

# 1919

A person wearing a red baseball cap and a blue and white plaid shirt is seen from behind, holding a long, dark wooden pole. They are standing on a gravelly surface, looking towards a line of riot police in the distance. The air is filled with a thick, white smoke or tear gas, creating a hazy atmosphere. The riot police are wearing helmets and carrying shields. The overall scene suggests a protest or a moment of civil unrest.

Issue Nº 2 — October 2021

# ABOUT US

1919 is a joint political journal between the two North American affiliates of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), Klasbatalo and Internationalist Workers' Group. We fight toward the historic task of the working class, communism. Communism is the organization of society directly focused on the fulfillment of need in which the antagonism between the individual and collective is abolished. It is a world which knows no classes, property, state, or bureaucracy. In short, communism is the abolition of political society. To achieve this task, we believe the working class must fight on its own terrain to defend against the bosses' attacks, and to push forth its own interest. We are for the formation of the world communist party. We do not believe that we alone will be this party. Rather, we see ourselves participating in the real work that is necessary for its formation.

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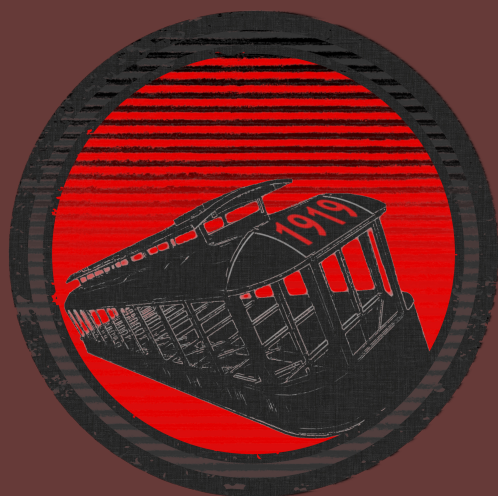
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# Issue N° 2 — October 2021

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# Editorial

Past modes of production were notable for their relative stability throughout the course of history. Entire centuries would pass with minimal change in the lives of peasants. Capitalism, on the other hand, has been tumultuous from the start. Stability is short-lived, and sooner or later a crisis erupts in its cyclical fashion. On a world scale, some of these crises have been worse than others. Sandwiched between two world wars, conflicts the likes of which humanity had never seen, the Great Depression was a period of low profitability and tremendous class conflict. By the end of the Second World War, enough capital had been destroyed to reverse the economic decline, and bring about surging profits for the capitalist class. While, for a time it appeared that “stability” and “consensus” brought a relative peace, including a class peace, underneath it was the routing of working-class organization. All the while extraction of surplus value carried on until there was simply no more profit to be had. Crisis hit capitalism again in the 1970s, producing a paradigm shift, and a return to a no-compromise tactic by the capitalist class. The working class fell increasingly under assault, and a process of intensification of labor and reduced real wages brought about another era of false prosperity. The crisis of 2008 broke the consensus, made a mockery of the “end of history” notions of eternal growth and permanent profitability, and reshaped global politics as it threw many workers into precariousness and unemployment. We are still living in the wake of that crisis, and the shuffling of imperialist alliances to meet the needs of national capital has led to massive military build-up and hints at war between the great imperialist powers. In an attempt to wring out meager profits, “belt tightening” austerity was introduced. This brought a decline in living standards for millions of workers. Incoherent cultural politics have sprung up in place of well-defined class politics. Conspiracy theories have instead been used to explain away the defects in a capitalist system.

Although it is marketed as a system that brings wealth and freedom, it instead encloses the working class, strips it of time, dignity, and life. In a world where class politics are a whisper heard only from the past, some fictitious cabal becomes the scapegoat. By 2020, the gears of capital continue turning, profits continue to be squeezed from our class, while economists begin to posit that this bull market could continue forever. And then, of course, a crisis begins anew.

Crisis often breeds conspiracy theory. Humans seek patterns in a world where misery appears to strike at random. Our current crisis, brought about by COVID-19, is exceptionally prone to conspiracy theory. A sudden massive disruption of daily life and heavy-handed state action have been followed by the wildest fantasies of “deep state actors” and “secret virus labs”. While the conspiracy theories themselves have had tremendous real-world consequences—convincing some to go maskless at indoor events or to self-prescribe horse drugs—the real threat at this time is occurring in board rooms and geopolitical summits. In some sectors, profits soared, while in many other areas profit came to a screeching halt. Workers had their rent and other debt payments deferred until some later date to be decided upon by their ruling class, but already some debts have come due. The expectation is that workers will take the hit yet again, as if there is no expectation that the class will fight back.

Issue 2 of 1919 has been written at a time when vaccine doses are expiring in one country, while another country digs mass graves for its COVID victims. While the pandemic is still upon us, and feels like a new permanent state of affairs, the assault on workers is accelerating in the background and is largely ignored by bourgeois media. It is critical not to lose sight of this generalized assault. Yet again, the capitalist system enters its malaise, and yet again wages must be cut, benefits shredded, and productivity



increased. What makes this period different from 2008 is that there is not much room for further extraction from the class that produces this much needed surplus value. The old standby tactics of wage cuts and intensification of labor are already reaching physical limits for workers unable to remain housed while working multiple jobs, or for those who lost work due to the pandemic but are still on the hook for thousands of dollars in unpaid rent. The United States, Russia, and China have begun instead to focus efforts on “national defense”. A cold war that has been brewing for at least a decade. Despite the consensus being that a conventional world war the likes of the previous two would be too catastrophic to imagine, nations throughout the world are steeling themselves for such possibilities. Imperialist conflict has historically followed similar patterns: increased focus on high tech weapons and defense spending, cutthroat trade diplomacy, and protectionism. All of this portends the unimaginable while media outlets

casually discuss the possibility of a war between the United States and China as being ever more likely.

We are also including Part 2 of the Malignant Ulcers of Capitalism series, not in addition to the others but because it speaks to much of the same phenomena. Global birth rates are at historic lows, while access to abortion has become a greater challenge for the working class. China, once known for its One-Child Policy, is now seeking to promote population growth in a bid to stay competitive in global capitalism. In the United States, reproductive freedom is increasingly symbolic, something that exists only in a few places where absurdly restrictive laws have not yet been passed. And while there are cultural forces at play, a strong case can be made that population control—either upwards or down—has always been about the interests of capital and the state.



# Icebreaker imperialism

The current crisis in the world economy has spurred the various imperialist players to drive towards increasingly desperate and destructive policies. Unable to overcome the logic of capital and the tendency towards for its rate of profit to fall, the various actors in the global imperialist framework are now thrashing in the cold Arctic waters, a region witnessing extreme militarization in light of the desperate imperialist rivalry. The new imperialist arena has opened up due to rapid and catastrophic environmental calamity, all of this is made possible. The Arctic no longer presents itself as an icy desert, but is instead a region of increasingly attractive mineral and energy resource along with coveted sea routes which could be more lucrative than the Panama or Suez canals. Salivating over these minerals are Chinese industrialists who desperately desire the resources required to stoke their ever expanding factories and their Canadian counterparts whose grip on global mining presents itself as a life or death scenario. Nervous over these sea routes are American admirals whose fleet of aircraft carriers have long dominated world commerce, and Russian strategists poised to utilize the largest fleet of icebreakers to proclaim dominance over the

"new Suez."

With the collapse of the USSR, the Arctic was widely considered a special diplomatic zone for which demilitarization and "cooperation" were presumed to be the norm. This joint recognition was short-lived. A widening division between Russia and NATO was exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, which acted as the historical marker toward this phase of re-militarization and bitter imperialist rivalry. By 2009, Canadian generals were vowing to intensify military drills and increase personnel in the region, claiming their goal was to have, "more boots on the Arctic Tundra, more ships in the water, and a better eye in the sky."<sup>1</sup> The increase of Canada's military attention to the Arctic region is not surprising. After claiming the Northwest Passage as its sovereign waters in the 1990s, by 2003 Canada became the third largest producer of diamonds, found largely in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.<sup>2</sup> Canada has long been a major player in the mining industry across the globe. As of 2013, 75% of the world's mining companies were headquartered in Canada.<sup>3</sup> When Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan toured the Arctic in 2018 the whole affair was mired in the increasing imperialist competition between

Russia and Canada. Openly and loudly this competition was boasted in the press as Minister Sajjan made a new commitment to infrastructure and military equipment.

Denmark has established a northern military command in Nuuk Greenland, and in 2013 deployed units to join in Canadian military operations. With Denmark extending its claims to the Arctic sea bed to include larger portions of the Arctic, it has bolstered this claim by extending its participation in annual military drills with Canada and the United States, and sought to acquire more patrol boats for its arctic activity. Denmark's interest in the region is directly connected to the mineral wealth of Greenland and the island's strategic position geographically, which has caught the eye of both Chinese capital and US military strategists.

As early as 2007 Norway declared the Arctic as their strategic priority in national defence and began a redeployment of most military headquarters from the south to the north of the country. In 2013 Norway backed up this commitment by hosting a military drill involving 16,000 troops from 14 nations. In 2018 this was expanded as Norway hosted a NATO exercise consisting of 40,000 troops. In 2020 Norway signed a treaty with Sweden and Finland coordinating military cooperation with the aim to solidify alliances across Scandinavia. And with the United States granting Norway's request for an increase in American marines on its soil the Russian state has claimed there will be "consequences" to such decisions. These moves by NATO forces in the Arctic of course run parallel to Russian militarization. The symbolic submarine planting of the Russian flag on the bottom of the ice cap, alongside the Russian military build-up in the Arctic has been ominous.<sup>4</sup> This buildup has included everything from the reinstitution of abandoned USSR naval facilities in the north, a manned amphibious landing drill in 2012, to sailing a full armada through the Northern Sea Route (NSR) in 2013. One notable drill took place in 2013 when a series of

exercises consisted of more than 160,000 servicemen, 1,000 tanks, 130 planes and 70 ships, one of the largest since the collapse of the USSR. By August of 2019 it would be topped by an even larger military exercise of 300,000 troops, the largest Russian military drill since 1981. In the meantime, Russia's state oil giant Rosneft is developing what it claims will be the largest onshore drilling operation in the world, with trade routes ensured by a new fleet of nuclear-powered and armed icebreakers capable of subduing the ice sheets of the NSR.

This drive towards militarization in the Arctic theater can only be understood when connected to the economic drive of both the great and regional powers. With the Arctic warming at twice the rate of the rest of the globe previously inaccessible resources now present themselves to profit-starved centres of capital.<sup>5</sup> It is no surprise that when Putin commissioned a northern naval base he highlighted the Arctic as a key to Russian economic success, and in 2017 he cited an estimate of the mineral wealth alone to be 30 trillion dollars. Chinese industrialists eye these rich deposits of nickel, iron, lead, zinc, phosphates and gold, while Torontonians financiers seek to tighten their grip on global mining. In addition to mineral wealth vast reserves of unrecovered natural gas and oil are located just under the sea floor. The energy resources already in use have converted the previously barren North into a region from which a tenth of oil and a quarter of natural gas in the world is extracted. The attraction to this region is not purely for domestic economic purposes. Energy, particularly oil, has long been critical to "security" and "strategic" positioning inside the international framework. The relationship between capital and military adventurism has never been more apparent.

