



1 May 2021: For socialist internationalism against the crises of capitalism

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The triple crisis of global recession, pandemic and environmental destruction is shaping the situation of the working class and all the oppressed. Millions died last year as a result of coronavirus infection. Millions more have lost their jobs and incomes. People in the countries of the global South, women, youth and the elderly, the nationally and racially oppressed, are hit particularly hard by the crisis; it is they who bear the brunt of super-exploitation, broken or absent health systems, private reproductive labour, environmental disasters, wars and occupation.

At the same time, many of us are being targeted by right-wing populism and fascism on the streets, by increasingly authoritarian and repressive regimes and dictatorships, by racist border closures and attacks by police and reactionary forces. Femicide, domestic violence, attacks on the right to self-determination of women and LGBTIAQ persons increased worldwide and reached even more frightening proportions.

However, the recession and crisis are not only affecting the great mass of super-exploited workers and the socially oppressed. It is also hitting with full force millions of the better-off workers in large corporations and the public sector. Entire industries are facing restructuring and mass layoffs on a historic scale to increase profits, capture markets and win in global competition.

The recession of 2020 will not be replaced by a long-lasting recovery. Rather, the growth rates of the global economy will turn out to be a flash in the pan, based on multi-billion dollar stimulus packages. Economic imbalances will continue to worsen, the countries of the global South in particular will continue to find themselves in the stranglehold of pandemic and crisis. While the population in the imperialist states can at least hope for vaccinations against Corona, billions of people in poor countries have to manage without vaccines or social security.

The other major crisis, the environmental catastrophe, which is much more threatening to humanity in the long term, also continues to advance, despite video climate summits and announcements of a "Green New Deal". Increasing global competition does not allow for an internationally coordinated environmental policy, much publicised investments such as in electric vehicles will not solve the problem, but only change its form, in some cases even intensify it.

The signs are that the world economy and global politics are clearly heading in the direction of intensified competition. The struggle to redivide the world between the US and China and the other, weaker powers and blocs such as the German-led EU, Japan or Russia is intensifying. Under the new US President, Joe Biden, this struggle is merely taking on a "new" form. The populist and unilateralist adventurer Trump is now to be followed by the revival of the transatlantic alliance of "democracies" under US leadership. This will not avert the danger of war, but rather threaten an intensified military race between the old and new great powers. The general rearmament and the wars in Syria, Ukraine or the Caucasus could turn out to be preludes to the next world conflagration in just a few years.

The ruling class has no solution

The strategies of the ruling classes prove to be sham solutions at our expense and are incapable of providing an answer to the big questions of our time. The ruling classes are responding to the global crisis of capitalism with different, but

ultimately national, forms of crisis management.

The new, right-wing movements and populist forces are responding in their own way. Racism, chauvinism and nationalism are irreplaceable means for them to harness petty-bourgeois strata, but also backward workers, to the cart of a faction of the ruling class in the name of the "nation", or of a pseudo-radical struggle of the "people" against the "elite". They deliberately and consciously stir up national, religious, racist and sexist resentments, promote backwardness and irrationalism and form them into a movement of social despair with aggressive rollback at all levels. Where they gain government office, they use it to fuel attacks on democratic and social gains, democratic movements, the oppressed and the working class on the one hand, and to divide the class and the oppressed themselves on the other.

The pretended democrats from the bourgeois camp, the liberals, moderate conservatives or Greens are also playing the national card. While one wing of capital once again calls for neo-liberal attacks and cuts, the other is betting on increased state intervention. But the Green New Deal and the Keynesian promises of reform are also inextricably linked to an economic policy aimed at market domination by "their own" corporations and securing world domination in the name of "democracy".

Thus, nationalism turns out to be the inevitable consequence of imperialist competition, of the struggle for the redivision of the world. For the working class, this means that it must fight both political camps, the old and the new imperialisms, everywhere it must recognise its "own" ruling class as the main enemy.

The global crises; economic, pandemic and environmental, can only be solved internationally. But this is precisely what capitalism, by its very nature, is proving incapable of doing. As important as it is to take up the struggle for a solidarity lockdown and against austerity programmes, factory closures, environmental destruction and attacks on democratic rights, locally or nationally, this can only be the beginning. The causes of the pandemic, climate change and the global economic crisis cannot be overcome or eliminated in one factory, or even one country. The solution can only be an international one.

Resistance and class struggle

Globally, the working class is on the defensive and this, together with the advance of reactionary forces, feeds the idea among many workers and leftists that we can only choose between two bourgeois camps, that of pseudo-radical, populist reaction or that of the "democratic" centre. For many, an independent class politics seems impracticable, at best, an abstract goal for an indeterminate future. First, they think, we have to fight the evils of right-wing populism and Bonapartism, in the shape of Trump, Bolsonaro, Modi, Orban, Le Pen, Putin or the Beijing regime, in alliance with the democratic wing of the bourgeoisie. An anti-neoliberal reform policy or a more left-wing version of the Green New Deal is, for them, the best "realistic" goal. In this scenario, a shift in the balance of power would only be possible in alliance with one wing or another of the ruling class, be it with the liberal bourgeoisie or with the supposedly "more social" and "anti-imperialist" great powers like China and Russia.

All these strategies lead to a dead end. They subordinate the interests of the working class and the oppressed masses to the interests of one or another wing of the bourgeoisie. A particularly pathetic role is played by the big apparatuses of the workers' movement, the bureaucratised, top-down controlling trade unions, the reformist, bourgeois workers' parties as well as left-populist regimes and movements in the countries of the global South.

