to protect themselves. However, in terms of how the lock-down affects all other areas of life, bourgeois ideology spreads the fantasy of equal rights. The ruling class pretends not to see the poverty or dire housing conditions in which the vast majority of the working class, the most vulnerable and the unemployed, live. Whole families have to live in cramped small rooms morning and night. Once again, profit and market forces rule over quality of housing.

If violence against children and women is unfortunately not a new phenomenon, in these lockdown conditions, it has increased significantly. As the state’s only interest is ‘saving the economy’, it has little to offer terrified people who are fearing for their lives, except to propose they ring the emergency number for the social services, which has

little capacity to cope with the tide of violence.

As a consequence, all over the world, domestic violence has mushroomed, rising by 30% in France where police call-outs to domestic violence cases have risen by 48 %. In Europe, calls to emergency services have increased by 60%. In Tunisia, attacks against women have increased five-fold. In India, the number of domestic violence cases has doubled. In Brazil, reported cases of domestic violence have increased by 40 to 50 percent. In Mexico, calls to violent incidents there increased by 60% during quarantine with an additional 200 cases of femicide. More than 900 women are reported missing in Peru...

Nonetheless, for the bourgeoisie these human disasters are nothing more than numbers or percentages on paper, which they will quickly forget about. After decades of cut-backs to health services, the social services sector for child protection, for the prevention of violence against women and all the

services for the protection of the weakest or the most disadvantaged, have simply been underfunded.

What is the real scale of suffering and how much physical and mental damage is being hidden at the end of the day? How many cases of distress, depression and attempted suicide have accumulated due to these conditions of lock-down and confinement?

The severe lock-down measures and the restrictions on social activity imposed on the populations, alongside the workers sent to work in workplaces as virtual ‘virus fodder’ to ‘save the economy’ thus being at risk of contamination along with their colleagues, has highlighted the impersonal and abstract nature of social relations under capitalism.

With the virus continuing to spread on several continents, and showing a significant upturn in several European countries where a second wave is underway, the media have started to target and stigmatise young people, calling them ‘irresponsible’ towards their elders and the general population, because they have gathered in large groups after weeks of isolation; it aims to arouse more ideological division between generations. If, of course, all

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# Explosion in Beirut: a tragic illustration of capitalist negligence

On 4 August 2020, in the port of Beirut, a stockpile of 2750 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded, causing one of the biggest industrial disasters in the history of capitalism.

## Capitalism's latest criminal act

To date, 190 officially dead, dozens missing and more than 6,000 injured, some very seriously. According to specialists from Sheffield University, this explosion would be the equivalent to a tenth of the power of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima ... The material damage was enormous: imagine a crater 120m in diameter and 43m deep! Hospitals, like the Saint-Georges Hospital, were badly damaged, even completely destroyed.

Looking back on the unfolding of events, we can see that the reality far exceeds the fiction of a *Net-flix* series: in 2013, a Russian ship, the *Rhosus*, sailing under a Moldovan flag of convenience, was taking 2750 tons of ammonium nitrate from Batumi in Georgia to Mozambique. Due to technical problems, this waste-carrying vessel with its explosive cargo had to make a stop in Beirut. After inspection, the Lebanese port authorities did not allow the ship to go to sea. In 2014, the nitrate was unloaded and then stored in a warehouse at the port. The owner abandoned both the ship (refusing to pay for repairs) and the sailors. Obviously, they were no longer being paid and were prohibited from disembarking. Moreover, they did not comply. The story does not end there: subsequently, customs officers warned six times about the danger of this explosive stockpile.

But their recommendations were in vain and nobody wanted to take a decision. Seven years of judicial, administrative and political meandering followed, which led to the disaster of 4 August 2020. The immediate consequences of the explosion were dramatic: the port and much of the city were wiped off the map. Much infrastructure was destroyed and economic activity severely damaged. The scenes on the streets were reminiscent of the battlefield. Almost 300,000 people were left homeless, without running water, and 100,000 children were displaced. The humanitarian stakes are considerable, as the port of Beirut handles 60% of Lebanon's imports, including 80% of its food-stuffs, the food security of the population has been seriously jeopardised.

Before the disaster, Lebanon was already going through a dramatic social and health crisis (due to the inadequacy of the hospital system: lack of medicines, overflowing hospitals, exodus of medical personnel, ...) Under these conditions, and with the rapid spread of Covid-19, the health system was already no longer able to meet the medical needs of the population: it should be noted that lockdown was imposed again on August 21, 2020 ... except for sectors affected by the devastation! Such decisions speak volumes about the cynicism and incompetence of the Lebanese "government".