However, the real prize in the scramble for the Arctic is control over the two northern sea routes, the Northwest Passage on the Canadian side but particularly the Northern Sea Route on the Russian side. Since the days of mercantilism, the





development of capitalism has always been inseparable from the ever-expanding networks of naval distribution. From the South China Sea to the Panama Canal, the arteries of economic life appear as the vast flow of commodities atop massive freighters. Historical events like the Suez Crisis in 1956, or recent events such as the blocking of the Suez Canal by the *Ever Given*, confirm the indispensability of these passages for world capital. The enthusiasm of the bourgeoisie to the opening of these northern passages can be marked by the celebration of the cargo ship *Nunavik* transporting nickel from Quebec to China in 2014. The voyage took two weeks less than the traditional Panama Canal route. Coinciding with the opening of Arctic shipping is the Canadian government's plan to open and expand the infrastructure of deep-water Arctic ports, with new commitments to build a port in Nunavut and expanding the infrastructure of the port of Churchill, Manitoba. Across the pole, Russian policy is even more determined. The building of new naval bases is always geared toward controlling the NSR. With the first commercial ship making its way through the NSR in 2018, it can be estimated that the utilization of the NSR would lead to a reduction of days at sea

by 40 percent in contrast to the traditional route through the Suez Canal. With 7,000 miles of Arctic coast Russia understands it is well positioned geographically to dominate what it hopes will rival the Suez Canal in connecting European and Asian markets. The Russian strategy is based on its ability to ferry cargo though the NSR with its modern fleet of nuclear powered icebreakers—with a fee of course. Putin has remarked that Russian dominance in the Arctic is key to Russia's economic and strategic future. In response to Russian plans in 2020 the United States sailed a fleet of four destroyers with anti-submarine equipment though the Barents Sea. Future maneuvers are prepared to increase the number of destroyers from four to six. The message is clear, America wishes the northern routes to be "economic free zones" and "international waters", while in real terms waterways would be under American power.

With the opening of the two northern routes China was quick to declare itself a "near Arctic country" and has entered the competition to push its interests by proclaiming a "polar silk road". The polar silk road is attached to China's massive Belt and Road Initiative which seeks to institute



massive infrastructure projects throughout Asia, Africa and Europe to greater tie the world economy to Chinese capital and openly challenge American capital. Knowing that the NSR through the Russian northern coast offers the shortest route from China to Europe, in 2017 China's state-owned shipping giant COSCO has proposed the development of an Arctic deep-water port on the Northern Dvina River near the northern Russian city of Archangelsk. Next to this are Chinese proposals to develop bridges and railroads in Norway and Finland. Even earlier there was Chinese interest in buying the Canadian Arctic port in Churchill, an offer which was clearly rejected as the Canadian press in 2020 proudly boasted that the port was 100 percent Canadian-owned. The American response to the Chinese initiative in the Arctic is exemplified by former president Donald Trump floating the possibility of purchasing Greenland from Denmark, where China has invested in rare-minerals. While the purchase offer for Greenland was rejected by the Danish government, the Danes did accept a \$12.1 million economic aid package for Greenland, "aimed at strengthening mutual ties and boosting a renewed U.S. push for a greater military presence in the Arctic".<sup>6</sup> The point is clear: The number one priority of the U.S. is to stop the expansion of Chinese capital at all costs, and to achieve this through preparation for future military confrontation.

The icebreaker is the seminal piece of machinery required to contest the Arctic waters. Icebreakers use their strong hulls to bear down on sheets of ice to crack its upper surface. A fleet without icebreakers is vulnerable to the unpredictability of the Arctic climate and runs the risk of a reduction in maneuverability or even getting trapped in the sea ice. Russia hosts a fleet of 40 icebreakers, the largest stock in the world, including its new class of nuclear-powered icebreakers. This has American officials lamenting that the Russians can treat, "[the] Northern Sea Route like it's the Mississippi River."<sup>7</sup> The United States fears that the Russian edge in geography and hardware will turn what is predicted to become a major

shipping route into a Russian dominated toll route. In contrast, the United States can only boast of possessing 3 icebreakers, which officials fear leaves them vulnerable and unable to compete despite America's otherwise massive capabilities. Meanwhile, China has announced its plan to build its own class of nuclear-powered icebreakers and Canada can field 13 of its own icebreakers. The current state of the stock of U.S. icebreakers has the American Defense Department decrying an "icebreaker gap", reminiscent of the cold war "missile gap". In response to this "gap", former President Trump demanded a new fleet of icebreakers be commissioned, containing 3 heavy and 3 medium icebreakers, to be ready by 2029. While the U.S. Coast Guard announced it had signed a \$746 million contract for the design and construction of a new class of heavy icebreakers. Nonetheless, the U.S. Defense Department's obsession over the 'icebreaker gap' has not been quelled, with American admirals nervously stuttering to the press "who puts missiles on icebreakers?"<sup>8</sup> when remarking on Russia arming its nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet. In contrast to the American military worried if it can defend crucial chokepoints, such as the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom corridor, the Russian Northern Fleet is conducting a study of combat operations in the western and eastern Arctic sea zones via large military drills. The situation is clear. The dire economic situation facing the bourgeoisie has spurred an arms race in the Arctic Theatre. As capitalism meanders toward another crisis, no actors in the fight for Arctic dominance appear willing to stand down. While it is always "too soon" to declare a potential site for inter-imperialist bickering to result in global conflagration, there is reason to shed light on maneuverings in the Arctic. The climate has assuredly and permanently opened the once-frozen landscape to exploitation. Decades ago, the question was "is it possible for conflict to arise here?" Today, we must ask "how soon should we expect it?" as the massive centers of national capital scramble to secure the dwindling profits.

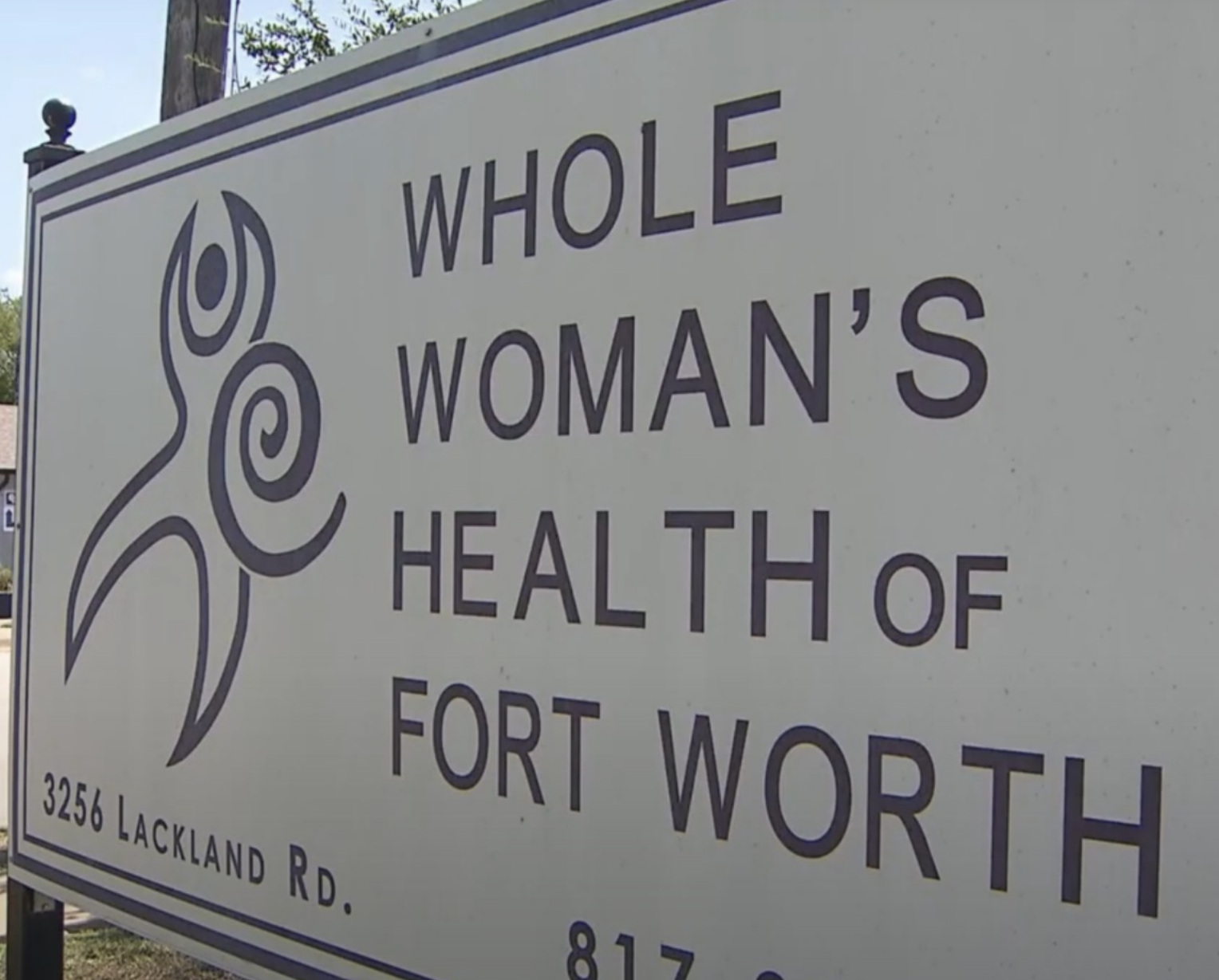
What is clear is that capitalism's response to its crisis of profitability is the escalation of imperialist competition next to massive attacks on the condition of the working class. What does this crisis mean for Chinese workers but the 996 work week and fighter jets over Taiwan. What does this crisis mean for Canadian workers but larger military drills and rising rents. What does this crisis mean for Russian workers but tank maneuvers on the borders of Europe and longer

hours. What does this crisis mean for American workers but Uber-style jobs and an icebreaker build up. What else can this mean but that "the main enemy is at home"! For the bosses misery and militarism are the solutions to the crisis. Against the bosses drive towards total barbarism the solution of the working class can only be a world communist revolution!

-Lucas Bordeaux, Klasbatalo

## Notes

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# **Malignant ulcers of capitalism: The proletarian struggle for reproductive freedom (Part 2)**

## **1919 Introduction**

The article which follows was first published on the website of the Internationalist Communist Tendency ([leftcom.org](http://leftcom.org)) at the end of 2020. It sheds light on sterilization, sex selective abortions, religion, and bourgeois laws as specific to the needs of capital, while noting the consequential damages which are caused to the proletariat. Along with the fact that South

Australia has since decriminalized abortion and it is now seen purely as a healthcare matter, the laws mentioned in this article which further restrict abortion in Poland have since gone ahead and Argentina has followed through on the legalization of abortion until the 14th week of pregnancy, quite a bit has also happened in the United States over the past year and so this introduction has been written to provide a slight update on what has changed since the article was first published.

Several weeks ago, Texas passed a repressive law banning abortions after six weeks of pregnancy; the interval before most people even realize that they're pregnant. Once the rhythmic contraction of fetal cardiac tissue can be detected, the pregnant person is no longer allowed to have an abortion. The law eliminates the rights granted to women after the passage of *Roe v. Wade*. Civilians can also sue abortion providers for whom they suspect illegally performed an abortion after the six week restriction; anyone who assists in aiding an abortion will be held liable under the new law. This includes individuals who may be financially assisting someone with paying for an abortion or driving someone to the clinic to perform the procedure. Civilians who report these providers are provided with a reward of \$10,000 if the lawsuit is successful.

Not only is this law completely unconstitutional, The U.S. Supreme Court has also declined to block the law from passing. The Texas law has impacted millions of women nationwide, as an abortion bill similar to Texas' six week ban has been introduced in Florida over the past week. The new bill, HB 167, would ban most abortions in the state of Florida and would allow people to sue doctors and abortion providers for performing unlawful abortions and for assisting with an abortion; people were also given up to six years after an illegal abortion had taken place to file a lawsuit against the provider. The law would also require physicians to test for a "fetal heartbeat" on a pregnant person seeking out an abortion; if the physician finds a "detectable fetal heartbeat", then they are prohibited from performing an abortion. The abortion laws in both states do not include exceptions from pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, but they do make an exception if a physician believes a "medical emergency" exists – something that is left to the physician's own subjectivity and biases.

