

Marxist Leninist Theses: The aftermath of the Corona virus (COVID-19) Health care crisis and short term demands

How will we know the pandemic is scientifically 'over'? What if authoritarian governments extend it?

Hari Kumar 29 March, 2020.

Introduction:

No doubt all progressives and leftists agree that the current time is a very swift changing one, and one that is fraught with confusions. On the 17 March, 2020 we put some views on the medical and immediate economic crisis of the COVID 19 pandemic.¹ Since then, a lot more left articles have been published. These collectively give us a good picture of the crisis from the left viewpoint. Taken together they make some common points.

These collectively emphasise:

How the pandemic has hit workers and the most vulnerable (unemployed, those in debt, immigrants, refugees etc.) the most;

How the chronic under-funding of health care systems has been exposed amid rocketing health care needs;

How health care workers are not protected – rather they are put at dangerous risk by an under-financed and ill-prepared health care system;

That the capitalist states have created an ever more inhumane and ruthless profit machine that under the guise of 'neo-liberalisms' has disemboweled any support systems for the working classes, and has undermined the infra-structures of states in a manner endangering the whole working class;

That the capitalist class will bail its own class out with state monies, but much less of this will filter down to the working class and rising numbers of unemployed.

The present theses concern the following questions:

When will we know the health crisis is 'over' or at least diminished to allow relaxation of 'social distancing'?

What demands should the working class make in the short term?

What hampers the working class in its long term goals?

1. The trade-off of a social isolation policy in conditions of a pandemic

Most workers in at least the Western bourgeois democratic states seem to have largely accepted the following trade-off, when considering policies of quarantine-social isolation:

On the one hand, reducing social contacts with reduced large group assembly outside of family, will lower the burden on health care service by lowering the numbers infected, and thereby the acute load on the health service; and slow the death rate;

On the other hand, at the same time it suppresses individual freedoms; and more importantly the working class rights of free association and protest, and rights of organization of meaningful protests. It also reduces social communication for a human species who is by nature - social. This can lead to profound psychological disturbance if prolonged.

Most scientists and informed observers interpret the current short-term situation as being marked by:

¹ Hari Kumar, 'How Should Marxists View the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2019- 2020?' at <http://ml-today.com/2020/03/17/how-should-marxists-view-the-covid-19-pandemic-of-2019-2020/>

an apparently 'new' virus (at least to humans who have no prior immunity to it) with very high transmissibility-contagiousness;
 an absence of imminent vaccines or imminent therapy;
 which is hitting an already creaking and under-financed, or privatised health care system in most countries of the capitalist world.

In that situation, most people seem to have agreed that a period of 'shut-down' is essential, and will lower the death rate for the working class - including health care workers such as nurses and doctors.

We will return to this later, but *none of this is contrary* to the position that ultimately - the causes of this pandemic are directly traceable - to the greed of capital and its un-remitting pursuit of profit. It is the capitalist class who is responsible.

The above statements characterising the current situation, only deal with the immediate consequences of a disease that ravages the working class. Although as we said – it also ravages the rich – as **Engels** points out:

“Capitalist rule cannot allow itself the pleasure of creating epidemic diseases among the working class with impunity; the consequences fall back on it and the angel of death rages in its ranks as ruthlessly as in the ranks of the workers“. ²

2. Varying positions adopted on the left

However our characterisation is by far from a uniform consensus on the left. We addressed previously some differing opinion on the Marxist front, on the 17 March 2020. ³ To reiterate, there are Leftist views that minimize the effects of the corona COVID-19 virus. We believe these are in reality ultra-left and misleading.

Unfortunately some elements of the Marxist-Leninist organisations have also taken such positions. Parts of the Marxist-Leninist (ML) left have expressed doubts, some initially falsely equated COVID 19 with 'flu'. This attempt to minimise the health care risks, was in *Lalkar* (UK) for the CPGB (ML); on 8 March 2020:

"There is, therefore, really no cause for panic. Professor Michel Chossudovsky has crunched the numbers: “The world population is of the order of 7.8 billion. “The population of China is of the order of 1.4 billion.

“The world population minus China is of the order of 6.4 billion.

“4,691 confirmed cases and 67 reported deaths (outside China) out of a population of 6.4 billion does not constitute a pandemic. $4,691/6,400,000,000 = 0.00000073 = 0.000073$ percent.

“64 cases in the US, which has a population of approximately 330 million is not a pandemic. (Feb 28 data): $64/330,000,000 = 0.00000019 = 0.000019$ percent.” ([Covid-19 coronavirus: a fake pandemic? Who's behind it? Global economic, social and geopolitical destabilisation](#), Global Research, 1 March 2020). However, as with other types of flu, some people will be more seriously affected and will require medical intervention, even hospitalisation. These are likely to be fewer in number than those requiring medical intervention as a result of having caught the ordinary seasonal flu – but

² Frederick Engels, 'The Housing Question – Part Two How the Bourgeoisie Solves the Housing Question'; 1872; <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/ch02.htm>

³ Hari Kumar, 'How Should Marxists View the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2019- 2020?' at <http://ml-today.com/2020/03/17/how-should-marxists-view-the-covid-19-pandemic-of-2019-2020/>

they will of course put pressure on hospitals whose budgets have been slashed to the bone, as is the case with the NHS hospitals in Britain." ⁴

Interestingly, later Lalkar sensed a propaganda moment for the state of China. Correspondingly on March 20, Lalkar changed its tune to now extolling China's 'war' against COVID 19 – which was 'a gift to the world'. ⁵

Meanwhile in sharp contrast, other ML parties have adopted a measured response respectful of the health risks. ^{6 7} But the CP Canada (ML) also gave appropriate warnings that the working class and left needed to prepare itself for the ruling class attacks. ^{8 9} We generally agree with these positions.