But what the ruling class tends to present as a simple industrial accident (another one!) is in reality yet another tragic episode in the life of capital-

ism driven by the permanent search for profit and by the reduction of the costs of production to a minimum. This logic, in which human life is irrelevant, is at the root of the proliferation of catastrophes of this sort all over the world. Industrial history is littered with what the media discreetly presents as "accidents" whose frequency and scale continue to grow as capitalism sinks into its historical crisis and today into its phase of decomposition. It is enough, among the immense number of catastrophes, to mention some notable ones to get an idea of their monstrosity:

- On 10 July 1976, the factory of a Swiss firm, located in Seveso, 20 km from Milan, suffered a tragic fate: the sudden increase in pressure in one of the reactors blew a safety valve and caused an explosion of extremely harmful herbicides. Dioxin was a chemical agent in Agent Orange that was widely used by the US military in villages throughout the country during the war in Vietnam! It is therefore easy to understand that the authorities have minimized the toxicity of this product while planning, among other health measures, "therapeutic abortions" ...

- On 3 December 1984, in Bhopal in India, at the Union Carbide pesticide plant, owned by a subsidiary of an American corporation, there was a highly toxic gas leak: 30,000 dead, between 200,000 and 300,000 sick in a city of 800,000 inhabitants, permanently contaminated.

- On 26 April 1986, the Chernobyl power plant 96 km from Kiev in Ukraine (then a "socialist" republic of the USSR) exploded and left the region unfit for human life. The number of deaths due to exposure to radioactivity is estimated at several thousand. In April 2020, fires in a forest near the power station increased radioactivity 16 times compared to "normal" But everything was "under control" according to local authorities.

- On 21 September 2001, in the AZF factory in Toulouse, a subsidiary in France of Total-Fina: an explosion of a stock of ammonium nitrate caused 30 deaths and 2,000 injuries: the cause of the explosion was, as in Beirut, the storage of this highly toxic product without any protection and very close to a large city.

- On 12 August 2015, in the port of Tianjin in China, 140 km north of Beijing: a sodium cyanide leak caused an explosion and fire at a warehouse: 173 died, according to the figures provided by the Chinese authorities, more than 700 people were injured or infected, thousands were made homeless, in a devastated area with a radius of several kilometres.

- On 12 August 2018, the Genoa Bridge in Italy collapsed: 43 died. We soon found out that the monitoring sensors had not worked for several years ... However, two years later, the authorities inaugurated a new bridge with a great fanfare (without the presence of affected families who refused to participate in this despicable ceremony).

- On 26 September 26, 2019, in the river port of Rouen, the American Lubrizol plant, similar to that at Seveso, caught fire and a subsequent explo-

sion caused a huge toxic cloud affecting an area with a radius of more than 50 km. The authorities denied the toxicity of the fumes so that they could restart business as quickly as possible. Residents' protests and the setting up of monitoring committees had no effect on decisions, and the "post-Lubrizol" plan (as the authorities called it) looks



The huge explosion in Beirut

surprisingly like "pre-Lubrizol". Capitalism is allowed to continue its work of destruction.

This list is unfortunately not exhaustive. But all of these disasters, brought about by the wilful neglect of bourgeois states and the capitalist class, remind us that capitalism can only survive in a landscape littered with rubble and corpses.

## Lebanon, a country eaten away by decomposition

Today, Beirut is added to the roll call of "accidents".

The local authorities were aware of the danger of this cargo and the scale of the disaster can only be explained by negligence, naked greed, and corruption at all levels of the completely rotten Lebanese state. This country survives only by attracting foreign capital with interest rates of up to 20%. The Beirut disaster was not due to an unfortunate combination of circumstances. It took place in a country totally ravaged by fifty years of war in the Middle East, by widespread corruption, by political and sectarian cliques. The decomposition that has ravaged this country for decades, has led the desperate population to want to find "democratic solutions" and so, since 2018, waves of impotent anger have been expressed through an interclassist movement entirely dominated by bourgeois demands. This has only grown since the disaster.

You could draw a parallel with the situation of the neighbouring state of Israel, also confronted with demonstrations of popular revolts on a bourgeois "democratic" terrain against the political power in place, its corruption, its disastrous economic and military policy, against the backdrop of the handling of the equally calamitous Covid-19 pandemic.

The restrictions that were imposed in Lebanon in October 2019 were drastic: you can't withdraw wages from the bank, you can't withdraw currency, there's no access to the most basic medical care. The Lebanese pound has lost over 78% of its value, 45% of the population lives below the poverty line, and 35% of the workforce is unemployed. The daily life of the population becomes unbearable: for example, more than 20 electricity cuts per day. It's easy to appreciate the suffering and the anger of the population against this extreme precariousness.

A wave of protests led in October 2019 to the resignation of the government. The next cabinet, headed by Hassan Diab, was equally marked by corruption and incompetence. All this triggered a new wave of demonstrations in June. Nothing changed. The Lebanese state has been mired for decades in a system of corruption in which the banking system (fuelled by foreign funds, including powerful regional sponsors) plagues the entire economy and inexorably sinks the country into decomposition.