In a system based on capital accumulation and

profit, the interests of the bourgeoisie supersede working class women's control over their own bodies. Women's economic subjugation began with the creation of bourgeois marriage (as we wrote about in Part 1) and it will not end with reproductive freedom. There is worse to come, as the bourgeoisie will stop at nothing to achieve its aim – profit. The working class pays the price. Bourgeois women in Texas have the luxury to travel to another state where abortion is legal and perform the procedure without penalty. Working class women who are unprepared to be mothers are more likely to have no alternative but to have a baby they do not want; something that could significantly traumatize both the mother and child. Although some working class women may feel happy and fulfilled with motherhood, many also face serious hardships, primarily financial. Many working class women in the U.S. are abandoned by their husbands/partners soon after finding out they're pregnant or giving birth to a child. A large percentage of single mothers end up staying in abusive relationships because they cannot provide for their children on their own – despite the fact that the children will likely become traumatized being around domestic violence. Single mothers may also have to engage in sex work to survive in order to make a high enough income to provide for their children. Sex workers may face the likelihood of being raped by a john and becoming pregnant with their rapist/client's baby, without the option of getting a legal abortion. With safe and legal abortions inaccessible to proletarian women, their only alternatives are illegal ones, which are unregulated, and prone to dangerous or even fatal procedures.

Only once capitalism is abolished will women have full reproductive freedom. In a communist society, people will have the choice to decide whether to proceed with a pregnancy or to have an abortion, as well as accessible resources and clinics to attend the procedure. Since women will no longer be confined to economic subjugation by the bourgeois family unit, child rearing will be made social and women will no longer hold the



sole burden of domestic labor. We must abolish capitalism to abolish the family and to achieve full reproductive freedom.

## Introduction

In our first part on reproductive struggles in class society, we highlighted some of the facts and dangers surrounding abortion and contraception. We also commented on the family unit and prostitution – two phenomena Marxists deem to be flip sides of one another and inseparable from the struggle for reproductive freedom. In this piece, we shed light on sterilization, sex selective abortions, religion, and bourgeois laws as specific to the needs of capital, noting the consequential damages to the proletariat.

## Bourgeois Law and the Stronghold of Capital

Such laws [against abortion and the distribution of medical literature on contraceptive measures] are nothing but the hypocrisy of the ruling classes. These laws do not heal the ulcers of capitalism, they merely turn them into malignant ulcers that are especially painful for the oppressed masses.

–Lenin, *The Working Class and NeoMalthusianism*, 1913

As of 2019, the Hague Convention includes 101 countries. It has been in force since December 1983 and is said to have been drawn to prevent one parent from fleeing internationally, with their child, upon losing custody.<sup>1</sup> The majority of Hague cases, however, involve proletarian mothers attempting to escape domestic violence.<sup>2</sup> Women, especially those who are unable to access contraception or abortion and have had children as a result, are then faced with the stark choice of either leaving their child behind, if they need to flee internationally, or remaining trapped in the country that they gave birth in – whether they are a permanent resident or citizen or not. On paper there is an exception to the convention if there is a grave risk of harm to the child.

Despite recognizing that domestic violence puts the victim's entire family at risk of violence (especially those living in the same household), courts often dismiss this when a direct impact on the children cannot yet be proven.<sup>3</sup> Under these circumstances, the ability to escape this violence is further impaired. Many proletarian women are unable to access legal advice or government assistance, they often end up homeless, at risk of losing custody, or murdered. This is a prime example of how bourgeois laws reinforce the same harm they claim to protect people against, while restricting our movement through sovereign borders.

## North America

One of the first countries to sign the Hague Convention was Canada, where abortion has been free from legal regulation on a national level since 1988. The mistake of conflating nationwide legality with accessibility is one that overlooks other hurdles to obtaining the procedure, such as funding, distance to medical facilities and provincial laws and regulations.<sup>4</sup> For example, Ontario does not fund abortions at every clinic and New Brunswick only funds them in hospitals. The result is that workers living outside of the urban centers, such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, face further distress when seeking an abortion.

The Northern regions are heavily populated by First Nations workers and further reflect just how much better “universal healthcare” in capitalist society looks on paper than it works in practice. In the capitals, access to abortion is rather the same to the southern provinces, except for surgical abortion rarely being immediately available.<sup>5</sup> The procedure is only performed a few days each month and a lack of resources often see them bumped back for incoming emergencies. Those residing in rural communities, face barriers to accessing abortion that are distinctive to those anywhere else in the country. Whether the abortion service chosen is medical or surgical, the procedure demands

travelling to a capital city – a demand that is financially and emotionally taxing.

In the United States, abortion is still the topic of many protests, with a handful of providers and their assistants being killed over the years and clinics vandalized or bombed.<sup>6</sup> In 2019, a myriad of states passed – or proposed to pass – stricter abortion laws.<sup>7</sup> Some of them were later blocked by federal judges and others are still yet to go into effect.<sup>8</sup> Most of these bills would ban abortion from the moment a heartbeat can be detected – before the embryo has even formed a heart chamber, and before many realize they are pregnant.<sup>9</sup> Taking the matter further, Alabama signed off on laws which would prohibit abortion at any stage of pregnancy, unless the pregnant person's life is at risk. These laws are more restrictive than those found in Saudi Arabia – where abortion is allowed under these circumstances, as well as if there is a serious threat to mental or physical health. In Texas, laws were proposed that would see those who seek an abortion facing the death penalty.<sup>10</sup>

With maternal and infant mortality in the United States continuing to rise, more working women and girls were already dying from pregnancy-related complications than in any other developed country, before any of these bills were proposed.<sup>11</sup> As symptoms present in the same manner, even healthcare professionals cannot tell the difference between a miscarriage and a medical abortion.<sup>12</sup> Around 30% of the world's imprisoned women are in United States' prisons, and 80% of them are mothers.<sup>13</sup> Most of them have not been convicted of any crime and are simply unable to afford bail. Anyone who suffers through a miscarriage and avoids seeking medical attention, out of fear of prosecution, could face serious health consequences.

There is no national guarantee of maternity leave in the United States, and the price of childcare continues to soar – disproportionately driving mothers out of the workforce.<sup>14</sup> In two parent households, where both are in employment, over

a quarter of household income is spent on childcare. Things are even bleaker for single parents, as childcare costs around half of their income. Childcare workers themselves remain among the lowest-paid in the country. When working long hours (often in multiple jobs), the need to survive often results in working women taking care of others' children for survival, with little time left to spend with their own.<sup>15</sup>

Canada and the United States both have a long history of forced and coerced abortion. First Nations women in Canada have been seeking compensation for these atrocities, some as recent as 2017.<sup>16</sup> It has been reported that Californian prisons' authorized the coerced sterilizations of nearly 150 prisoners between 2006 and 2010.<sup>17</sup> We understand this struggle against forced abortion and sterilization to be one and the same; both are part of the struggle for safe access to consensual terminations and overall reproductive freedom. They are both a part of the fight against capital's incessant fetish for controlling our bodies.

## Oceania

In Australia, abortion legislation varies from state to state. Some even have "safe zones" surrounding clinics which criminalize anti-abortion protesters.<sup>18</sup> In every state and territory, abortion is legal to protect the life and health of the person carrying the pregnancy. In recent times, several states have removed abortion from the penal code. Western Australia was the first to do so over two decades ago and now the focus has shifted onto South Australia finally doing the same. The current laws in South Australia state that all surgical abortions must be signed off by two medical professionals and performed at a registered hospital. After 23 weeks, abortion can only be lawfully performed to save the pregnant person's life.<sup>19</sup>

Despite being available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) since 2013, RU486 is still classified as a special drug. In rural

areas especially, where many doctors are unable to prescribe the pills, pregnant workers experience great difficulties in accessing them.<sup>20</sup> The demand for a surgical abortion after 9 weeks gestation can also leave many working women without access to much-needed services.<sup>21</sup> On top of the limited medical facilities in some states and most rural towns, the price of a surgical termination varies.<sup>22</sup> The cost of the procedure and the common need for travel and accommodation is one that not all working women can afford.<sup>23</sup>

Access to permanent forms of birth control, such as tubal ligation or a hysterectomy, is practically non-existent for anyone under 30 – no matter how adamant we are about the decision to not have (more) children.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the Australian state has an ongoing tendency of forcing contraception, sterilization, and abortion – that is wanted but inaccessible to others – onto disabled women and girls.<sup>25</sup> Capital informs who ‘must’ and who must not raise children. The unborn are deemed as either necessities or liabilities – reproductive restraints are here enforced by the state.

Proletarian Indigenous women are the fastest growing segment among the Australian prison population – they are 21 times more likely to be imprisoned than their non-indigenous counterparts.<sup>26</sup> Evidence suggests that up to 90% of imprisoned Indigenous women have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused at some stage of their life (in some cases, they are even imprisoned for calling the police on someone who has assaulted them). It is believed that these experiences, coupled with racial profiling and the usual working class struggle of poverty and exploitation, frequently lead to their offending and subsequent criminalization.<sup>27</sup> The majority of them are mothers and it is largely through this fragmentation of their families that women are more inclined to reoffend out of desperation. Indigenous women are the least likely to find secure housing after leaving prison, they are often left homeless or must return to a

violent household. Being denied the ability to provide a safe and secure home for their children only fuels the conditions in which children are more likely to end up in the child “protection” and “criminal justice” systems themselves.

The forced removal of Indigenous children from their families runs rampant throughout Australia’s history and to this day they are still extremely overrepresented in the child “protection” system. They compose just under 6% of the child population but 37% of children in “out-of-home care” are Indigenous – 81% are on a long-term guardianship order and therefore in state care until they turn 18. Additionally, the number of Indigenous children in the child “protection” system doubled in the decade between the 2008 “apology to the stolen generations” and 2018.<sup>28</sup> In Australia, children as young as ten can be thrown in prison. Indigenous minors constitute a little over 53% of those in youth custody.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that the state has never ceased imprisoning Indigenous people or stopped stealing children, they simply altered their methods. We could consider this to be a generations-long, colonially informed, capitalist suppression of one of the most simplistic forms of reproductive freedom: the freedom to partake in the raising of one’s own children.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has found that conditions in Australia’s “offshore processing center” on the nearby island of Nauru are “cruel, inhuman and degrading”. Despite this statement, they believe these policies have not been purposely designed to harm anyone and say there is not enough evidence to prosecute the Federal Government. For years, these camps have produced tragic accounts of women and children being sexually assaulted – especially at the hands of those who are paid to “protect them”. From 2015, until a policy change in 2017, 24 women were flown to Australia to their terminate pregnancies – most of them the result of rape.<sup>30</sup> This change has meant that traumatized women and girls would no longer be seen by doctors in Australia and would instead be

referred to the Nauruan Overseas Medical Referral committee.<sup>31</sup> As abortion is illegal in Nauru, except for when saving the pregnant person's life, women are now denied yet another necessity. These laws are the same in Papua New Guinea, Micronesia, Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, and the Marshall Islands. In Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu abortion is only allowed if it is lifesaving or is for the preservation of physical or mental health.<sup>32</sup>

### Religion, one child policies, and son preference

In many religions, abortion is forbidden and seen as an act of murder. This is the case in Roman Catholicism, where the belief is also that any form of contraception, outside of natural calendar methods, is an "intrinsic evil". In recent times, Pope Francis has compared abortion to the mob hiring hit men to kill people to resolve a problem. Despite these factors, it is said that around 90% of Catholic women in the United States use some form of artificial contraception.<sup>33</sup> All denominations of Christianity adhered to the Catholic Church's view on contraception until the 1930s, today they are one of the only denominations to maintain it. The views of some Anabaptists (such as the Amish) are even stricter and prohibit both artificial contraception and natural methods.