Regarding Marxist-Leninists supporting Hoxha, the Communist Party Ecuador (ML) has also taken the COVID-19 crisis as a real emergency. The CPE (ML) made its position clear that there was a 'crisis' : (At <https://pcmlle.org/EM/spip.php?article10431> - accessed March 25th 2020). It presented the crisis as a part of an international imperialist capitalist phenomenon that strangles Ecuador. It stated:

“It's not the coronavirus it's capitalism

The effects of this crisis finds Ecuador a puppet at the mercy of the winds and the government with no plan to deal with the situation. The economic growth model imposed on Ecuador by the bourgeoisie and imperialism, that prioritizes primary-export production for international markets - is once again questioned in the wake of the decline in oil prices and the decisions taken by several countries to deal with the current situation. This model boosts the potential for exporters to accumulate large profits, belittling domestic trade, which now has consequences by conflating several economic realities that reveal the model's shortcomings and leave the country in a critical position, deepened by fiscal management that favors accumulation, over the solution of social needs. All Ecuadorian exportable products, starting with oil, passing through wood and ending up in the banana has been suffering sales reductions since February to date, as is the case for tourism. Oil, the main source of tax revenue, was budgeted for this year at \$51.30 a barrel, but is barely being sold at \$28. The downward trend is maintained by demand reduction and OPEC's failure to include Russia in its proposal to reduce

⁴ Lalkar Writers, 'The anti-China coronavirus panic - What is really behind the media hysteria over Covid-19? And what can the virus tell us about the state of our NHS?' 8 March 2020, at: <https://thecommunists.org/2020/03/08/news/anti-china-coronavirus-panic-covid-19/>

⁵ Professor Tingbo Liang; 'Covid-19 treatment handbook published compiling frontline experience - China's gift to the world is hard-won knowledge: 'The real remedy for epidemics is not isolation, but cooperation.' <https://thecommunists.org/2020/03/20/news/covid-19-treatment-handbook-published-compiling-frontline-experience/>

⁶ CP Canada (ML), 'For Your Information About the COVID-19 Pandemic and Required Measures'; <https://cpcml.ca/covid-19-pandemic-info/>

⁷ 'What can We expect?' CPC (ML) <https://cpcml.ca/Tmlw2020/Articles/W500094.HTM>

⁸ Pierre Chénier Problems with the Employment Insurance Measures', CPC(ML), <https://cpcml.ca/Tmlw2020/W50009.HTM#6>

⁹ CP Canada (ML), "Beware of the Fend-for-Yourself Aspect of Federal Economic Response to COVID-19"; & 'Our Security Lies in the Fight to Defend the Rights of All'; March 21, 2020, 'TML Weekly' No. 9; <https://cpcml.ca/Tmlw2020/W50009.HTM#1>

production in order to maintain prices. In that way, the state is harmed, so it will not receive what it expected from taxes or oil sales, nor will the recently approved economic measures yield all the expected results. The positive thing, though, is that the fuels it imports will also come cheaper and the subsidies will not be as expensive. However, the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie have already come out to demand this week, the government urgently decided to phase out fuel subsidies, arguing that the situation is unsustainable for the government, because of the above and, moreover, because the IMF does not plan to make the next disbursement to Ecuador. Alternatives to tackling the problem should include drastically reducing imports of domestically feasible products and strengthening the domestic market. Increase the foreign-exchange tax, as well as the income tax temporarily on companies with profits exceeding \$500,000, also reduce VAT to 10%. In addition, reducing tax revenues by eliminating military and police expenditures for repression and other superfluous expenditures such as official propaganda.”¹⁰

We agree with the CPE(ML) that the policy of “*the bourgeoisie and imperialism, that prioritizes primary-export production for international markets*” – place countries like Ecuador in a peril.

Shortly after, was a pan-European statement of parties affiliated to ICMLPO, between the 25-26th March 2020. This was posted at ‘Red Phoenix’ on the 26th March; and is also posted in Spanish at the ‘El Marcha’ site of PCE(ML). The affiliated parties are - *Communist Platform, Italy Party of Labor (EMEP), Turkey; Communist Platform (Marxist-Leninist), Norway; Movement for the Reorganization of the Communist Party of Greece 1918-1955 (Anasintaxi); Organization for the Construction of the Communist Workers’ Party of Germany; Arbeit Zukunft (Labor Future); Workers’ Communist Party, Denmark; Communist Party of the Workers of France*. This calls for – ‘a repeal of the emergency’, presumably as of now:

“It is time to demand the repeal of the state of emergency laws. To demand not only the soldiers out of the streets, but all soldiers engaged in imperialist wars to be brought home and given useful civilian work to stop the pandemic.”

We can only interpret this to mean as of now – immediately.

Yet the same statement also points out that ‘*the epidemic is a tremendous threat*’:

*“The epidemic is a tremendous threat to the people worldwide, especially where the health care system is weak, because of the plundering of wealth by the imperialist states and monopolies, supported by anti-people and corrupt governments. The imperialist cannot wash this responsibility from their hands. It is time for comprehensive sanitation.”*¹¹

It is quite correct as the statement says, that the “*imperialist cannot wash [their] responsibility from their hands*”. But is it correct to call for the repeal of the emergency at this time? Does this call for an arbitrary timing (‘now’) have any scientific basis?