Ultimately, the politics of the trade union bureaucracies and social democracy, but ultimately also of the Left parties, amount to a politics of national unity with capital, coalition governments and social partnership in the workplaces. Under bureaucratic control, these organisations which, despite membership losses, continue to comprise millions upon millions of wage-earners, cannot realise their potential. On the contrary, the bureaucratic leaderships act as an obstacle, a brake, often even a direct opponent of any mass mobilisation. They are not only pursuing a mistaken policy, they are also spreading false consciousness in the class.

A sub-set of this reliance on the liberal imperialist powers and parties is the widespread attempt to revive a radical

version of social democracy, either by founding new parties on a radical Keynesian programme combining social movements with electoralism, or by taking over bourgeois liberal or old social democratic parties. In fact, we have seen the former fail in the case of Syriza and Podemos and the latter in the form of Corbynism in the British Labour Party. Former Stalinist 'Left parties' have long been experimenting with the same method. Today, we see a hybrid of the two in the case of the Democratic Socialists of America and its so-called 'dirty break' with the party of Joe Biden and Hilary Clinton. Ideologists of this neo-reformism try to co-opt a de-natured Marxism with the aid of a revived Luxemburgism, Gramscianism or Kautskyianism. 'Trotskyists' who adapt to this are simply treading the path of the original Revisionism and Eurocommunism, and are part of the problem of ideological confusion, not its solution.

Mobilisations

Despite these powerful obstacles, despite the pandemic and the crisis, an impressive resistance was also stirred up last year all over the world. The revolution in Myanmar, the strike movement of Indian workers and peasants are impressive highlights of democratic and social struggles. They pose, once again, the question of how the struggle for basic democratic and social demands can be linked to the struggle for socialist revolution. In short, they show the need for a programme of permanent revolution.

In Belarus, Lebanon, Nigeria and many other countries, mass movements mobilised against reactionary regimes and social misery, creating pre-revolutionary situations and crises. The explosive situation in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and large parts of Asia, means that more mass struggles are likely in the coming period and may escalate into revolutionary situations. As in the Arab revolutions after 2011, the question will then become how these movements can achieve revolutionary victory.

In the imperialist countries, first and foremost in the USA, huge mass movements, above all Black Lives Matter, mobilised millions of people and inspired the racially oppressed youth all over the world. Similar examples of spontaneous internationalism are also shown by the women's strike movement and important parts of the environmental movement, both of which mobilised millions worldwide, even during the pandemic. On the level of trade union and workplace struggles, we saw the beginnings of transnational, coordinated actions in individual corporations, such as Amazon.

But, despite a historic crisis and the threat of deep cuts, the core layers of the working class, especially in the imperialist countries, often remained on the margins of these movements and mobilisations. The workplace struggles against closures and mass layoffs were numerous but remained isolated from each other and under the control of the trade union bureaucracy and workplace officials.

This stalling policy of the reformist apparatuses and parties explains why the working class could not take a leading role in most movements. As a result, the leadership of resistance movements fell almost involuntarily to politically petty-bourgeois forces and their ideologies. The dominance of such ideologies; identity politics, intersectionalism, postcolonialism, feminism, left populism, in the movements of recent years is itself a result of the prevailing bourgeois politics and the associated bourgeois consciousness in the working class. The fact that many activists see an alternative in radical petty-bourgeois theories and programmes is the inevitable punishment for the social-partnership and social-chauvinist politics of the trade-union bureaucracies and reformist parties. This is made worse by the acquiescence in this sovereignty by many forces that believe themselves to be to the left of them.

Revolutionaries can only win activists of the petty-bourgeois-led movements to a revolutionary workers' politics if they combine support for their struggles with a patient critique of petty-bourgeois programmes and theories. They must also be seen to wage a relentless struggle against the bureaucratic and reformist leaderships in the working class itself. In concrete terms, this means that they have to fight for the class-struggle renewal of the trade unions and build democratic grassroots movements against the bureaucracy. Denunciation alone will not break bureaucratic supremacy, they have to make demands on these same leaderships without concealing their criticism. They must fight for all workers' organisations to break with the bourgeoisie. In countries where the labour movement is politically and organisationally tied to bourgeois parties, they must call for the building of an independent mass party of the working

class. In the USA, for example, the DSA should fight for a consistent break from the Democratic Party. In other countries, like Germany, this means working for the creation of a new revolutionary workers' party.

In all cases, revolutionaries must propose a united front of all parties, organisations and movements of the working class as well as the oppressed on a programme of action against crisis, pandemic, environmental destruction, racism and sexism. Such a programme must include, for example, demands against threatened dismissals, against unemployment, rent increases and for free access to a health system for all, for a solidarity lockdown. This also means challenging private ownership of the means of production, for example, by demanding the expropriation of the pharmaceutical industry and a global plan for the production and free distribution of vaccines for all. It is about the expropriation without compensation of all private corporations in the health sector under workers' control; the expropriation of all corporations threatening mass layoffs and cutbacks.

These, and all other major social struggles, can only be won if they are based on mass mobilisations of the working class. Therefore, all their organisations must be called upon to participate in the common struggle, thus setting the great mass organisations in motion and at the same time exposing their leaderships to the test of practice.

Such a struggle requires democratic structures: it must be based on assemblies in the workplaces and neighbourhoods, on elected and recallable action committees and caucuses. Finally, a mass movement must also build self-defence organs that can protect it from the attacks of strike breakers, right-wing gangs or the police. In order to link the resistance on a continental and global level, an international movement is needed, a revival of the social forums, which, however, should not only be organs for discussion but also decision-making coordinators of the common struggle.

But this alone will not be enough, because what is needed is a political response to the leadership crisis of the working class itself: new revolutionary parties and a new, Fifth International based on a programme of transitional demands for socialist revolution; a world party representing a truly international, global response to the triple crisis of humanity.

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