## The "international community" is an accomplice

As always, the same scenario arises: the international bourgeoisie sympathises, sends some

assistance, and promises aid. But capitalist life continues its same frantic race for profit, exacerbating the geopolitical rivalries that fuel growing chaos. Under the guise of solidarity and humanitarian aid, it is the stampede of cynical imperialist vultures (be it the great powers or the second rank regional powers) rushing to "help" Lebanon in or-

der to defend their own sordid interests.

And in the foreground of this swarm of grim predators, we find France. The eagerness of Macron (the only head of state to date to have visited the scene of the disaster) led to a first visit to Lebanon in which he told the Lebanese government the conditions for French aid in reconstruction ... because the French State intends to regain a preponderant place in the region after having practically been ejected from it in recent years. This is why Macron said that "*France will never let go of Lebanon*". On 28 August 2020, in a press conference, he said: "*If we let go of Lebanon..., there will be civil war*". To support the imperialist scope of such a declaration, during his visit on 1 September 2020 Macron first of all boasted by commemorating the centenary of the creation of Greater Lebanon (at the instigation of France) then spoke with the various Lebanese political factions to get them to promise to create a transitional government in the next fifteen days.

During the course of the French President's stay hundreds of residents took to the streets to let it be known that they weren't fooled. At the end of the day, Macron was more threatening: "*At the end of October I will convoke an international conference in Paris and if nothing has been done, I will tell the international community that we cannot be there for aid.*" Such statements say a lot about the fraternal intentions of the French bourgeoisie! The new Prime Minister Adib, former chief of staff to Prime Minister Mikati (first in the camp of Hezbollah camp and then in the opposing side of Hariri) perfectly embodies the type of "change" expected by the old General Aoun who, overnight, understood that "*the time has come to change policy*" and called on the different political factions to come to an agreement to proclaim "*a secular state, as demanded by the Lebanese youth*" ... It would almost be a great melodrama if the situation was not so serious.

For the moment, the country is mired in an unprecedented crisis and the explosion of 4 August constitutes a new climax of the decomposition of the state with the impact of corruption and incompetence of the various political parties, financed by rich external sponsors. With this new scenario, the Lebanese bourgeois cliques are only trying to buy time and each is trying to keep its position in the face of growing chaos.

This terrible event reminds us once again that the "accidents" of capitalism are so many permanent threats against humanity. The only guarantee of security for the future lies in the constitution of a truly human international community, namely a society where man and his environment are at the heart of all concerns and decisions. Before that, it will be necessary to sweep away the rubble of this rotten and murderous capitalist society. This is our programme, our struggle. In 1915, Karl Liebknecht said: "*The enemies of the people are counting on the forgetfulness of the masses – we counter this with the solution: **Learn everything, don't forget anything!***"

Adjish (2 September 2020)

## Continued from page 4

precautions must be taken, these gatherings testify to a thirst for social bonds, a desire to meet with family, friends and relatives after months of solitude and psychological isolation.

However, these young people only express a vital need of the human species, that of socialised living. Pointing to them as the cause of the virus' rapid new growth in Europe, as the media have been doing for several weeks, demonstrates even more the brutality and inhumanity of bourgeois society.

## In times of crisis capitalism reveals its true face

The bourgeoisie wants to present itself as a class at the helm of a society that benefits everyone, a society where everyone has their place and where everyone has their opportunity. But when a health, economic and social crisis of this magnitude strikes, the veil slips and the unblinking monstrous face of this system of exploitation emerges; a system in which life is a commodity that deserves attention and support only if it is deemed to be profitable, and then on the condition that it does not cost too

much. With the economic crisis, with the sinking of this society into an ever-greater inhumanity and chaos, increasingly irresponsible and deadly policies are imposed on life itself. To listen to this class of liars, its media and others who churn out its ideology, the world in the future will no longer be like the one before.

Today, we are made to believe that in the future 'there will be better health services', that 'there will be masks and tests', that 'the world will be more united', that 'we will take care of the elderly in the care homes', that 'loneliness will at an end', that 'we will not repeat the same mistakes again', etc. These hypocritical tall tales are just as unreliable as at the time of the First World War when the bourgeoisie proclaimed with a hand on the heart that this would be 'the very last time!' or 'never again!' The Second World War was close behind with a renewal of widespread barbarism. Thus, it is true, the world after will not be like the one before: it will be even worse! The promises of the bourgeoisie are only convincing to those who want to believe in them, but the proletarian class can no longer be under any illusion about the world of suffering and nightmares that the bourgeoisie has in store for society. **Sam, 2 May 2020**



# The mass strike in Poland 1980: Lessons for the future

“Forty years ago, in the summer of 1980, the working class in Poland made the whole world tremble. A massive strike movement was spreading across the country: several hundred thousand workers launched wildcat strikes in the different towns; it shook the ruling class in Poland and those in other countries”.