At what risk does this place the working class?

Should there be further considerations?

¹⁰ Machine translation from web-translator.

¹¹ Statement of the European Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations of the ICMLPO: “We are not only fighting a pandemic – but for a new and better future.” <https://theredphoenixpl.org/2020/03/26/statement-of-the-european-marxist-leninist-parties-and-organizations-of-the-icmlpo-we-are-not-only-fighting-a-pandemic-but-for-a-new-and-better-future/?fbclid=IwAR0b8luCey0ygyecYVHpVWs-DqEeHUjBTIW6TnOEcAgZP-ONx49godcukc>

3. How long is enough?

Let us for the moment accept, as we state above, that there are good reasons scientifically for us to accept a shut-down. In that case, for how long is this policy correct for society to adhere to? Extending policies of quarantining-social distancing- social isolation beyond the point of medical justification, will tempt some dictators and authoritarian governments, even some bourgeois democratic rulers. Inevitably in some countries, the ruling class will attempt to extend a period of suppressing worker rights.

Therefore a reasonable question is 'How long is enough?' That is to safely lift shutdowns.

Data from China, which was the first country to go through the epidemic, suggests that a period slightly longer to 2 months – might be needed at minimum. This period was needed, in China, to lower the new infection rate adequately - to prevent new outbreaks. But admittedly this was enforced in a ruthless 'lock-down', by a dictatorial Chinese state. ¹

However the situation was entirely different, for example, in the USA or the UK. There the ruling class's self-serving refusal to acknowledge the virus became a real threat to workers, and resulted in real and life-threatening delays. [*We will not here be distracted into discussing the idiocies of Johnson's advocacy of promoting 'herd immunity'; nor of Trump's dismissal of 'the Chinese virus'*]. In the UK and the USA, these fatal delays led to a huge unknown volume of either minimally symptomatic or asymptomatic carriers, who infected a further large unknown number. In that situation, the period of medically recommended seems likely to be longer.

In such countries, perhaps it may be up to 4 months, as the pool of infected people with a latent ability to transmit is very large. Rather than guessing, are there better ways of estimating an appropriate length of time? One that balances the trade-off to both protect working class lives, while simultaneously minimising the duration of social isolation.
















3. Are there scientific ways society could estimate when to lift social isolation?

Some ways are emerging, despite all the uncertainty. Below is a table made up by the German paper, "*Sueddeutsche Zeitung*", using data from Johns Hopkins University in the USA, re-computed three times a day.¹² We show the table from the 27 March 2020 at 1730 pm. The columns in English from left to right are: 'the country'; 'confirmed cases', 'the number of deaths'; 'the rate in days of doubling of cases'. It can be seen that the doubling rate varies a lot. Where it is a small time period (e.g. 2.9 days for the USA) this is very worrying and indicates the period of social-isolation is warranted medically. In contrast the situation in China, nowadays shows the epidemic has largely passed – doubling at 579.4 days.

¹² <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/wissen/coronavirus-zahlen-aktuell-1.4844448>

Die weltweite Corona-Situation

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Staat	Bestätigte Fälle	Todesfälle	Verdopplung
 Vereinigte Staaten	86.012	1.301	2,9 Tage
 China	81.897	3.296	579,4 Tage
 Italien	80.589	8.215	8,5 Tage
 Spanien	64.059	4.934	4,2 Tage
 Deutschland	46.619	286	5,1 Tage
 Iran	32.332	2.378	9,8 Tage
 Frankreich	29.591	1.698	4,8 Tage
 Großbritannien	14.735	761	4,1 Tage
 Schweiz	12.311	207	5,9 Tage
 Südkorea	9.332	139	71,0 Tage
 Niederlande	8.641	547	4,8 Tage
 Österreich	7.500	58	3,9 Tage
 Belgien	7.284	289	4,4 Tage
 Portugal	4.268	76	3,4 Tage
 Kanada	4.046	40	3,0 Tage

But this is still gross complete full population data. Can this be more fine-tuned, perhaps even individualised? It is likely the more technologically adept countries can, and will be able to. For example in Germany.

Perhaps, the best epidemiological data is emerging at the moment, from scientists at the Robert Koch institute in Berlin. The virologist, Drosten and his team were very quick to develop a diagnostic test. It was then offered to the WHO. Germany was widely testing before most other Western countries. By now it is well known that that test was made available to the USA by the WHO early on. That offer was rejected by the chauvinistic Trump administration and its politically tethered CDC. Drosten's team has gone on to perfect the blood testing of people after known infections, to follow their antibody responses. Such serological testing, enables checks on an individuals immunity. This will soon be possible on a mass scale in Germany.

In an interview now on-line in English, Drosten explains his belief that only active diagnostic and serological testing, - can scientifically answer the question of "when is enough enough?"

But Drosten sensibly (in my view) suggests also, a shift in focus from an across-the-board restriction, to a focus on the most high-risk population.¹³ It is worth citing a short excerpt, which discusses two situations: the elderly, and testing people prior to return to work safely. But to start with, Drosten agrees that "a year of a state of emergency" – is pretty 'un-imaginable':

Drosten: We perhaps have to assume that from a societal perspective, we'll have to go through a year in a state of emergency. But we probably won't continue pursuing all measures precisely as we have now introduced them. We will be able to, we will have to, adjust them. Some things will be phased out. But during the initial phase between now and the week after Easter, we really have to take rigorous action and keep a close eye on the development of the number of cases.