Across predominantly Catholic Latin America, abortion is heavily restricted. Out of 33 countries, only Cuba, Uruguay, and Guyana permit elective abortions – as well as Mexico City. Some countries permit abortion in the case of rape or if there are life threatening conditions. But Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Suriname all have a total ban on abortion, and punishments include up to 50 years imprisonment.<sup>34</sup>

Although abortion is legal in Cuba, access to contraception is extremely inadequate for workers and this often results in repeated abortions being sought in its place. Studies have

indicated that 76% of pregnant teenagers terminate and that many pregnant 15 to 19 year old girls have already had at least one abortion.<sup>35</sup> This is not only evident of the lack of contraceptive access, but also of the broader issue of economic crisis and skyrocketing food prices.<sup>36</sup> It is all the more complicated to flee from a country when you are pregnant or have small mouths to feed – something that is evidenced by Cuban, Venezuelan and other Latin American migrants currently being held and living in uncertainty in Mexico and in ICE cages upon trying to enter the United States.<sup>37</sup>

In Argentina, birthplace of Pope Francis, you can face prison time of up to fifteen years for having an abortion. It is also quite common for pregnancies to be forced to term.<sup>38</sup> In 2019, there was the controversial case of an 11-year-old girl who was raped and then delayed an abortion by state authorities, until a doctor stepped in to perform a caesarean section at 23 weeks gestation.<sup>39</sup> Despite the strict abortion laws, it would have been legal for the procedure to have taken place when the pregnancy was discovered at 16 weeks. A minority of health professionals and activists provide information about accessing safe abortion, while others go a step further and provide access to abortion pills.<sup>40</sup> The health professionals and first group of activists are protected by "freedom of information" laws as they do not provide access to the pills themselves, but the latter must operate more discreetly to avoid prosecution. It is unfortunate, however, that just as in many other places, most pro-choice activists put their faith into electing the "right people" into parliament.<sup>41</sup> In 2015, following the murder of pregnant 14-year-old Chiara Paez by her boyfriend, Argentina saw mass protests against femicide under the slogan Ni Una Menos.<sup>42</sup> And in 2016, following the brutal rape and murder of 16-year-old Lucía Pérez, protests broke out again and a one hour "women's strike" was called (inspired by the "women's strike" in Poland a few days earlier).<sup>43</sup> The Ni Una Menos movement has since spread into surrounding countries and



mobilized support for reproductive rights but in 2018 a bill to legalize abortion was rejected in the Argentinian senate. On 11 December 2020, a bill legalizing abortion until the 14th week of pregnancy passed through the lower house and is now once again awaiting the decision of the senate. We must keep in mind that even if legalization does go ahead, it could just as easily be stripped away again while the capitalist state still exists. The same issues that women in other countries with legalization deal with are also likely to present themselves.

Abortion is also illegal in Venezuela, except for when the pregnant person's life is at risk. These strict laws, increased prostitution due to the country's economic woes, and a lack of affordable birth control have caused a rise in sexually transmitted infections (and diseases) and in unintended pregnancies.<sup>44</sup> Due to this, many working women seek out back-alley abortions and die or are lucky to survive.<sup>45</sup> When the pregnancy is carried to term, the struggle continues in the form of trying to avoid sending children to bed hungry.<sup>46</sup> With most of the country's population living below the poverty line, more permanent forms of contraception, such as sterilization – which the government offers for free while denying access to safer, less permanent contraceptive measures – are being sought by teenage girls after one pregnancy. Previously, this procedure was sought primarily by people in their late 30s with multiple children. On top of this is a freshly emerging trend of childless workers seeking out vasectomies.<sup>47</sup> The crisis of reproductive freedom in the country continues to grow.

In recent years, Catholic Poland has repeatedly tried to tighten their already highly restrictive abortion laws.<sup>48</sup> In 2016 and 2020 this resulted in nationwide protests where tens of thousands of people from all over the country missed work and school, or disregarded lockdown measures, to attend them.<sup>49</sup> This years' protests have resulted in a temporary freeze on the implementation of laws that virtually ban abortion by making them

illegal even when the fetus is severely deformed or will not survive the pregnancy.<sup>50</sup> In the Republic of Ireland a long campaign and a series of protests (with the likes of Strike 4 Repeal again taking direct inspiration from events in Poland) culminated in a referendum in 2018 which legalized abortion. The procedure is available for any reason until 12 weeks, until 24 weeks in case of serious risk to the pregnant person's health, and beyond this in instances of fatal fetal abnormality. When these laws went into effect in January 2019, the country's national health service also began offering the procedure free of charge. However, there is a lack of doctors able to provide it and there is a mandatory 3-day "cooling-off" period between requesting an abortion and being able to receive one. These conditions make it so that many people are still likely to have to pay for travel and accommodation – like they did before legalization.<sup>51</sup> In October 2019, Northern Ireland also scrapped their draconian abortion laws. Some of the women who were forced to travel to England and had to pay for procedures they could not truly afford have now won compensation cases that they filed against the government.<sup>52</sup>

In Islam, contraception is permissible only if both parties consent – in other words, if the man gives permission. It is widely agreed that abortion after 120 days is the killing of a soul – an act forbidden by Allah. Before that 120-day mark, the permissibility varies among different sects. Although no Muslim-majority country has a complete ban on abortion, it is illegal to have one under any circumstance other than for saving the life of the pregnant person in almost half of these countries. Where abortion is legal outside of this factor, the only additional leeway typically comes in the form of also allowing fetal abnormalities, if there is a proven risk to the woman's mental or physical health or in cases of rape.

In some countries with looser abortion laws, it is not often easily accessible or affordable for

working women. The reasons behind this legalization also do not stem from genuine concern for the well-being of anyone who falls pregnant. Since 1973, Tunisia has been the only Muslim-majority country with legalized abortion for social reasons if it is before the end of the first trimester. This is believed to have been influenced by post-war neo-Malthusian ideology that had the ruling classes deem population control as a top priority.<sup>53</sup> In Turkey, abortion is legal until the tenth week of pregnancy. But most public hospitals reject the request for an abortion if it comes solely from the pregnant person. Around 12% of hospitals refuse to perform the procedure as a matter of principle and in the regions near the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, abortions are no longer permitted at any hospital.<sup>54</sup> In a country where the average household income is far below that in Europe and where only one-quarter of women are employed, the costs of the procedure vary and are often far too expensive for working women.<sup>55</sup>

After the 1979 Islamic “revolution” in Iran, abortion became a criminal offense and was only permitted before 120 days to save the life of the pregnant person. In 2004, laws were changed to include preventing stillbirth and deformity as grounds for legal abortion. Approximately one third of all pregnancies are unintended, around half of these are unwanted and the other half are poorly timed. A number of these pregnancies are terminated through unsafe back-alley methods. As a result, abortion complications are one of the main causes of maternal mortality in Iran and around the world.<sup>56</sup>

The practice of sex-selective abortion is influenced largely by cultural beliefs that deem female children as an economic burden. In Muslim-majority Pakistan, these beliefs and a lack of sexual education are just two factors behind high abortion rates.<sup>57</sup> Due to the vague laws that regulate the procedure, many hospitals will not provide it.<sup>58</sup> In cases where the hospital does believe it is legal, doctors often use their personal

beliefs as an excuse to refuse them. Once again, it has been proven that abortion laws and social influences do not always deter people, especially if they are desperate not to give birth – they only maim and kill them.

The main religion in India is Hinduism, which permits abortion if the pregnant person’s life is at risk – due to it being viewed as the lesser harm. Outside of this condition, abortion is considered tantamount to killing one’s own parents.<sup>59</sup> It is not uncommon for illegal unsafe abortions to be sought, for procedures to be delayed by abortion clinics, or for pregnancies to be forced to term. This is a struggle that unmarried female workers especially face, at an increased rate, due to the social stigma surrounding sex before marriage, and the additional legal hurdles faced by minors.<sup>60</sup> It was not too long ago, that dowries involved the family of the bride paying the family of the groom. These days it is the bride’s family who pay, to maintain or increase the family’s status. The combination of dowry costs and women earning less comes with the fear of the family being financially crippled if they have too many girls.<sup>61</sup> The act of “bride-burning” (also known as “dowry death”) – where a husband or his mother sets the wife on fire – claims the life of at least one woman every hour, in India. This threat, and other instances of domestic violence, pose a significant risk to married women, whether that marriage is forced or one of love – especially to those who only bear girls or who marry into a family with little, or no, dowry.<sup>62</sup> Similar to this act of bride-burning, is the ancient ritual known as “Sati”. Sati began as an act that was considered as the greatest form of devotion to one’s husband and signified the end of a marriage. The widow would “follow her husband into the after-life” by throwing herself on his pyre and burning alongside him. Over time, Sati became a forced practice and women who did not wish to burn to death were forced to kill themselves in different ways. This is because widows are viewed as a burden who have no role to play in society, especially if they have no living children to support them.<sup>63</sup>

In 1979, under Deng Xiaoping, China implemented a one-child policy to ensure that population growth did not outpace economic development. During the 1980s, a change was made to allow rural parents to have a second child if the first one was a daughter. Towards the end of 2015, the shift was made to a two-child policy. This move has so far failed to resolve any of the extensive issues that were caused over a 36-year period. In Chinese culture, women typically join their husband in taking care of his parents in old age, rather than taking care of her own. This is a tradition that makes male children more desirable and has them seen as a wise investment for retirement. The one-child policy has also had a significant impact on those who lose their only child and are left to suffer financially and mentally, along with having no one to care for them in old age.<sup>64</sup>

The one-child restriction resulted in the abandonment of many baby girls in public spaces – in hopes that another family would come along and adopt them. For some families, a second child could mean anything from large fines to women being forcibly sterilized or tied up and their pregnancy aborted.<sup>65</sup> There are now 30 million more men than there are women in China, largely due to many having opted to terminate their pregnancies upon finding out they were carrying a girl.<sup>66</sup> Although sex-selective abortions are morally condemned in mainstream opinion and have long been the exception to China's otherwise loose abortion laws, there is a clear contradiction and both cultural and state enforced factors are the driving force behind such choices.

The two-child policy has done little more than add pressure on women to have more children and has caused fear of state measures that could force pregnancies to term in a bid to boost the population. Despite this pressure and fear, birth rates have continued to decline. With children being trafficked out of the country to foreign orphanages for decades and women from

Myanmar now being trafficked into the country to marry Chinese men, we can see that the lasting impact of the one-child policy extends well beyond China's borders.

## Conclusion

We know quite well that a surge in working women's militancy can trigger big and great things. For example, the 1917 February Revolution spurred from working women and soldiers' wives taking to the streets on International Working Women's Day.<sup>67</sup> As mentioned above, recent years have seen mass women's protests for reproductive rights in countries like Poland, Argentina and Ireland. These undoubtedly inter-classist movements have managed to affect public discourse and, at least in Ireland, to change existing laws. In rhetoric they have taken up the language of strike action, but this has hardly translated into reality – more often than not the "strike" consists of not carrying out household duties, simply taking a day off work, or liberal employers letting their employees attend a protest.<sup>68</sup> Although slogans pertaining to economic realities have at times been taken on, organized proletarian elements have not emerged, and politicians (from various mayors up to presidents) have come out in support of these movements. Any real class movement will have to see a struggle not just for one day of action, and not only in the sphere of reproduction, but also at the point of production where surplus value is extracted (i.e. where the capitalist class would really start to worry). As Rosa Luxemburg noted in 1912:

This kind of work [bringing up children, housework, etc.] is not productive in the sense of the present capitalist economy no matter how enormous an achievement the sacrifices and energy spent, the thousand little efforts add up to ... As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit ... This sounds brutal and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality

and insanity of our present capitalist economy. And seeing this brutal reality clearly and sharply is the proletarian woman's first task.

We do not pass judgement, nor can we say that there are right or wrong reasons to choose to, or choose not to, have an abortion. But what we do know is that downtrodden workers turn toward religion and cultural beliefs, to seek solace from the world that we live in. They put their faith into the idea of an afterlife that will reward them for having lived this life in accordance with the sacred scriptures. Religious beliefs, in masters and slaves, in heaven and hell, parallel the conditions in class society here on earth. The ruling classes have long considered religion to be an extremely useful tool for deceiving the working class into adapting to and accepting their position as slaves. This is because they know that the religious worker is more likely to accept anything that comes their way without so much as a whispered objection – because everything is the will of God.<sup>(69)</sup> One example of this can be observed during the Stalinist counter-revolution in the USSR, where the Russian Orthodox church was revived during the Second World War to fuel patriotic support among the working masses and to garner help from the West. In 1936, several years prior to the outbreak of the war, abortion had been recriminalized (after the Russian Soviet Republic had been the first country in the world to decriminalize it under all circumstances during the revolution) due to concerns about needing to boost the population

due to impending war. If one thing is sure it is that laws reflect the needs of capital, which always override all else – not all religious states have strict abortion laws and not all states with strict abortion laws are officially religious.