That was forty years ago, but this “massive strike movement” pointed a finger to the future. These inevitable struggles that the working class would have to wage and the many lessons it would learn from this great experience are invaluable: taking control of its struggles, self-organisation, elected and revocable delegates, the extension of the movement, workers’ solidarity, the general assemblies and broadcasting the debates over loudspeakers... this is what the workers’ struggle in Poland was like: a struggle against the attacks on their living conditions, against the increase in meat prices and for wage increases. The organisation of this strike movement demonstrated what the working class is capable of. Poland 1980 was one of the great experiences of the workers’ movement which shows our class that it can and must have confidence in itself, that its strength comes from being united and organised.

This movement also showed what the ruling class is capable of, the sophisticated traps it can set for those it exploits and the degree to which the bourgeoisies from all sides are ready to work together to crush the working class. The response that was mounted against the class struggle demonstrated once more the strength and Machiavellianism of the political apparatus of the bourgeoisie. In the East and in the West, all possible forces were used to extinguish this dangerous fire and prevent it from spreading, especially to East Germany.

### What happened in Poland in 1980?

The 1980 movement did not appear as a bolt from out the blue. On the contrary, the international situation was marked by the recovery of the class struggle since May 1968 in France. Even if the presence of the Iron Curtain limited any interaction between the struggles of the working class in the West and in the East, the same dynamic was at work either side. Hence, the 1970s in Poland were characterised by a strong development of combativity and reflection.

In the 1970s, forced by the economic crisis and the weakness of its state capitalism, the Polish government attacked the workers’ living conditions: horrific increases in food prices were accompanied by food shortages, while Poland was continuing to export potatoes to France. “In the winter of 1970-71, the Baltic shipyard workers went on strike against the increases in the prices of basic foodstuffs. Initially, the Stalinist regime reacted with fierce repression of the demonstrations which resulted in several hundred deaths, particularly in Gdansk. However, the strikes did not stop. Finally, party leader Gomulka, was removed and replaced by a more ‘sympathetic’ figure, Gierek. The latter spoke for 8 hours with the Szczecin shipyard workers before convincing them to return to work. Not surprisingly, he then betrayed the promises he made to them at that time. In 1976, new brutal economic attacks provoked strikes in several cities, notably in Radom and Ursus. The repression left many dozens dead.”

It was in this context and in the face of the worsening economic crisis that the Polish bourgeoisie decided to impose another increase in the price of meat by almost 60% in July 1980. The attack was direct, without the ideological coating that the Western bourgeoisies are capable of. It was characteristic of the brutal Stalinist methods of the regime and totally inappropriate in the face of a combative proletariat. The decisions of the Polish bourgeoisie would only provoke the workers’ reaction. Based on the experience in the 1970s, “the workers of Tezew near Gdansk and those of Ursus in the suburbs of Warsaw went on strike. In Ursus, general assemblies were held, a strike committee was elected and common demands were raised. In the following days, the strikes continued to spread: Warsaw, Lodz, Gdansk, etc. The government then tried to prevent any further extension of the movement by making rapid concessions such as wage



increases. In mid-July, the workers in Lublin, an important railway junction, went on strike. Lublin was located on the train line connecting Russia with East Germany. In 1980, it was a vital line for conveying Russian troops from East Germany. The demands of the workers were: no repression against the striking workers, withdrawal of the police from the factories, wage increases and free trade union elections”. The movement spread, attempts to stop and divide it failed: **the mass strike was underway. Within two months, Poland was paralysed.** The situation was too explosive for the government to suppress. In addition, the danger was not confined within the Polish borders. In the coal-mining region of Ostrava in Czechoslovakia, and in the Romanian mining regions, in Russia at Togliattigrad, miners and workers were following the same path. “In the countries of Western Europe, if there were no strikes in direct solidarity with the struggles of the Polish workers, workers in many countries took up the slogans of their class brothers in Poland. In Turin, in September 1980, we could hear workers chanting: ‘Gdansk shows us the way’.”

**Faced with this danger of extension,** the bourgeoisies of the world worked together to crush the movement. **On the one hand, the movement had to be isolated and on the other it had to be misrepresented.** The borders with East Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were quickly closed. The international bourgeoisies worked hand in hand to shut down and isolate the movement: the Polish government feigned a radical distancing towards the USSR, the Soviet government threatened the workers by moving tanks to the border and Western Europe financed and advised Solidarnosc while international propaganda rallied behind Solidarnosc as a heroic, free and independent trade union.

This alliance of the various Western bourgeoisies with the Polish bourgeoisie proved fatal for the Polish mass movement. And it is for this reason that, contrary to the theory of the weakest link, the future revolution can only start from the central countries: “As long as the important movements of the class only affect countries on the periphery of capitalism (as was the case for Poland) and even if the local bourgeoisie is completely overwhelmed, the Holy Alliance of all the bourgeoisies of the world, led by the most powerful ones, will be able to establish a cordon sanitaire both economically and politically, ideologically and even militarily around the proletarian sectors concerned.. It is only at the moment that the proletarian struggle strikes the economic and political heart of the capitalist system:

- that the establishment of an economic cordon sanitaire will have become impossible, because it will be the richest economies that are affected,
- that the establishment of a political cordon sanitaire will no longer have any effect because it will be the most developed proletariat that will confront the most powerful bourgeoisie, only then

will this struggle give the signal for the world revolutionary conflagration.”<sup>1</sup>.