¹³ <https://www.zeit.de/wissen/gesundheit/2020-03/christian-drosten-coronavirus-pandemic-germany-virologist-charite/seite-3>

ZEIT ONLINE: A year of a state of emergency? What will our lives look like during this period?

Drosten: Nobody knows. I can't imagine it yet either. ... "

Therefore he proposes a different approach, moving away from a blanket social isolation policy for the whole population, to a testing strategy to identify high risk individuals:

For those who are particularly at risk.

ZEIT ONLINE: What kinds of things do you have in mind?

Drosten: Certain arrangements could be made specifically for such risk groups, for example by rigorously testing the elderly and those at risk early on and giving them priority when it comes to hospital admissions. And those at higher risk will have to continue to work from home, for an extended period. It could be possible to find ways to isolate elderly people at home. There could be shuttle services for them, and groceries would have to be delivered to them. Volunteers could help, perhaps even the German military. And in day-to-day life, children would have to be kept away from those at risk as strictly as possible.

ZEIT ONLINE: And then the schools could be opened again?

Drosten: Perhaps measures could be imposed, like half the school can use only these hallways and the other half the other hallways. There would no longer be a long recess, and perhaps no short ones either. Common rooms would no longer be used and would be locked. With such measures, you can reduce effective group sizes in the schools. That would require some planning, but we have time between now and the week after Easter. The most important thing is that we need scientific data regarding the situation at schools.

ZEIT ONLINE: And what if grandparents want to see their grandchildren again?

Drosten: Perhaps it will be the case that grandchildren will first have to undergo a test when they want to visit grandma and grandpa to be sure that they don't infect them. Such details now need to be clarified. With the political decisions that have been made, social life has been put on hold. But hopefully adjustments can be made with the help of scientific findings and modelling that apply specifically to Germany.

ZEIT ONLINE: When will people be able to go back to work?

Drosten: In the medical world, consideration is already being given to the idea of testing people so they can go to work. Once antigen tests are available, that could be expanded to include other occupational groups. Plus, if we assume that during the current wave of infections, perhaps 10 to 15 million people will become infected in Germany by autumn, we will soon have a large number of people with antibodies. People who are immune. Then, there will be doctors and nurses who can work without masks, and in other occupational groups, there will also be people who say: "I've made it through." And their number will continually increase.

We caution against some elements of potential naivete in Drosten's thinking (*'Volunteers could help, perhaps even the German military.'*) Maybe this is too cynical on our parts. We note the 5 party ICMLPO statement calls for "*all soldiers engaged in imperialist wars to be brought home and given useful civilian work to stop the pandemic*".

In any case, even the most skeptical cannot ignore that Drosten has compassion. Nor should they reject that Drosten outlines a sensible strategy: to target the highest risk groups, after initial larger quarantining.

Hence, in summary - a period of between 2-4 months is pragmatically both realistic and acceptable scientifically. I think also from the point of view of working class rights. Use of sensible medical testing to prolong advised isolation for high risk-groups is likely sensible for society. Furthermore, the working class should use every means at its disposal to challenge and resist prolongation beyond a medical justification. That exact period will likely depend upon the specifics of each country, and whether infection rates are rising or falling.

The calculations in desperate situations of the masses – such as in India are very different we suspect. There risk of virus death competes directly with risk of starvation. This is touched on below under (5).

4. What progressives and Marxist-Leninists should do if the shut-down gets extended beyond reasonable medical justifications

One reassuring thing is that by and large, the medical and scientific teams are working at this in a transparent and caring manner. To reinforce this view, the scientific data is being widely

published in the peer-review medical press and lay press. While peer-review is far from perfect, it also far from being subject to censorship. Censorship of both the lay press and the medical press, seems to be an unlikely possibility in the very near future, at least in the standard Western type bourgeois democratic states.

But it is the potential misuse of the data by unscrupulous politicians – perhaps especially in countries with more obvious authoritarian structures and rule - that should be the focus of the working class movement. In several countries (including **India, Egypt,**¹⁴ **China, The Phillipines** etc) the intimidation and persecution of papers and reporters has been intense. Added to all this is the role of new, more intense methods of surveillance. These become inextricably linked to how much trust can be placed on such information remaining secure, or not misused. For instance in China even now:

“China is already normalizing some of its emergency measures to spy on its population. It has implemented an app-based system of health codes that assign different colour codes to citizens depending on how closely they have been in contact with corona-affected areas. Access to public transport and job facilities could be linked to this data. Public health can hence quickly serve as a pretext for ‘risk scoring’ citizens or even sabotaging political dissidents. Also in Western countries, a cluster of disaster capitalism is forming around the crisis. Private companies have already started developing apps that combine geolocation data with health scores to monitor public life.”¹⁵

Regardless of the type of government, whether a standard bourgeois democracy, or a more authoritarian government - the working class and its representatives need to be on guard. What should they do if they suspect the period of shut-down is extended beyond any medical justification?

One first step is to consult their own best progressive scientific and medical advisers to verify if there is an appropriate medical justification. These advisers range from national bodies such as the Physicians for a National Health Care Program (formed and led by Drs Woolhandler and Himmelstein) in the USA, the Socialist Health Association (UK) and similar organisations in other countries.