Our goal as communists is to make life here on earth into one that we all look forward to living each day, rather than spend our days exploited and struggling for survival – a life that is free from slaves and masters. We aim to live in a world where caring for children, the elderly, and the disabled is something that is done communally and has ceased to ever be a burden that primarily falls on women. The laws, economic conditions, and religious and cultural beliefs that impact reproduction in class society, will disappear or become superfluous upon states (religious or not) being abolished and these matters becoming private ones. This can only be achieved through international proletarian revolution and the global communist society that comes as a result.

Our next part in this series, will comment on schooling, forced and coerced sterilization of sexual and gender minority workers, sexual violence in times of imperialist conflict, and the full extent of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis is having on us having children.

E (ICO) & KM (IWG)

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# Covid capitalism is still killing workers across the world

Over the previous year and a half, the working class across the world has been subject to an extreme intensification of their exploitation and the degradation of their living conditions. Already suffering from a renewed series of attacks by the capitalists to expand their profit margins going all the way back to the end of the post-war boom period in the 1970s, the situation for workers was rendered exponentially worse with the arrival of Covid 19. In all countries where Covid has made a home, workers faced a combination of repression, negligence, and cuts to their living conditions by the bosses. While the virus ravaged unimpeded through working class

communities, hitting hardest in the most marginalized and oppressed groups, workers in every country were made to continue working with what little safety precautions were available to them. Even then the workers often had to fight tooth-and-nail on their own to secure that safety equipment against the wishes of the capitalists. At the same time as workers were dying on the frontlines from Covid to keep the economy afloat, the capitalists and their state machinery used the situation as an excuse to both increase repressive measures against the working class, such as expanding budgets to cops and militaries and



giving them new powers, as well as making blows at the conditions of the working class. This they did under the propaganda campaign that we are somehow “all in this together”, obfuscating class differences and instead presenting our society as one in which we all share common interests.

In China as in the United States, in Italy as in Brazil, the workers paid while the bosses got richer. Despite the surface political differences between the capitalist method of domination in China or bourgeois democracies like the US or Britain, at the end of the day the same political structure, capitalism, was in place which prioritized profits before humanity and especially our class’ health and safety. And unfortunately, in all of these countries, the capitalist offensive steamrolled ahead with an encouraging yet disproportionately small response from our class.

Throughout the pandemic the position of the Internationalist Communist Tendency has been clear. Workers are not lambs to the slaughter for the bosses’ profits, and “lockdown has shown that this is a public health crisis defined by inequality, and the working class is suffering most”. The entire crisis that we have been living through is not a crisis of Covid but of capitalism, and the only force in society which has the power and interests to put an end to this misery is the working class. We just need to get up and fight for a new world.

At this point writing from the United States, the situation in regard to the pandemic and the working class has changed considerably due to the distribution of vaccines across the country. Currently more than 50% of the US population has been fully vaccinated against Covid, yet deaths are again on the rise and average more than two thousand per day. ‘Covid capitalism’ is still killing workers, both within the United States and without. While unvaccinated workers in this country fall for the bosses’ propaganda which pretends that Covid ‘isn’t real’ or that the vaccines are an attempt at social control, dying

on the altar of right-wing capitalist lies, the vast majority of workers across the world don’t even have access to Covid vaccines (in large part because of capitalist prioritization of profits over health) and are still dying in immense numbers just like they were throughout 2020. In the meantime, the ruling class is continuing to push for a return to ‘normalcy’ which in reality means an increase in exploitation, without safety measures, and the removal of the pandemic protections against a total immiseration of the working class, such as eviction moratoriums and unemployment benefits.

Across the world too, workers face a similar and nearly universally worse situation. The ‘vaccine imperialism,’ which is seen most clearly in countries and blocs such as the United States and European Union hoarding vaccines for themselves and refusing to waive Intellectual Property rights for vaccines, worsens the impact of Covid across the peripheries of capitalism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In the peripheries as well, billions of workers collectively face deteriorating conditions and living standards at the same time as Covid rains down hell on them.

The question remains: can the working class wake up from its long sleep, and stand up for itself as a class against capitalism’s agonizing economic and health crisis?

## Covid capitalism in the United States

The US working class has dealt with one of the worst Covid experiences as its ruling class cynically disregarded health and safety in the pursuit of profits. The US was already infamous among the capitalist “democracies” for being especially callous in its prioritization of profits over health before Covid. The healthcare system here is explicitly oriented around profits and is at the whim of the market, turning healthcare into a luxury for the rich.

Covid further demonstrated how little the US

ruling class cares about the health of the working class. Both Trump and the Democrats only called for any sort of “protective” measures once it Covid had firmly established itself within the country by March of 2020. But even then many of the emergency measures that were passed either by Trump or Democratic and Republican politicians at the state and local level were not aimed at protecting our lives but in keeping the system running, with our class used as collateral. Covid was a good excuse for members of both parties to overall broaden the militarization of American capitalism, granting the state new powers and tools to maintain ‘law and order’. If the lockdown was seriously about public health then it would have been much more extensive and focused on providing for everyone during the crisis. Instead people were told to stay at home and not to socialize but the state did the bare minimum to prevent workers from falling into total poverty.

Workers were already on the brink of falling into poverty before the pandemic. They were always either one or two paychecks away from not having enough to buy food or rent or were already in that situation. Workers in the US then could not have gone into any meaningful quarantine without sacrificing their economic safety. There was no remittance or pay from the state for workers to stay home besides the checks adding up to \$1800 given to workers in 2020 but this was a drop in the bucket for workers behind on rent and struggling to pay for basic necessities. In the first months of the Biden administration the help from the state was even worse, as Biden and the Democrats lied to workers that their original promise of \$2,000 relief checks was in reality only for \$1,400 with terms and conditions. At the same time there was no cancellation of rents, only eviction ‘moratoriums’ filled with loopholes for landlords, and which only postponed the ultimate wave of evictions.

Any pretense of protecting workers against the virus was basically dropped by both parties by

April and May, as it became clear that this would mean a near-total shutdown for the economy and impinge on profits. Both parties then, either loudly or quietly, took up the mantle of “reopening”, or in other words using workers as cannon fodder for the economy. Workers were then given the ‘choice’ of becoming homeless and starving or going to work and risk becoming infected with the virus. By the time vaccinations in the US started picking up speed, around 500 thousand people in the US are estimated to have died from Covid (although some estimate as high as nearly a million). The virus did not fall evenly and it hit the working class the hardest. While the capitalists and their political representatives were able to afford the finest medical treatment, workers dealt with the same inadequate medical infrastructure that they have always dealt with, with deadly results. Those within the working class were much more likely to die from Covid than the rest of society, and within the working class it was the most marginalized groups that were hit the hardest, with Black and brown people and those living on Native American reservations suffering the highest death counts proportionally.

The situation in the United States has changed now, however. As of the middle of September 2021, around 55% of all people in the United States have been fully vaccinated against Covid. The number of those who have received at least one dose of the Covid vaccine is almost 64%. This does not mean the end of Covid within the US and much less across the world. As of the writing of this piece, the Delta variant, which will be covered shortly, is currently driving up cases, hospitalizations, and deaths across the country, but the bosses are still rolling full steam ahead with the reopening. As of September 21st, the 7-day average for Covid deaths in the United States is 2,087 per day, according to the New York Times. This is a significant number and while the information on the income and class of those currently dying is hard to come by, research over the previous year makes it clear that lower income correlated with a higher chance of dying

from Covid. We can assume the same trend for current deaths.

What makes this situation unique are the specific circumstances which are still causing people, many of which are working class, to die of Covid in the United States. At this point the virus is medically preventable with the vaccine, and vaccines are free (although access is sometimes a different question). Now more than 99% of those currently dying from Covid in the US are made up of the unvaccinated, a scenario described as a “pandemic of the unvaccinated”. The reasons for why so many have not gotten vaccinated must be examined from a Marxist perspective.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation “the unvaccinated group are younger, more likely to identify as Republicans or be Republican-leaning, and more likely to have lower levels of education and lower incomes than the vaccinated population.” Another interesting distinction for the unvaccinated is that they are “more likely to be . . . people of color”.

One of the largest reasons for why people in the United States are not getting vaccinated is, unfortunately, right-wing propaganda. This is easily gauged from the Kaiser Health statistics and should also be relatively obvious given the political atmosphere in the country. Of the unvaccinated population, 49% identify as Republican, compared to only 29% identifying as Democrat. Meanwhile, of those vaccinated, only 31% identify as Republican compared to 59% as Democrats. The ideological aspect of this opposition to the vaccines is seen more clearly when one distinguishes between the unvaccinated who fall into the camp of either “wait and see” and “definitely not” in regards to taking the vaccine in the future. The latter camp is much more ideologically right-wing than the former. In this group, a much larger 67% identify as Republicans compared with a mere 12% of Democrats. In contrast, the wait and see group is split nearly evenly politically, with 41% as Republicans and 39% as Democrats.

A significant differentiation between the vaccinated and unvaccinated is income, which is also related to education. While income is not the same as class (being poor is not necessarily a synonym for being part of the working class just as being rich is not necessarily a synonym for being part of the capitalist class), the two correlate heavily. In this analysis we will therefore use income statistics as an estimate for class.

Those that are unvaccinated tend to have lower income, education, and insurance levels than the vaccinated population. Out of the unvaccinated population, 42% have less than \$40k in income per year, whereas that income level makes up only 33% of the vaccinated population. In contrast, only 19% of the unvaccinated population makes more than \$90k a year, compared to 31% of the vaccinated population with that income level. Those with an income between the two extremes make up 31% and 28% of the unvaccinated and vaccinated population, respectively.

Education and insurance follow a similar pattern. The unvaccinated population has received lower levels of education than the vaccinated. Of the unvaccinated, 46% have received only a high school education or less, and 19% have gotten a college degree or higher. In contrast, 34% of the vaccinated have received a high school education or less, and 38% have received a college degree or more. In terms of health insurance, 24% of the unvaccinated under 65 is uninsured, compared to 12% of the vaccinated.

When one breaks up the unvaccinated into “wait and see” and “definitely not”, there is not as much differentiation between the two groups in terms of income, education, and insurance as there was with political affiliation (or as will be seen with race/ethnicity), but there was some difference. While statistics for education between the two subsections was relatively equal, those adamantly against the vaccine were more likely to be wealthy (25% as compared to 16% making



more than \$90k+ a year), yet were also less likely to be insured (74% compared to 81%).

Race shows the strongest differences between the two unvaccinated subsections. In the general population, while white people are more likely to be vaccinated (the vaccinated population is 64% white compared to the unvaccinated being only 56%), this difference is relatively small and it covers another story hidden in the unvaccinated demographics. That is, the unvaccinated population which says that they will “definitely not” get the vaccine is 70% white, whereas the “wait and see” group is only 49% white. The “wait and see” group is also 22% Black and 20% Latino, whereas the “definitely not” group is 5% Black and 11% Latino (the remainder of both subsections is made up of other ethnicities).

From this data we can make several useful conclusions about the unvaccinated population and its relation to capitalism. Putting all of the data together, it appears that the unvaccinated population is made up of a wealthier, whiter, population that has broadly bought into reactionary ideology which is adamantly opposed to the vaccine for ideological and class reasons, and a poorer, less white population which is not necessarily opposed to the idea of the vaccine but is currently not taking it for a variety of reasons.