### Illusions in democracy and trade unions: the weakness of the working class in Poland

The main weapon of the bourgeoisie would be the Solidarnosc trade union itself. Called on to play the role of the “left-wing” of capital, a role it would perform “clandestinely” from 1982 onward, it diverted the struggle onto the nationalist terrain, serving the workers up to defeat and to repression. This trade union came out of the KOR (the Workers’ Defence Committee) that emerged after the repressions of 1976 and was comprised of the intellectuals of the democratic opposition fighting for the legalisation of independent trade unions. It would have 15 of its members incorporated in the MKS (the inter-factory strike committee).

While “there was no trade union influence in the summer of 1980 at the start of the movement, the members of the “free trade union” would act to undermine the struggle. While initially negotiations were conducted openly, after a while it was claimed that “experts” were needed to work through the details of negotiations with the government. It became increasingly difficult for the workers to follow the negotiations, let alone participate in them, as the loudspeakers transmitting the negotiations had stopped working due to ‘technical’ problems. The work of sabotage had begun. The original political and economic demands (including wage demands) were diverted towards the unions’ interests rather than those of the workers, with the recognition of independent unions to the fore. **On August 31, the Gdansk Agreement, embodying the democratic and trade union illusions, signed the death knell of the mass strike.** “Because the workers understood that the official trade unions were an integral part of the state, most of them now believed that the newly founded Solidarnosc trade union, with ten million workers, was incorruptible and would defend their interests. They had no familiarity with the experience of the workers in the West who had been confronted for decades with ‘free’ unions”.

Solidarnosc would perfectly assume its role as the fire-fighter of capitalism and extinguish the workers’ combativity. “**Democratic illusions were the ideal breeding ground for the bourgeoisie and its trade union Solidarnosc to carry out their anti-working class policy and unleash the repression.**( ...) In the autumn of 1980, when the workers went on strike again to protest the Gdansk Agreement, having realised that even with a ‘free’ trade union on their side, their material situation had worsened, Solidarity was already beginning to show its true face. Once the mass strikes had

ended, Walesa, as the leader, travelled all around in an army helicopter to call on the workers to urgently stop their strikes, saying ‘we don’t need any more strikes because they are pushing our country into the abyss, we have to calm down’. Whenever possible, he seized the initiative from the workers, preventing them from launching new strikes.” For a whole year, Solidarnosc did the job of undermining and preparing the ground for repression.

The Polish government “re-established order” during the night of 12-13 December 1981 and martial law was declared: communication channels were closed down, mass arrests took place, tanks moved into Warsaw, and military checkpoints were erected across the country. “**While no workers were beaten or killed in the summer of 1980 because of self-organisation and extension of the struggles, and because there was no union supervision over the workers, in December 1981 more than 1,200 workers were murdered and tens of thousands were imprisoned or driven into exile**”. The living conditions that would follow were worse than those imposed at the beginning of July 1980. During 1982, the combativity did not disappear, but it would be suppressed under the blows of a fierce repression coupled with the continual sabotage of Solidarnosc, leaving the Polish working class impoverished and forced into exile to sell its labour power.

### The lessons of the summer of 1980

Despite this defeat, the experience of this workers’ movement is invaluable. **It was the highest point of an international wave of struggles** and it provided an illustration of the fact that the class struggle is the only force that can compel the bourgeoisie to suspend its imperialist rivalries. The military action of the USSR in Afghanistan, which it invaded in 1979, was halted by the actions of the undefeated proletariat in the Eastern bloc. This clearly showed the power of the working class. This is what we need to reclaim:

“In the summer of 1980, the workers took the initiative in the struggle. Not waiting for instructions from on high, they marched together and held assemblies to decide for themselves the place and time of their struggles. Joint demands were put forward in the mass assemblies. A strike committee was formed. In the beginning, economic demands were to the fore. The workers were determined. They did not want to suffer a repetition of the bloody crushing suffered by the struggle in 1970 and 1976. In the industrial centre of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, an inter-factory strike committee (MKS) was formed; it was composed of 400 members (two delegates per enterprise). In the second half of August, some 800 to 1,000 delegates would meet. Every day general assemblies were held at the Lenin Shipyards. Loudspeakers were installed to allow everyone to follow the discussions of the strike committees and the negotiations with government representatives. At that time there were even microphones installed outside the MKS meeting room so that the workers present in the general assemblies could intervene directly in the MKS discussions. In the evenings, the delegates - most of them provided with cassettes with recordings of the debates - returned to their workplaces and presented the discussions and the situation in ‘their’ factory general assembly, returning their mandate to it. These were the means by which as many workers as possible could participate in the struggle. Delegates had to return their mandate, were revocable at any time. and the general assemblies were always sovereign. All these practices were totally opposed to union practices. Meanwhile, after the workers of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot united, the movement spread to other cities. To sabotage communications between workers, the government cut the telephone lines on 16 August. Immediately, the workers threatened to extend their movement even further if the government did not restore the lines. The government backtracked. The general assembly then decided to set up a workers’ militia. It was collectively decided to ban alcohol as consumption was widespread.