Secondly the class must raise a demand for public accountability and transparency on such policy discussions. Some transparency does exist currently in most European countries and in Canada.

Thirdly – failing all this, the traditional working class actions may need to be triggered. Namely widespread public actions of protest, mass disobedience, and mobilization. Admittedly this may prove difficult to organize, but enough of the class does have access to internet means of establishing connections and links.

Meanwhile, concrete demands to protect the under-privileged and the working class, even during the period that a shut-down is medically justifiable need to be addressed.

5. Current Scope of Demands for the Working Class and Toilers of the world

¹⁴ Guardian correspondent kicked out of Egypt for publishing data suggesting under reporting of cases - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/egypt-forces-guardian-journalist-leave-coronavirus-story-ruth-michaelson>

¹⁵ Tim Christaens, ‘Must Society be Defended from Agamben?’, *Critical Legal notes*, 26 March 2020; at: <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/03/26/must-society-be-defended-from-agamben/>

Depending on which exact capitalist society is discussed, there are differing degrees of financial support being thrown to the increasingly large swathe of unemployed and poverty-stricken workers and toilers of the world. These bits of support are at best simply *crumbs* from the 'High Capitalist Table', tossed from where the bankers and magnates sit. However workers need such crumbs now, but even more and a larger share.

Here we are forced to confront a painful recent past. There have been decades of a loss of working class resistance to bourgeois dictates of 'profit rules'. After years of neo-liberalism and so-called 'austerity' measures, not only have the standards of compensation and payment fallen, but the extent of working class resistance and social solidarity has become weaker. One notable example is in trade union membership and organisation. This is certainly the case for example, in the USA and in the UK. Following major concerted attacks (including USA President Ronald Reagan's 1981 attack on air-traffic controllers¹⁶; and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 1984 attack on the miners¹⁷), the ruling classes succeeded in placing significant constraints on the traditional trade unions.

The loss of the working class's long battle for trade union rights; its long battled social welfare systems; its long battle for class solidarity - was near forgotten. It all needs to be re-learned and re-enacted. It is true that the trade unions were largely stuck at only reformist measures. Yet they were essential to defend the class, and to form a class orientation of solidarity. Admittedly, translating the traditional models of trade unions into the e-based industries has proven challenging.

Even more alarming is the situation in those countries such as the former colonial and semi-colonial countries. There even such crumbs are inconceivable, where the problems faced are horrendous. For **India** for instance the draconian shut-down leaves the poverty stricken masses in a desperate situation. Says Shehnaz Khatun

"Shehnaz Khatun, a mother of three living in a cramped tenement in New Delhi, panicked after hearing Mr. Modi's decree on Tuesday night. "The police beat us if we try to step out," she said. "We dare not step out even to buy vegetables whose prices have skyrocketed."
"The future looks very dark," she added. "If coronavirus does not kill us, hunger will."¹⁸

In many ex-colonial countries, the stranglehold of the foreign imperial cartels remains intact. For instance in Ecuador, the main revenue stream for the state has been oil. But given the price war being fought over oil (See the prior discussion of this¹) – revenues are plummeting in **Ecuador**, which is a *puppet at the mercy of the winds*:

"Ecuador (is) a puppet at the mercy of the winds and the government with no plan to deal with the situation. The economic growth model imposed on Ecuador by the bourgeoisie and imperialism, that prioritizes primary-export production for international

¹⁶ 'August 05 – This Day in History', 'Ronald Reagan fires 11,359 air-traffic controllers'; <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/reagan-fires-11359-air-traffic-controllers>

¹⁷ Seumas Milne, 'Opinion: The Miners Strike 1984-1985: During the miners' strike, Thatcher's secret state was the real enemy within'; *Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/03/miners-strike-thatcher-real-enemy-within-extremism>

¹⁸ Jeffrey Gettleman & Kai Schultz, 'Modi Orders 3-Week Total Lockdown for All 1.3 Billion Indians,' *NYT*, March 24, 2020

markets - is once again questioned in the wake of the decline in oil prices and the decisions taken by several countries to deal with the current situation... All Ecuadorian exportable products, starting with oil, passing through wood and ending up in the banana has been suffering sales reductions since February to date, as is the case for tourism. Oil, the main source of tax revenue, was budgeted for this year at \$51.30 a barrel, but is barely being sold at \$28.”¹⁹

In such situations some drastic changes could assist the masses, including such as below:

“Alternatives to tackling the problem should include drastically reducing imports of domestically feasible products and strengthening the domestic market. Increase the foreign-exchange tax, as well as the income tax temporarily on companies with profits exceeding \$500,000, also reduce VAT to 10%. In addition, reducing tax revenues by eliminating military and police expenditures for repression and other superfluous expenditures such as official propaganda.”⁷

An additional fundamental demand that could be made jointly by workers and toilers in both the periphery (countries like Ecuador) and the central dominant imperialist capitalist states, is to cancel the international debts. The programme of demands for each individual country will obviously be different. Another example, is the Philippines:²⁰

“Mass testing for all citizens;
 Free hospitalization of victims, persons under investigation (PUI), and person under monitoring (PUM) for COVID-19;
 Mass disinfection in all communities;
 Food and water rationing for workers and the poor;
 Distribution of face masks, hygiene kits, vitamins, and contraception;
 Assistance to farmers, drivers, and other affected workers;
 Release of 4Ps for beneficiaries;
 Paid emergency leave to uninsured workers;
 Refund tuition to students due to class suspension;
 Price control of commodities;
 Electricity, water, and communications to be provided 24/7;
 Allowing vehicles and tricycles to provide transport to medical workers and people with medical needs;
 Suspension of rent, water, electricity, communications, and other fees;
 Disarming the large numbers of military and police forces deployed so as not to cause terror to the people; and a debt moratorium.”