The latter population which is generally part of the “wait and see” group is likely more working class (based on income statistics, and again this is only an estimate). Most of them are not getting the vaccine not due to ideological reasons, but instead due to factors which characterize and have characterized the lives of workers in the United States.

One of the largest factors which explains why those in the “wait and see” group are not getting vaccinated is healthcare access. In the United States workers suffer from a lack of healthcare in a variety of ways. First, the healthcare which they receive is generally of a poorer quality than that

which the capitalists are able to receive. Hospitals in working class areas and cities are overcrowded, underfunded, and provide less advanced healthcare than those that the capitalist class has access to. But more relevant to the question of vaccines is health insurance for working class people. Workers overall suffer from high rates of being uninsured. “According to the CBO, the number of American citizens who are uninsured in 2020 is around 31 million”. In addition, “38 million do not have adequate health coverage” and can be classified as underinsured. This adds up to more than around 20% of the total US population, and those that fall within this group are disproportionately of the working class as well as non-white. According to Kaiser Health News, most “uninsured people have at least one worker in the family” and that as of “2019, nonelderly AIAN, Hispanic, NHOPI, and Black people remained more likely to lack health insurance than their White counterparts”. This points to an explanation for why so many people in the United States, especially workers and Black and brown people, aren’t getting vaccinated. Although it can feel as though we are constantly bombarded with messages and information about the vaccines, for many workers who work day-in and day-out, seven days a week and 12 hours a day, staying up to date about all of the precise information about the vaccines just happens to be something outside of their daily concerns. It is for that reason that the myth persists among many workers that the vaccines have a price tag instead of being free. Kaiser Health News reports that “concerns about having to pay for a vaccine (one-third of the “wait and see” group is concerned about this compared to 19% of the “definitely not” group)” still plague many of the unvaccinated.

In addition to worrying about having to pay for a vaccine, many in the “wait and see” group have concerns about being able to access an adequate healthcare center at all for the vaccines. This is due to both the aforementioned poorer quality of healthcare in poorer areas, as

well as a long and detailed history of medical racism within the United States. According to Kaiser Health News, “nearly four in ten (37%) in the “wait and see” group also express concern about being able to get the vaccine from a place they trust, perhaps another indicator of health care access issues within this group”. Those of the working class as a whole are well acquainted with having to deal with long lines and treatment that can be poor and shoddy. But those Black and brown members of the working class understand these on an even more deep and profound level. In the United States throughout the entire history of the country, non-white people have continued to receive healthcare that is not only of poorer quality but is often malicious and intended to do them harm or treat them as guinea pigs. According to The Lancet, “while much public health research has shown that racism is a fundamental determinant of health outcomes and disparities, racist policy and practice have also been integral to the historical formation of the medical academy in the USA”. This was as true in 1619 (the date of the arrival of the first slaves on what is now the United States) as in the present. The following excerpt from The Lancet makes clear that throughout US history:

Black people, and especially Black women, endured violent medical treatment and experimentation against their will. Enslaved Black people’s bodies were exploited for the development of some aspects of US medical education in the 19th century. Medical schools relied on enslaved Black bodies as “anatomical material” and recruited students in southern states by advertising its abundance. This practice was widespread in the 19th and early 20th centuries. American medical education relied on the theft, dissection, and display of bodies, many of whom were Black.

As the excerpt mentions, non-white but especially Black women were prone to being experimented on by the state throughout history. The article notes that “Native American, African American, and Puerto Rican women were overwhelmingly

targeted for involuntary, coercive, and compulsory sterilisation under early 20th century eugenics laws”, and that furthermore the practice only ended en masse in the 60s and 70s, continuing at a lower frequency in the years after to the present. Even just last year it was revealed that ICE was experimenting on undocumented women in its concentration camps by sterilizing them. All these historical horror stories add up in the psyche of Black and brown people, especially of the working class, growing up in the United States and into adulthood, and help explain why so many are hesitant to put their trust in medical officialdom after so many abuses.

For those of the working class in the “definitely not” vaccine group, the story is also a sad one. In this case, while the aforementioned factors likely factor in in some way, one of the largest determining factors in their adamant resistance to taking the vaccine is simply the vulgar, reactionary propaganda of the extreme right in the United States. This sort of unashamedly dishonest filth which compares the vaccination campaign to the Shoah and which lambasts children wearing masks as “child abuse” is embodied not by the most isolated fringes of American politics, but by national politicians and “news” commentators. Marjorie Taylor Greene and Matt Gaetz are the most recognized national politicians who make their career out of grifting off of these far-right lies, while Tucker Carlson broadcasts his lies to an audience that has at times reached nearly 5 million. While these professional distorters of reality claim to be embattled underdogs going up against the all-powerful establishment, in truth they have incredible power and reach. According to Forbes, “Fox News host Tucker Carlson was the most-watched host in cable news for May, with Tucker Carlson Tonight delivering an average total audience of 2.937 million viewers”. Likewise, while they claim to be battling against the “elites”, they themselves are the elites (Carlson’s net worth is \$30 million, for example). And unfortunately, while the propaganda that they spew is most loved by some members of the

big bourgeoisie and especially the petty bourgeoisie (who made up some of the strongest stalwarts behind Trump and the political forces he represents), it is also consumed and believed by many in the working class who have been led astray. That is why this is a sad case of a significant number of workers being taken in by outright lies directed against their class interests and their lives. As previously stated, the vast majority of those currently dying from Covid are among the unvaccinated. They are also all mostly concentrated in states under GOP governors, mostly in the Southeastern United States. Many of these people dying or getting sick are of the working class and are giving their lives away on the altar of bourgeois lies. The deaths average more than two thousand per day now, and they continue climbing. The plan for the capitalists to accrue more profits at the expense of our lives is paved by these reactionary bourgeois propagandists.

This also brings up the important issue of the petty bourgeoisie and opposition to Covid protections and vaccinations. The petty bourgeois was one of the most fervent stalwarts of the Trump campaign in 2020 (as well as 2016) and they continue to follow the same general reactionary political beliefs. The opposition by the petty bourgeois to measures against Covid, whether they be vaccines or simple social distancing, stem from their own peculiar class interests which include a competition with and resentment against the big bourgeoisie, as well as a jealousy towards the working class.

The petty bourgeoisie had always seen their champion in Trump. In 2016 he represented the sort of populist hero of the "people" who would stick it to the "elites" who had screwed them over by wrecking the economy in 2008 and then making them bail the bankers on Wall Street out. In reality, the 2008 crash was not the result of some nefarious bankers in New York City (that is not to say that many are quite nefarious) but was instead another phase in the deepening crisis of capitalism that has been going on since the

1970s. With this said, in the years after 2008 it was the working class who was made to pay for the crisis of capitalism, and the petty bourgeoisie also saw their livelihoods wrecked and their precarity increased. It was the process of proletarianization of the petty bourgeoisie that Marx talked about, where big capital (the major banks) were protected by the state while the small capitalists were left to fend for themselves.

A similar scenario played out in 2020 with Covid measures by the state. The petty bourgeoisie felt a resentment against certain sectors of the ruling class which they identified not as the "ruling class" in any Marxist sense but as the "establishment" or "elites", because they felt that they had been left behind between the two opposite class extremes of society. On the one hand, the lockdown measures that were undertaken to prevent the spread of Covid hit them much harder than the owners of large capital. Big capital was able to protect itself (and was itself protected) during the lockdown, as they had enough capital to dispense with to be able to cope with temporary decreases in production and profits. In fact, certain large capitalists, and enterprises, such as Amazon, actually benefited from the lockdown as more and more people relied on delivery for goods. The section of the capitalist class, which is more oriented towards tech overall, as opposed to the more "brunt" capitalists focused on manufacturing and production of things like oil, were also more inclined towards the lockdown as they were better able to navigate it (the former were more in the camp of Biden and the latter in the camp of Trump). The small businesses/petty bourgeoisie on the other hand were not able to deal with it as easily, and the quarantine measures were often the straw that broke the camel's back. The petty bourgeoisie were unable to cope with the pandemic lockdown measures and they failed across the country by the hundreds of thousands. While fewer small businesses failed than expected thanks to loans given by the state as part of their stimulus packages, it is still no less significant that huge numbers of these petty

bourgeois were effectively proletarianized, as they were unable to keep their shops open or transition to the pandemic economy oriented towards delivery and lack of contact (this was especially true in the restaurant industry). Big capital swept in to pick up the remains of petty bourgeois dreams and aspirations which had come colliding into the reality of a capitalism in crisis.

The petty bourgeois also felt jealousy against the working class, which they felt had also been unfairly bailed out by the state while they were left to struggle for themselves. They expressed discontent at the moratoriums on evictions that were passed by the federal government along with the states and local governments (especially "small" landlords). While the ruling class oriented towards the Democratic Party tried to push forward "larger" stimuli to the working class (larger compared to the Republican proposals but in no way actually meaningful) as well as more unemployment benefits in order to try to prevent a total immiseration of the workers that would push them more towards class struggle, the small business owners across the country felt that this was unfair and was/is the reason that they were/are unable to find workers for their businesses. This is plainly seen in the now oft-repeated petty bourgeois slogan that "nobody wants to work anymore". They resent the fact that workers are still "gaming the system" by surviving off unemployment benefits instead of returning to grueling wage-labor at their small shops and restaurants. Even though the working class has been definitively hit the hardest by the pandemic and the capitalist offensive, the petty bourgeois still feel jealous and resentful due to their slippery class position. It is for that reason that they have been the most vocal opponents of Covid protective measures and, as that politics carries forward through time, the vaccines as well.

### The bosses' reopening in the US

Despite the fact that Covid is experiencing yet another wave of which we have lost count in

the United States, killing proletarians by nearly a thousand daily, the capitalist class is still going full-steam ahead in their plans of "reopening" the economy. This is really just a sham phrase designed to disguise another round of pounding the working class with greater attacks. As we in the Internationalist Communist Tendency have demonstrated many times before over the course of the past year, capitalism is in a deep cyclical crisis and the pandemic, while providing a convenient alibi, also marks another stage in that crisis. In order to rescue themselves from this crisis of profitability, the capitalists are forced to resort to intensifying exploitation of the working class and getting them back to work in order to continue generating surplus-value, profits, for the capitalists.

This subjection of the working class to a new round of exploitation is a bipartisan plan by the capitalists. On the one hand, the Republicans openly reveal themselves as vicious enemies of the working class. Throughout 2020 when Covid was new and at its height, they tried to make the already small stimulus benefits to workers even smaller than they ended up being. They were also consistent opponents of unemployment relief and eviction moratoriums. Now with the vaccines having been rolled out to large numbers of Americans and the last vestiges of lockdown having nearly come to an end, they use this as a pretext to unleash bloody attacks against our class. One of these is the cutting off of unemployment benefits to workers earlier than the federal government had provided them for (at the time of writing, they have not yet expired but are set to expire in September 2021, when this issue will have been released. The situation can only have gotten worse by then). This effort at ending unemployment benefits to workers early has been mostly spearheaded by Republicans. PBS reports that:

As of July 16, federal unemployment benefits have been cut off in 23 Republican-led states, but remain in place in Indiana and Maryland due to legal battles. Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards



also made the decision to stop federal jobless benefits at the end of July, becoming the first Democratic leader to opt out of the program early.

The unemployment benefits had already been reduced nationally once before, from \$600 weekly to \$300 weekly. Now, these representatives of the capitalist class are cutting off the last lifeline for many workers and forcing them to return to work in the midst of a rapidly mutating virus in order to generate more profits for the ruling class. The ruling class is transparent about their motivations and reasoning here. Recently on Fox News, Laura Ingraham pondered in regards to the crisis of the bosses in finding more workers to exploit "What if we just cut off the unemployment? Hunger is a pretty powerful thing". Her guest on the program then chimed in, stating that "I have a friend in the military who trains military dogs, and they only feed a military dog at night, because a hungry dog is an obedient dog . . . If we're not causing people to be hungry to work, then we're providing them with all the meals they need sitting at home".