1. “The proletariat of western Europe at the centre of the generalisation of the class struggle”, *International Review* 31



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The workers understood the need for clear heads in their confrontation with the government. When the government threatened a crackdown in Gdansk, the railway workers in Lublin declared: ‘If the workers in Gdansk are physically attacked and if even one of them is harmed, we will paralyse the [strategically most important] railway line between Russia and East Germany’. In almost all major cities, the workers were mobilised. More than half a million of them understood that they were the only effective force in the country capable of opposing the government and that this strength came from:

- **the rapid extension** of the movement in contrast with what happened in 1970 and 1976 when it was worn down in violent confrontations;
- **the self-organisation**, that is the ability of the workers to take their own initiatives instead of trusting the unions;
- **the general assemblies uniting their forces, controlling the movement and providing the greatest possible mass participation in the negotiations with the government that was visible to all.**

In fact the extension of the movement was the best weapon of solidarity; the workers did not just make pronouncements, they took the initiative in the struggles themselves. This dynamic made possible a change in the balance of forces. As long as the workers were struggling in such a massive and united way, the government was unable to carry out any repression”.

Poland 1980 was one of the great historical experiences of the workers’ movement, an experience that the proletariat must reappropriate in preparing its future struggles so that it will have confidence in its strength and its ability to organise itself, knowing how to develop solidarity but also being aware of the traps that the bourgeoisie is able to set, especially with the trade unions.

All the quotations come from the article: “Poland (August 1980): 40 years ago, the world proletariat repeated the experience of the mass strike” *Révolution Internationale* n°483 (July-August 2020)

The ICC has published numerous articles about the struggles in Poland. The following, from our *International Review*, are available online in English:

**International Review 23**  
“The capitalist crisis in the Eastern bloc”  
“Mass strikes in Poland 1980: The proletariat opens a new breach”

**International Review 24**  
“In the light of the events in Poland, the role of revolutionaries”  
“The international dimension of the workers’ struggles in Poland”

**International Review 27**  
“Notes on the mass strike”  
“One year of workers’ struggles in Poland”

**International Review 28**  
“State of war in Poland: the working class against the world bourgeoisie”

**International Review 29**  
“After the repression in Poland: perspectives for the world class struggle”

**Note on the ICC’s intervention towards the mass strikes**

During these events, as well as numerous articles in its press, the ICC also distributed three international leaflets, two of them translated into Polish.

The first, dated 6 September 1980, described the massive struggles of the summer, highlighting the power of the movement, its generalisation and self-organisation, denouncing trade unionism and insisting that the workers have no country. It was distributed in about ten countries.

The second leaflet, dated 10 March 1981, was distributed internationally but also translated into Polish and distributed in Poland by a delegation of comrades. It denounced the so-called “socialist” nature of the eastern bloc countries, putting forward an internationalist standpoint and exposing the activities of the different bourgeoisies and of the trade unions

Continued from page 1

## Trump and Biden: the false choices of capitalist democracy

Such moments of unity run counter to the “classist” expressions of racial division – to white supremacy and the fascist movements which are oozing out of the rotting body of capitalism. But they also go in a different direction from the Black Lives Matter mobilisations which put race above class and which have been totally instrumentalised by the Democrats, by major business interests, by a significant part of the state itself. Struggles based on race cannot lead to the unification of the working class: parts of the ruling class are happy to “take the knee” and give their blessing to BLM because they know it can be used to hide the fundamental reality of capitalism as a society based on the exploitation of one class by another.

The working class in the US faces a huge ideological onslaught in the lead-up to the elections, with politicians and media superstars proclaiming far and wide that its only hope lies in the vote – when its real power lies not in the polling booth but in linking up across workplaces, in general assemblies open to all workers, in uniting on the street around class demands. It is also faced with the real danger of being drawn into violent conflicts between armed “militias”, as we have seen in some of the recent BLM protests. The danger of a “civil war” on a completely bourgeois terrain could grow even sharper in the wake of the election, especially if Trump refuses to recognise the result. This only emphasises the need for workers to refuse the siren calls of right and left, to reject the false choices of the democratic supermarket and come together around their own class interests. **Amos, 26.9.20**

Since this article was written the US elections face an added factor of instability: Trump’s infection by Covid 19.

workers of the world, unite!