Overall, in the short term, what should workers and toilers demand? Several demands – necessarily ‘reforms’ at this point, are important for the class to fight for. Several groups, in several countries, have already raised demands. We do not list them, but reference a few:

- Editorial, Health: Marx21 COVID-19 statement • 5 socialist solutions to a capitalist disaster’ March 26, 2020; at: <https://marx21us.org>

¹⁹ “It’s not the coronavirus it’s capitalism”; <https://pcmlc.org/EM/spip.php?article10431>
38/2000

²⁰ Reihana Mohideen and Tony Illtis, “Philippines: A weak but authoritarian state confronts Covid-19”, ‘Climate & Capitalism’, March 23, 2020, <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2020/03/23/philippines-a-weak-but-authoritarian-state-confronts-covid-19/>

- Joint statement on COVID-19 crisis from Indianapolis organizers March 17, 2020; <https://answerindiana.org/updates/indy-covid-19/>
- Six Demands from NHS staff to help us tackle Coronavirus https://www.change.org/p/boris-johnson-our-6-demands-aim-to-ensure-the-nhs-is-able-to-properly-respond-to-the-coronavirus-crisis?utm_source=grow_gb

Instead here, we will try to **summarise** them into the following categories:

- i) Ensure adequate living standards including by demands for living wages or appropriate government wage substitution, by rent freezes at minimum and more meaningfully withhold or cancellation of rent demands and cessation of evictions; ensuring of food safety programmes; no cost utilities (electricity, water, internet);
 - ii) Ensure access to medical care free of co-pays or fees, including for diagnostic testing; and universal paid sick leave, for everyone who gets sick;
 - iii) Ensure safety: hazard pay and safety equipment for health care workers, sanitation workers, and essential service workers interacting with the public (cashiers at super-markets etc);
 - iv) Ensure supervision and oversight of governmental monies being dispersed to the big capitalist firms;
 - v) Re-purpose existing factories (eg car factories to making of mechanical ventilators); or to provide space for emergency medical facilities as needed;
- Resist further invasion of personal liberties by electronic monitoring systems for isolation;
- vi) Protection of vulnerable groups including immigrants, refugees, prisoners especially those on minor charges – who should be released;
 - vii) Protection against abuse, including support for women’s shelters and charities in especial food banks;
 - viii) Ensure international acts of solidarity: Thus far these have been limited to some instances of a meaningful medical aid (China to Italy; Cuba to Italy; Germany to France, Italy); but this aid should be extended especially to the formerly colonial world, to include the erasure of debts;
 - ix) Develop new means of working class resistance: Increase the working class’ own interactions by cross-linking on social platforms with video conferencing and videoconference class; yet recognizing that many unemployed workers may not have net access for safe, net library hubs; develop a focus on developing new internet resources that are under worker control and relatively safer from state surveillance;
 - x) Demand an end to racist calls (no to such Trump-ite labels as 'Chinese Virus', no to Chinese accusations of "the virus was an American army attack");
 - xi) Make health services accountable and freely available to the people, and put them under public control in countries where this is not the case;

These are only immediate and short term goals. The working class and its representatives need to be aware of the best science to understand when we should challenge the shut-down. Already the class is moving, in different ways befitting the individual circumstances of each individual country.

For instance in the **USA** it can be seen here:

“In recent days, Amazon warehouse workers in Queens, New York, sanitation workers in Pittsburgh, and poultry plant workers at Perdue Farms in Georgia have all walked off the job, demanding greater protections from coronavirus, and leading to calls for a “general strike,” or mass strike action across the country. Meanwhile, the upcoming Instacart strike will mark the first time gig workers in the United States—who face the double bind

of working on the front lines of virus and lacking basic labor protections like healthcare and paid sick days—have walked off the job in response to coronavirus.”²¹

The forthcoming strike of delivery workers, was organised by the ‘Instacart Shoppers and Gig Workers Collective’:

“Instacart shoppers are planning a nationwide mass revolt over the grocery delivery app's response to the coronavirus pandemic. On Monday, workers say they will refuse to accept orders until Instacart provides hazard pay of an additional \$5 an order, free safety gear (hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and soap) to workers, and expands its paid sick leave to include workers with pre-existing conditions who have been advised by their doctors not to work at this time. Workers say the strike will last until Instacart agrees to these terms.”²²

The sanitation workers of Pittsburgh point out the hazards they face:

“In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, hundreds of sanitation workers held a wildcat strike Wednesday demanding more protection from the virus.... **Sheldon White:** “We want better equipment, protective gear. We have no mask. We want hazard pay. Hazard pay is very important. Why? Because we have high copayments for any type of bill. We risk our life₂₃ Every time we grab a garbage bag, there could be a needle or something in there.”