At least the bosses and their lackeys in the media make it clear what they really think of us. To them, our class is made up of nothing but stupid dogs to follow their orders. We aren't humans really, but worker robots.

Workers are already feeling the impact of these benefits being cut off, especially in the South where nearly all states are GOP-led. In Mississippi, restaurant workers are literally being squeezed dry and starved by the capitalists. The state's government cut off the federal unemployment assistance and all that the state offers is a miserable \$235 per week. The fact that workers don't qualify for unemployment if they turn down "suitable employment" means that restaurant workers are essentially forced back into their jobs where they make considerably less than they did before the pandemic. Customers are not as frequent as before and this results in workers often earning the incredibly low \$2.13 per hour wage in the absence of tips. As

Mississippi Free Press reports:

Management demanded workers return to their positions, but often part-time and during shifts with virtually no customers coming in. The industry-wide transition to curbside services left many employees working for the tipped minimum of \$2.13 an hour with few tips, if any . . . The patchwork of shifts and limited tips left restaurant employees on the edge of underemployment, risking the loss of all their pandemic benefits despite earning well below a living wage, they say.

The fact that the Republicans are so open about their desire to use the working class as their work dogs, despite the dangers of a pandemic which is killing nearly a thousand people per day, should not distract us from the fact that the Democratic Party is the other major party of the ruling class in the United States and therefore also has a vested interest in seeing an intensified exploitation of the working class and a "return to normal".

In the lead-up to and duration of his presidency, Biden has tried to make the "return to normal" the centerpiece of his image and administration. One aspect of this was the reopening of schools and the moving away from virtual learning. While we have covered the issue of school reopenings widely in a lengthy article from the previous issue of 1919, the main aspect that has changed the situation from January to now is the emergence of the Delta and other variants of Covid. These present a new threat to the health and safety of workers but as mentioned before the capitalist class is going full steam ahead on reopening, regardless of how many workers must die and risk their lives. While the Biden administration pretends to be concerned with the emergence of the new variants, they remain adamant in their drive to reopen the schools. While the issue of school reopenings may seem like just an issue of whether or not students learn online or in person (as communists we are relatively impartial to this debate as workers are

hurt uniquely in both scenarios, and our job is to expose how this is the case), it goes much deeper than that in reality and at its core it is about extracting more surplus value from as many workers as possible. Often left out of the conversation about school reopenings are those outside of the main teacher staff or the student body, those being the janitors, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, substitutes, etc. With schools closed it is more difficult for the capitalists to extract surplus-value from these workers, who might be on unemployment benefits and therefore, in the eyes of the ruling class, “wasting away” by not enduring wage labor. The schools are also being reopened so as to make it easier to take them out of their work-from-home situation and back to the workplace. The schools ‘take care’ of the children so that the parents can spend their day generating surplus value. Therefore the effort to reopen the schools is part and parcel of the capitalist offensive to resubject workers to a new round of exploitation.

On evictions and unemployment, Biden and his faction in the ruling class also reveal themselves as being just another side of the same capitalist coin as their Republican counterparts. The CDC federal eviction moratorium that had been in place throughout the pandemic (which already held many loopholes and really only acted to hold back a complete flood of evictions) was set to expire at the beginning of August 2021 and did. For workers on the ground, the impending evictions were a constant preoccupation that they couldn’t stop thinking about. For Biden and the capitalists, it was more of an afterthought. A new moratorium was put in place shortly after the old one expired. This was done after it had become clear that the wave of evictions would become a PR disaster for the Biden administration and would make an already bad situation for the capitalists worse. Yet the new moratorium is both too little and too late. The time between the termination of the old moratorium and the imposition of the new led to many getting evicted from their homes. In addition, the new moratorium only covers “counties with a high rate

of Covid transmission”. While the rise of the Delta variant means that this includes around 80% of US counties, workers in the remaining 20% of counties are forced to rely on their states for rent-relief, states which would rather use their federal Covid assistance money elsewhere. According to the New York Times, “the \$47 billion Emergency Rental Assistance program has disbursed only \$3 billion — just 7 percent of the total”. This means that while states are granted sizable sums of money from the federal government to handle the impending eviction crisis, they would rather save it to shore up the deficits that they have been incurring throughout the pandemic. In addition, the new moratorium is still set to expire in October. Renters are still behind on more than a year’s worth of rent now, and they won’t be caught up by October.

Biden has also made it quite clear that he is going to stick to the schedule of ending unemployment benefits to get workers back to work. USA Today reports that “President Joe Biden’s administration won’t seek to reinstate enhanced weekly \$300 unemployment benefits set to expire on Sept. 6”. To try to save face for himself and the whole “left-wing” faction of the capitalist class in the United States, Biden has said that while he is going ahead with ending federal unemployment assistance, that the states can choose to make use of federal emergency funds under the American Rescue Plan to continue unemployment relief. Unemployment is highest in the Southeast, states which have the highest rates of Covid, states which face the greatest threat from the Delta variant, and states which have all gone ahead and ended the extra unemployment benefits months ahead of the scheduled expiration date. In other words, Biden and the ruling class embodied in the Democratic Party are going to leave workers in the ditch, and then stand back and try to claim that it is the fault of those ‘nasty Republicans’. In reality the entire capitalist class and system is to blame, and the sooner that our class realizes that, the sooner we can get out of this whole mess.

## The international dimension

At the same time as the ruling class-engendered tragedy unfolds within the country, the ruling class of the United States also exacerbates it outside of its borders. The reason for this can be aptly summed up in the phrase “vaccine nationalism” or vaccine imperialism. One of the comrades writing for 1919 already covered this phenomenon quite well back in January. This is a valuable excerpt from the piece that they wrote:

In a short time, research went from open-access to highly secretive. Pharmaceutical companies not only wanted to protect their progress from the prying eyes of competitors who could undercut them in the market in the months ahead, but nation states took an active role in pushing the vaccines to market by any means necessary, with the goal of being first. This seemingly humanitarian goal of providing for the public health became distorted by the nature of imperialist capitalism. We have become witness to perhaps three terrible waves of infection and death, while most of the world’s population finds itself wondering if the vaccine is even safe to take, or if the vials of vaccine will meander their way through the market in time for them to receive their dose. At a moment where humanity should be celebrating (at least distantly) one of our greatest triumphs, there is a sense of lingering doubt in a brighter future.

The situation has changed since January and that will be examined shortly. However what is most valuable from the excerpt and which has the most relevance for our current analysis is where it is remarked that much of the world’s population finds itself wondering if they will even be able to access the vaccine in a reasonable amount of time. World capitalism has answered this question for them with a definitive no.

In the United States, the European Union, Russia, and China (some of the ‘metropolises’ of world capitalism/imperialism) the rollout of vaccines,

while also hobbled by the inefficiencies of capitalism that we have just covered, proceeded much smoother than in the peripheries of capitalism, or to use a more general term the “Global South”. One of the most glaring reasons for this is vaccine patents.

In this article we will focus solely on the US aspect of this issue, but many of the same general trends can be seen with the other nations (although perhaps not to the same extent, just given the power of US imperialism). Vaccine patents and their significance can often seem like a complicated topic, often for the simple reason that we don’t know exactly what they are. Yet they are relatively simple. What vaccine patents mean is that only the companies that have “invented” the vaccine have the license to manufacture them. This means that to manufacture more of the vaccines, entities, whether they be companies or nations, must pay fees to the company who controls the vaccine patent.

This has (predictably) led to a massive imbalance in access to the vaccines between the centers of global capitalism, and the peripheries. All of the major vaccine manufacturers are located in the metropolises, and of those most are found in the United States or European Union due to their dominant role in the world imperialist system. AstraZeneca in the UK, BioNTech in Germany, Moderna in the United States, etc. When one also factors in the massive power that these imperialist bodies hold on the world stage thanks to both military might and access to capital (the US and EU), the recipe is clearly one of dominance of those powers over the populations of the peripheries. The sick irony of the situation is that it is often in these peripheral nations that the pharmaceutical companies manufacture the vaccines and the materials for them, but these vaccines are shipped out to countries such as the United States while the native populations are not allowed to use them for themselves due to capitalism’s vaccine monopolies.

In the peripheral countries of capitalism, the vaccination rates are close to zero and proceeding at a crawling pace. According to United Nations Development Programme administrator Achim Steiner, "In some low- and middle-income countries, less than 1 [percent] of the population is vaccinated – this is contributing to a two-track recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic". On average, only around 1.3% of the populations of low-income countries are fully vaccinated. In these countries it is only the top echelons of the ruling class that are able to get vaccinated. Workers are left behind to suffer death and sickness from Covid, all while "their" states go ahead with reopening (if they ever locked down in the first place). We will get to how this has manifested itself shortly. But first, a bit more on the situation in regard to vaccine patents and the United States.

Because of the glaring inequality of some wealthy countries hoarding of the vaccines while the poor masses of the world were unable to receive vaccines due to artificial paywalls constructed by the pharmaceutical companies which own the vaccines, there was growing pressure on the Biden administration throughout the Spring to waive the patents for the Covid vaccines. This would entail an eased access to vaccines by the populations outside of the metropolises. The pharmaceutical companies were (and are) vehemently opposed to any such measure to waive the patents, as this threatened their profits and stranglehold over the international vaccine market. After all, they are in this for money and not for any nonsense about public health. They were and are opposed on the international stage by nations in the periphery and semi-periphery such as India, South Africa, etc. But eventually Biden and his administration did signal support for waiving the Covid vaccine patents, in early May. However, this was really nothing more than a PR move which had no real effect beyond quelling those that had been pressuring the administration.

While the administration "signaled support" for

waiving the patents, the headlines were everything and action was nothing. The Financial Times reports that "three months [since signaling support for the waiver] little has changed. WTO talks over the proposed waiver were suspended without progress at the end of July as delegates dispersed for the European summer holidays. Despite a request from WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala for members to shorten the break given the urgency of the issue, they do not plan to reconvene until September". The US since the announcement has largely ignored the problem now that it isn't a pressing PR issue. All at the same time as vaccines are manufactured in the countries that are able to receive only a trickle of them for their ruling classes. The situation is even more dire in countries outside of the imperial orbit of the US. While the US remains "stingy" in distributing vaccines to the countries of capitalism's periphery, it blatantly hampers the distribution of vaccines to its imperialist rivals and those in their sphere. Prime examples of this are countries like Cuba and Venezuela. Sanctions by the United States on these two countries make it incredibly difficult to procure vaccines or treatment for Covid (or other diseases for that matter). The price for this is paid in proletarian blood. The workers of these countries on the hit list of US imperialism face the consequences of the petty imperialist rivalries of their ruling classes. So the same old story goes.

So in reality capitalism is still, predictably, standing in the way of global public health. The capitalist state is the tool for the management of the affairs of the bourgeoisie, and it is no wonder that the state sticks to its class character by siding, in this case, with large pharmaceutical monopoly capitalists at the expense of the world's poorest proletarians.

### Covid capitalism in the peripheries

While workers in the United States have gone through hell this past year due to the Covid crisis brought on by the ruling class, as well as the general capitalist crisis, workers in the



peripheral countries of capitalism have been through a nightmare of even greater proportions. In Latin America, Africa, and Asia, workers have yet again been turned into the cannon fodder of the bourgeoisie in the quest for profits. Because there are so many harrowing tales from so many countries, we are going to examine a case example from each of the three aforementioned continents, to illustrate the commonalities of suffering amongst workers across capitalism's borders.

## Brazil

The worst of Covid in the United States took place under Trump, and his populist style of ruling meant that he and his clique were open and brash about shoving workers back to work. A similar story has played out in Brazil, where the "Trump of the tropics", Jair Bolsonaro, has sought to prove to the ruling class of that country that only through his blunt and forceful leadership will Brazilian capitalism be able to navigate the crisis.