International Communist Current in Britain

Frontorganisation

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world revolution

Supplement on ecology

The future of the planet cannot be left in the hands of the capitalist class

Capitalist civilization – the world system based on the exploitation of the vast majority of the world population by a small minority – has reached a stage where it is no longer able to maintain itself. It is a system of exploitation and oppression that has led to the destruction of the environment, the depletion of natural resources, and the suffering of billions of people. The capitalist class, in its relentless pursuit of profit, has ignored the needs of the working class and the rest of humanity. It has created a world of poverty, inequality, and environmental disaster. The future of the planet is in the hands of the working class, and it is up to them to decide whether they will continue to live in a world of exploitation or whether they will fight for a world of freedom and justice.

Area of the Amazon destroyed by fire

## International Review 164

Reports and resolutions from the 23rd ICC Congress

The responsibilities of revolutionaries in the current period: The different facets of fraction-like work

Resolution on the international situation: Imperialist conflicts, life of the bourgeoisie, economic crisis

Report on the impact of decomposition on the political life of the bourgeoisie

Report on decomposition, (from the 22nd ICC Congress, 2017)

Resolution on the balance of forces between the classes

Report on the class struggle: Formation, loss and re-conquest of proletarian class identity

Report on the question of the historic course

workers of the world, unite!

International Communist Current

Manifesto on the October revolution, Russia 1917

The world revolution is humanity’s only future



Congress of Soviets, Petrograd 1917

Is the class war over?

Capitalism has outlived itself

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## Contact the ICC

**Write to the following addresses without mentioning the name:**  
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**WORLD REVOLUTION** BM Box 869, London WC1N 3XX, GREAT BRITAIN

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Unlike the bourgeois press, revolutionary publications such as *World Revolution* have no advertising revenue, no chains of news agents and no millionaire backers. We rely on the support of our sympathisers, and those who, while they might not agree with all aspects of our politics, see the importance of the intervention of a communist press.



# Population lockdown: the bourgeois state shows its brutality

Faced with the growing health catastrophe, the bourgeoisie in many countries had no alternative than to lock-down nearly four billion people, more than half of the world’s population. If this was made necessary by the incapacity of the capitalist states and their health systems to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus in any other way, the main and real concern for the bourgeoisie was to protect its economy as much as possible and to keep the fall in profits to a minimum. For this reason, the ruling class had given serious consideration to letting the virus spread through the entire population, with a plan to shield and protect the most vulnerable groups, believing that the rest of the population could emerge with limited fatalities. But there was a great risk that the spread of the virus could get out of control and that the entire economy would be plunged into a downturn. The large majority of countries therefore chose the ‘tactic’ of lock-down, that is to say that since no other health response was available, they chose to return to the practices of the Middle Ages, isolating, marginalising, and confining to close quarters the ‘virus victims’, but this time on a global scale.

The compulsory lock-down of large parts of the world’s population, most of which lives in insecure, cramped and unsanitary conditions, in dangerous overcrowded megacities of several million people, has only further exacerbated their very difficult living conditions.

It is the wage-earning, exploited class that has been, and therefore remains, the hardest hit by the consequences of lock-down. In underdeveloped areas such as Africa, Latin America and Asia, the living conditions of tens of millions of workers were already unbearable and the lock-down has only made things worse.

The general isolation, the limitations on social interaction, the overcrowded homes and the restrictions on movement and travel have caused serious damage to the health of the population, in particular, affecting its mental health.

In these conditions, the trauma of confinement among the exploited class is out of proportion with what the bourgeois class may have lived through in its spacious residences equipped with all the necessary material comforts. The confinement has therefore further highlighted the scandalous and appalling inequality of a society divided into social classes.

## Social and collective life increasingly at risk

Contrary to what the bourgeoisie wants us to believe, we are not all equal when facing life’s dramas, just as we are not all equal in the face of the consequences of the lock-down. In capitalist society, the proletarians always pay the most heavily and physically for the tragedies generated by this rotting system. Within the exploited class, the weakest or those who have become ‘useless’ and ‘unwanted’ in the eyes of capitalism are the first to suffer the consequences of its inhumanity and barbarism.

As Rosa Luxemburg wrote in 1912 in *The Night Shelter*: “Every year thousands of proletarian human beings sink from the normal living conditions of the working class into the night of misery. They fall silently, like sediment, into the depths of society. Worn out, useless elements, from which capital can no longer squeeze one more drop, human waste, swept away by an iron broom”. In addition to material poverty, rotting capitalism continues to develop the marginalisation and atomisation of individuals, with the destruction of family relations, the exclusion of the elderly and mental torment... it sows misfortune in the name of free enterprise, that is, with the obligation to work and be exploited to be able to live.

In its blind rage capitalism sacrifices the life and health of the exploited on the sacred altar of profit, destroying all human bonds within the working class and especially the emotional ties of solidarity. When this ruling class hypocritically talks about protecting the weakest and the oldest among us, or the least privileged children, it lies shamelessly. We are seeing the consequences of the policy of running down and dismantling services that provide a minimum of security to the working class, and this has to be covered up by massive ideological campaigns. They would have us believe that, during the pandemic the state will take care of the most vulnerable, when, in fact, the state itself is responsible for all the social, mental and health distress caused by the pandemic.