Meanwhile as **China** slowly returns towards a normal life, internal racism against the people of Hubei (in which province the city of Wuhan is located) trying to return to neighbouring provinces for work, has erupted showing the people’s frustrations:

“An article by the Communist Party mouthpiece *People’s Daily* acknowledged the problems in getting the country back on its feet. “In the past few days, all walks of life have called for governments to accept workers from Hubei,” it said. “However, it is undeniable that some places, intentionally or not, have set up obstacles for Hubei migrant workers to return to their posts and hold prejudices against them.”²⁴

This is from what is reported far from a rebellion directed at the Communist Party of China. This is still simmering below the surface, awaiting organisation. We pointed out this unrest,

²¹ Lauren Kaori Gurley, ‘Instacart’s Gig Workers Are Planning a Massive, Nationwide Strike’; Mar 27 2020, at: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/4agmvd/instacarts-gig-workers-are-planning-a-massive-nationwide-strike

²² Instacart Emergency Walk Off, Gig Workers Collective, Mar 27, at <https://medium.com/@GigWorkersCollective/instacart-emergency-walk-off-ebdf11b6995a>

²³ ‘Pittsburgh Sanitation Workers Hold Wildcat Strike, Demanding Safety Gear’; Democracy Now Report, March 26, 2020; https://www.democracynow.org/2020/3/26/headlines/pittsburgh_sanitation_workers_hold_wildcat_strike_demanding_safety_gear

²⁴ Sidney Leng, ‘Coronavirus: police, public clash as border reopens between Hubei and Jiangxi provinces’; South China Morning Post; 28 March 2020; at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3077393/coronavirus-police-public-clash-border-reopens-between-hubei-and>

manifested by the grieving for the death of Dr Li Wenliang and the public hostility shown to the Chinese vice premier Sun Chunlan.¹ But the new report of unrest at the border of Hubei indicates the desperation of elements of the masses in China.

In **India**, ten trades unions made demands of the Modi Government, but only in a letter. The organised trades unions of India are baulking from a street demonstration of their masses. Admittedly, this is a very difficult decision to make. The lives of their working poor, and those of the homeless and poor masses, can be argued to be at more risk from Modi's shut-down – than from calling on mass protests. The demands they have made are seen below:

“Central trade unions on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to announce a financial package of Rs 5-7 lakh crore for the worst-affected segments of the working population, saying their survival is in jeopardy due to coronavirus-forced lockdown in the country.

"We demand that the government immediately announce not less than Rs 5 to 7 lakh crore package both to meet urgent need of combating Covid-19 as well as for protection of means of survival for the working people who are worst affected by the unavoidable lockdown situation," 10 trade unions said in a joint letter to the Prime Minister. They stressed in the letter that saving the people's living and livelihood must be considered integral to the Covid-19 combat strategy.

The ten unions are INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF and UTUC.

They also demanded announcement of concessions and debt moratorium for the MSMEs, small retail traders, street vendors, self-employed, who are the worst affected by the 21-day lockdown imposed by the government in view of the rapid spread of the coronavirus outbreak.

The unions noted that daily wagers, casual labourers, migrant workers, agriculture workers, self employed as hawkers and vendors, rickshaw pullers, e-rickshaw /auto/taxi drivers are facing livelihood crisis. Others like truck drivers and helpers, coolies/porters/loaders unloaders, construction and beedi workers, domestic workers and waste pickers etc are losing their livelihood in the lockdown/curfew situation.

Their very human survival has been put in total jeopardy as they lost their only means of their income and sustenance due to lockdown situation, the letter said.

The trade unions also wrote that the door-to-door delivery of essentials like medicines, hygiene materials, vegetables/fruits and other food items must be allowed and facilitated.

They suggested that the government should immediately check the black marketing and hoarding of essential commodities. Workers need immediate income support/financial relief, free ration and free fuel to cook food. The supply of essential grains and necessities from public distribution system (PDS) should be made with immediate effect from the existing stocks and not to wait till April.”²⁵

In the interim we must continue to fight for the safety and living standards of the class. Intermediate goals must be to re-build a truly responsive health care structure for workers and a universal health care system, that is adequately funded. We should not allow the government spend our revenues to maintain the profits of the capitalist class.

²⁵ News 18 TV, 'Coronavirus Lockdown: Trade Unions Write to PM Modi, Seek Rs 5-7 Lakh Crore Relief Package, March 26, 2020, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/coronavirus-lockdown-trade-unions-write-to-pm-modi-seek-rs-5-7-lakh-crore-relief-package-2552443.html>

In a separate report we will analyse the economic packages that the various governments are giving. These are huge benefits to the capitalists whose profits are falling, but are only crumbs to the workers. As we have argued above, these are of some relief – but they are inadequate.

6. The longer haul – prevention means changing the economy from capitalist to socialist

Thus far we have focused only on short-term solutions. These are urgent and we do not minimize these. But longer term structural changes to current day capitalism – revolutionary change – is needed. There could be several illustrations of why this is so. However the current crisis of COVID-19, leads us to one very current – and vivid reason – why capitalism needs to be overthrown.

While humans have always faced infective risks from the environment, in recent decades this has gotten much worse. Zoonoses (infections derived originally from animals) appear to have increased dramatically. We discuss this before, but an increasing attention is placed on this aspect now. As we pointed out, scientists stated:

“We must realize that in our crowded world of 7.8 billion people, a combination of altered human behaviors, environmental changes, and inadequate global public health mechanisms now easily turn obscure animal viruses into existential human threats. We have created a global, human- dominated ecosystem that serves as a playground for the emergence and host-switching of animal viruses, especially genetically error-prone RNA viruses, whose high mutation rates have, for millions of years, provided opportunities to switch to new hosts in new ecosystems. It took the genome of the human species 8 million years to evolve by 1%. Many animal RNA viruses can evolve by more than 1% in a matter of days. It is not difficult to understand why we increasingly see the emergence of zoonotic viruses. ... We have reached this point because of continuing increases in the human population, crowding, human movement, environmental alteration, and ecosystemic complexity related to human activities and creations....”

Examples of zoonosis spread to humans includes:

“H5N1, H7N9 pandemic influenza viruses originally of wild waterfowl and chickens (‘bird-flu’); SARS, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS); Covid - 19 (bat viruses); HIV from monkey primates; arenaviruses (Argentine and Bolivian hemorrhagic fever) and agricultural practices; Nipah virus from bats in SE Asia to pigs.”²⁶

This partial list ignores Ebola and Jacob-Creuzfeldt disease – both related to either food insecurity in Africa, or intensive farming practice in the UK.

Is there scientific evidence for these assertions? We here only give one example. This is of the “novel” H5 and H7 strains of influenza – the so called *Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza* strains (HPAI) – these arise in two ways.

There are two patterns, the first is the conversion of a low pathogen into a highly pathogenic virus. This is seen in the older established areas of high intensity capitalist farming, such as in many bourgeois democratic states:

²⁶ David M. Morens, Peter Daszak, and Jeffery K. Taubenberger, ‘Escaping Pandora’s Box — Another Novel Coronavirus New England J Medicine; February 26, 2020; as cited in Hari Kumar Ibid.’¹

“From 1959 onwards, we identified a total of 39 independent H7 and H5 LPAI to HPAI conversion events. All but two of these events were reported in commercial poultry production systems, and a majority of these events took place in high-income countries.”²⁷

The second involves a different biology, whereby there is “the reassortment between different genetic segments of low and highly pathogenic viruses already in circulation”.

This is seen in the newer developing capitalist economies, adopting a rising degree of intensive farming:

“a total of 127 reassortments have been reported from 1983 to 2015, which predominantly took place in countries with poultry production systems transitioning from backyard to intensive production systems. Those systems are characterized by several co-circulating viruses, multiple host species, regular contact points in live bird markets, limited biosecurity within value chains, and frequent vaccination campaigns that impose selection pressures for emergence of novel reassortants.”²⁷

To put it in more plain English – **both** intensive care capitalist farming in the older capitalist states;

and, the farming in rapid transition to capitalist intensity farming in the newer more developing capitalist economies –
are **both** producing zoonoses.

And the **responsibility** for these phenomena undoubtedly lie at the feet of **Capital**:

“The real danger of each new outbreak is the failure –or better put—the expedient refusal to grasp that each new Covid-19 is no isolated incident. The increased occurrence of viruses is closely linked to food production and the profitability of multinational corporations. Anyone who aims to understand why viruses are becoming more dangerous must investigate the industrial model of agriculture and, more specifically, livestock production. At present, few governments, and few scientists, are prepared to do so. Quite the contrary.... When the new outbreaks spring up, governments, the media, and even most of the medical establishment are so focused on each separate emergency that they dismiss the structural causes that are driving multiple marginalized pathogens into sudden global celebrity, one after the other.”²⁸

It is true that China has become a major new source of intensively farmed poultry to the world. But this is in partnership with Western capitalist forms, as is made clear by the ‘Observer’:

²⁷ Madhur S. Dhingra, Jean Artois, Simon Dellicour, Philippe Lemey, Gwenaëlle Dauphin, Sophie Von Dobschuetz, Thomas P. Van Boeckel, David M. Castellán, Subhash Morzaria and Marius Gilbert; ‘Geographical and Historical Patterns in the Emergences of Novel Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5 and H7 Viruses in Poultry’; *Front. Vet. Sci.*, 05 June 2018

²⁸ Yaak Pabst talking with Rob Wallace; *Coronavirus: “Agribusiness Would Risk Millions Of Deaths”*; *International*; 11 March 2020; at: <https://www.marx21.de/coronavirus-agribusiness-would-risk-millions-of-deaths/>

“China is one of the world’s major exporters of poultry, but its poultry industry is not wholly Chinese-owned. After the recession of 2008, for example, New York-based investment bank Goldman Sachs diversified its holdings and moved into Chinese poultry farms. So if China has its share of responsibility for spillover events, it isn’t alone. That is why Rob Wallace insists on talking about relational geographies rather than absolute geographies, when it comes to identifying the causes of disease. Or as he puts it: “Follow the money.”²⁹

We have previously discussed how humans under capitalism have created environmental threats. To counteract these revolutionary changes are demanded.³⁰ The dramatic links between environmental disruption and international capitalism, require fundamental, revolutionary changes.

7. Urgent Need for Working Class parties

Ultimately, we need to rebuild all our fighting organisations. That includes not only stronger independent trades unions but strong Marxist-Leninist parties. These are not going to happen quickly, but we must urgently start. Currently while the class is throwing up major battles and manifestations, these are largely spontaneous. Thus far, Marxist-Leninists have been unable - as far as we are aware - of making the broad united fronts necessary to directly assist the class. We welcome any factual correction on this, if we are unaware of any movements. Even though there are party formations in several countries, these currently remain small and isolated. As it stands the class is left to the leadership of reformers.

²⁹ Laura Spinney, 'Is factory farming to blame for coronavirus?', *The Observer* 28 March 2020; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/28/is-factory-farming-to-blame-for-coronavirus>

³⁰ Hari Kumar, 'Situating Today's Climate Activists of the 'Fridays for Future' Movement,' <http://ml-today.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/climate-change.pdf>