## Older people discarded from society

In care homes across the world, the human drama is unending. At first it was shrouded in silence by the bourgeois state, but it became news when the sordid unfolding reality could no longer be hidden. Already more than 10,000 deaths have been

recorded officially in the French homes. In Spain, where as many as 16,000 deaths were recorded last May, hundreds of corpses were found inside these establishments, lying on their beds and abandoned for days. Similar dramas took place in many other countries, reminding us of how, for capitalism, the ‘old’ are little more than superfluous mouths to feed, best removed from society as death awaits them.

This is not to ignore all those others who died alone in their own homes, abandoned to their fate. The lack of protection against the virus in care homes and proper support for the elderly, along with staff shortages, has produced a real carnage for which the bourgeoisie, in all its well-known cynicism and proven negligence, is solely responsible.

In these ‘end-of-life’ establishments, these millions of people (700,000 in France alone), extremely vulnerable and with no adequate protection, are an easy prey for the virus.

Thus, and even with restrictions applied to the rest of the population, it was necessary for the elderly to be confined, isolated and locked in their rooms. All contact with the outside with their family, relatives or still able-bodied friends living outside was forbidden. Just as in orphanages, prisons, refugee camps, migrant detention centres and other juvenile detention centres, retirement homes are hotspots for the spread of contamination, especially since these people are often already weak from age or illness.

But the unfolding human drama does not stop there. In addition to the consequences of the pandemic itself, these human beings who it is claimed are isolated ‘for their own good’ are thus condemned to a bleak despair, cut off from all connection with their loved ones, and diagnosed as victims of ‘old age depression’. What capitalist society inflicts on them can only make them feel a deep sense of abandonment and loneliness, totally losing interest in life and even in identity. It is certain that in addition to all those who die from the pandemic, there are also those who simply let themselves die from grief and loneliness.

This context sees families witness the brutality of this society, since attempts to bring comfort and support to their loved ones have been punished with fines, such as the person who dared to defy the prohibition by traveling nearly 300 kilometres to visit the bedside of his father at the end of his life, or the woman who came to say hello to her husband, residing in a care home, from the street next door to the care home!

As we can see, during this period of lock-down the state succeeded in enforcing the social lock-down quite insensitively, with little concern for the social ties vital to everyday life and especially for those who are the most disadvantaged.

Conversely, by claiming to serve ‘the needs of everyone’, by posing as the Good Samaritan concerned with protecting the health of the weakest, the state has exercised an odious policy of control and extensive coercion over society, going so far as banning, and then restricting, the presence of families at funeral ceremonies, with the police refusing people access to the cemeteries. Since death is a commodity in this society like any other, in times of pandemic it can be very profitable; a funeral company in France will charge as much as 250 euros to families to assemble for fifteen minutes in front of the coffin in the Halles de Rungis, an enormous wholesale food market near Paris.

## Students, the other victims of capitalist lock-down

Students are noted for the precariousness of their conditions. Many of these future proletarians survive on odd jobs, which just allow them to continue their studies. Living away from their families, they can experience acute loneliness, more than is understood, but most of all a profound insecurity, with no guarantees of what the future holds. The lock-down has only worsened these living conditions. For some years, suicides among students have been on the increase. In France, for example, a few months ago, in desperation a student tried to set himself on fire outside the Centre Régional des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires at a University in Lyon. The decrease in odd jobs, the general shut-down, the material and physical impossibility of visiting their families, have become a reality.

Distressed phone calls to psychological support centres have never been so numerous. And this will only increase as in several countries, including the most developed (United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, etc), faced with the inability of the authorities to protect the health of the students, the state has decided not to reopen a large number of universities at the beginning of the academic year and to replace lecture-room courses with online courses or video-conferencing. Students will now be obliged to remain isolated in small rooms all day long, behind their computers with no direct physical contact at all. This is another step

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## Political positions of the ICC

**World Revolution** is the section in Britain of the **International Communist Current** which defends the following political positions:

\* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

\* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

\* The statified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’ were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

\* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in

the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

\* All the nationalist ideologies - ‘national independence’, ‘the right of nations to self-determination’ etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

\* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. ‘Democracy’, a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

\* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called ‘workers’, ‘Socialist’ and ‘Communist’ parties (now ex-‘Communists’), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism’s political apparatus. All the tactics of ‘popular fronts’, ‘anti-fascist fronts’ and ‘united fronts’, which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.

\* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union

organisation, whether ‘official’ or ‘rank and file’, serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

\* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

\* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it’s not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

\* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers’ councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

\* The communist transformation of society by the workers’ councils does not mean ‘self-management’ or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

\* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active

factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to ‘organise the working class’ nor to ‘take power’ in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat’s combat.

## OUR ACTIVITY

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

## OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen’s Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1884-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the *German, Dutch and Italian Lefts*.