The gravity of the situation in Brazil is conveyed clearly by a simple examination of the number of deaths. As of September 2021, the deaths from Covid have nearly reached 600,000, almost on par with the official count of US deaths. As mentioned previously however, some "unofficial" estimates of US deaths put them at nearly one million. In Brazil as in the US, there is also an unofficial Covid death count that looks at excess deaths during the pandemic, which puts the number of deaths at more than 600,000 as of early May 2021. More than three months later this number is certainly higher, perhaps reaching 700,000.

But the intricacies of the numbers can distract us from looking at the main point. That is, capitalism wreaks havoc on the health and lives of workers. In the particular case of Brazil, Bolsonaro, like Trump, has since the beginning of the pandemic been a heavy denier of its severity, all with the purpose of ultimately saving Brazilian capitalism

by continuing the exploitation of the workforce at a "steady" pace. In March 2020, in the face of shutdowns across the nation, Bolsonaro downplayed the realities of the virus and declared that, "life must continue and jobs be preserved". Despite becoming infected with Covid himself, his class interests lead him to use this as an opportunity for propaganda, using his recovery to prove how the worry around Covid is hysteria, instead of calling for protecting the health of workers (an obstacle to the profits of Brazilian capitalists).

Covid denial by capitalism is a package deal and part of that package is opposition to and distrust of the vaccines. This was a tool in the propaganda campaign by certain sectors of the ruling class against the realities of Covid, helping to facilitate the return of workers to the workplace. Now that the vaccines are becoming more and more available however, and at the same time as Covid is still rearing its ugly head at an increasing rate, some of these capitalists, like Bolsonaro, are seeing that their previous propaganda against the vaccines is coming to haunt their very efforts at reopening. A representative from Pfizer said that the company had "repeatedly offered to sell the government vaccines last year. It was ignored—for months. Over 100 emails were unanswered". This has partially led to Brazil's poor vaccination situation. In the quest to ignore the deadly realities of Covid for workers, the current faction of the ruling class in Brazil staved off the tool that they could use to get a real "return to normal". Bolsonaro has now half-heartedly embraced vaccines, but it is too little too late for Brazil's workers, who have been hit the hardest throughout the pandemic.

A morbid aspect of the impact of capitalism's Covid crisis on the working class of Brazil is its racial dimension. Michael Fox, writing for The World, states that "Three-quarters of Brazil's poor are Black or multiracial. And they have felt the brunt of the pandemic more than any other population in the country". Like in the United

States, capitalism manifests itself in Brazil as a racist system which adds additional oppression onto proletarians that fall outside of the current definition of white. In Brazil, the Black population has seen a death rate that is 30% above that of white Brazilians. A direct cause of this is the increased exploitation and oppression that Black Brazilians of the working-class face.

Despite the particularly brutal impact of Covid capitalism on Black workers in Brazil, the entire working class of that country, regardless of race, has seen a tremendous deterioration of their living conditions. Hunger in the country has reached unimaginable proportions. According to the Brazilian Research Network on Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security, the number of people in Brazil dealing with food insecurity has reached 116 million. Out of this population (which makes up more than half of the country's 211 million people), "43 million (20.5% of population) do not have enough to eat and 19 million people (9%) are just starving". The numbers are seen more clearly in the streets of Brazil's favelas, the working-class slums of Brazil's cities, than on a table of statistics. The Wire reports further that "poor people stand in lines for hours every day to get some rice or a loaf of bread from some NGOs; in many parts, small children can be seen rummaging through the rubbish bins to pick something for their hungry mouths".

The capitalist press in most instances has tried to paint Bolsonaro's economic policies during the pandemic as the work of some type of benevolent strongman. They ran headlines such as "Brazil's Bolsonaro, with popularity rising, extends COVID-19 welfare" which are meant to hide and distort reality. The truth is that Bolsonaro is not some generous man of the people, waging a lone and valiant struggle against the stingy elites who, supposedly unlike him, want to prevent poor Brazilians from receiving a government lifeline. The truth is really that Bolsonaro is pursuing a policy of austerity against working class Brazilians. In contrast to

the celebratory headlines of the mainstream bourgeois press, The Wire again writes that "Last year, the Congress had approved financial aid to 66 million Brazilians with five instalments of \$110 each. In September, Bolsonaro cut it down to four instalments of \$50, reaching only 42 million people". So, far from being generous to the destitute masses of the country, he has predictably been pushing ahead towards reopening at full speed. It is also worth noting that the government did not even spend all of the money that it had allocated to be used to alleviate the situation of the country's poor. One would think that all of this money and more should have been utilized.

The relief instalments from the government are all-the-more important for workers in Brazil because of the fact that unemployment is at a historically high rate of 14.7% in the country as of the end of June. While Bolsonaro and his ruling class clique tried to position their sacrifice of the working class of the country to Covid as a necessary move to maintain the economy, this has been revealed as horseshit; workers continue to die from Covid and to suffer from starvation. The scenes on the streets of Brazil of working-class families in the favelas wearing masks and standing in bread lines demonstrates the bankruptcy not just of capitalism's fake "populism" but capitalism as a whole.

## South Africa

One of the worst case studies in Covid capitalism's rampage through Africa comes from South Africa. In this country the worst effects of the Covid virus itself as well as capitalism's crushing impact on the working class are both clearly visible. Most of Africa has seen relatively low 'official' Covid death counts. For example, Nigeria, a country of 200 million people, has seen only 2,276 official deaths counted over the course of the pandemic. This is almost certainly the result of poor tracking, as well as other factors such as that the population in Africa is on average younger than the rest of the world and

therefore less susceptible to the virus' worst effects. This is not the case with South Africa. In that country, the official Covid death toll stands at nearly 80,000. However, new data suggests that like with many other countries, this official death count may be considerably lower than reality. According to Emile Stipp, who is the actuary of Discovery Health, Africa's biggest health insurer, it is possible that around 80% of South Africans caught Covid. Following his calculations, the death rate for South Africa from Covid is raised nearly three-fold. Bloomberg reports that:

Stipp said he based his assessment on the assumption that 90% of excess deaths reported by the South African Medical Research Council were due to Covid-19. The SAMRC estimates South Africa's excess death number at 238,949 during the pandemic, compared with an official Covid-19 death toll of 78,377. The country's case fatality rate is 3%.

The population of South Africa is nearly 60 million people. To help visualize this for our readers in the United States, the official death count's proportional equivalent in the United States would be 400,000. With the unofficial death count, it would be over one and a quarter million.

Of course, many of the excess deaths reported during the past year are not just from Covid, and stem from other aspects of capitalism's crisis. We will get to that shortly. First, a word on the vaccines in South Africa.

As of late August, only around 8.5% of the population in South Africa has had enough access to the vaccines to become fully vaccinated. South Africa is one of the countries that, being on the weaker end of the international imperialist pecking order, has tried to use bodies like the World Trade Organization as platforms from which to call for the removal of intellectual property rights on Covid vaccines in order to gain greater access to them for their populations. They have been unsuccessful in these endeavors.

In fact, the ironic cruelty of capitalism's irrational vaccine production and distribution continues in South Africa, as vaccines manufactured by Johnson & Johnson, for example, are manufactured in South African plants and then exported from the country to the European Union, an entity with high vaccination rates especially when compared with South Africa. The South African bourgeoisie of the ANC (African National Congress) are just as complicit in disregarding the working class of their country as the European bourgeoisie are in dominating the working class of peripheral nations like South Africa.

In the midst of the Covid disaster in South Africa, the working class has also been pummeled by an economic crisis which has pushed down workers even deeper than before the pandemic. A comrade in the ICT summed up the desperate economic situation for workers in South Africa:

A few statistics indicate the desperate condition of the SA working class, particularly the long term unemployed. Officially the unemployment rate is 33% and 11 million people are without work, but when those who have stopped looking for work are added it is 43%. Some of these people are, however, employed in the informal economy. There are 12.5 million people on state benefits; about 20% of the population and over half the country's population of 60 million live in poverty [the majority of the population living in poverty are also Black women – JC]. The state has been trying to cut the amount spent on welfare and a grant of R350 (£17.50) per month for the unemployed was stopped in April. This, and the strict lockdown imposed at the end of June, which shut down most of the informal economy, were additional blows for the destitute.

It should also be noted that the poverty line in South Africa includes all those that make less than 810 South African Rands (\$47 USD) per month. This line is incredibly low and doesn't capture the full picture of poverty which is much more widespread.

Within this economic catastrophe, as well as the deaths from Covid and the vaccination rate in the country, are glaring racial disparities. Far from fulfilling the promise of bridging the racial divide that characterized South Africa's colonial history, especially during Apartheid, and which kept white and Black workers divided against each other, the rule of the ANC has seen racial disparities in the living conditions of Black and white South Africans become exacerbated. The ANC and Black bourgeoisie have demonstrated that any sort of "racial solidarity" between workers and capitalists of whatever race is a facade used to trick workers into lending their support to just another faction of the capitalist class which will continue exploiting them.

The latest poverty statistics in South Africa come from 2015 and were released two years later, but they are nonetheless relevant as the picture hasn't changed much. The numbers reveal that 64.2% (more than 28 million) of Black South Africans live in poverty. This contrasts strikingly with the numbers for whites in the country, where only 1% (just under 50,000) live in poverty. It is thus demonstrated how effective capitalism truly is at eradicating racism, which in truth is just an outgrowth of that same system and a useful tool at maintaining the class rule of the bourgeoisie, in this case embodied by the ANC.

The exact numbers on Covid case, death, and vaccination disparity by race are hard to come by. However, judging by the trends in other countries covered, such as the US and Brazil, it can be inferred correctly that Black South Africans have been catching and dying of Covid at rates much higher than their white counterparts. The fact is that the conditions that South African workers, especially Black workers, have been forced by capitalism to live in have engendered the rapid spread of Covid throughout those communities. Many of these workers live in townships, which are designed so poorly that it would be news if Covid wasn't rampaging through these communities. Oxfam

reports that "these areas are still largely underdeveloped, overly populated, have poor sanitation facilities, lack of running water . . . and a poorly structured public healthcare system".

It is clear that South African workers are dying at a significantly higher rate than their bosses, and that disparity is reflected in the difference in deaths by race. What is also clear after some investigation is that the vaccines are primarily making their way into the arms of the ruling class of South Africa, those that are wealthier and are more likely to be white. As the vaccination campaign in South Africa slowly goes forward, it is becoming more and more apparent that "people living in rural areas, or those without an internet connection or private medical aid may be left behind altogether". Only 38 million South Africans have access to the internet, meaning that around a third of the country's poorest have virtually no easy and free access to information on the vaccines and how to get them. The unvaccinated population in South Africa increasingly takes on the image of the poorest and most exploited workers in the country, those overwhelming amounts of workers, mostly Black, left behind by the cynical promises that the ANC bourgeoisie made to them nearly 30 years ago as they went about enriching themselves.

The crisis of Covid capitalism erupted in South Africa in July when widespread rioting and looting erupted throughout the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. While much of the media has characterized these events as solely a ploy by the supporters of ex-president Jacob Zuma to either seize control of the country or disrupt the functioning of governance, what is missing is an analysis which realizes that while certain sections of the South African ruling class tried to create chaos for their own ends, many of those partaking were working class South Africans merely trying to take advantage of the chaos to alleviate their desperate conditions. Thapelo Mohapi, spokesman for the shack dwellers association Abahlali baseMjondolo,

writes that “people were even cooking wild plants under lockdown [during the unrest] . . . people were taking food and saying ‘I don’t know who Zuma is’”. Those rioting were poor, working-class South Africans driven to desperate hunger by capitalism’s latest crisis. As of December 2020, 40% of South Africans were dealing with hunger. The capitalist system and its endemic crises have once again driven down the general conditions of the working class to the lowest, most elementary levels that the human body is capable of withstanding.

## India

The horror story of Covid capitalism in capitalism’s peripheries has revealed itself on full display in India.

In fact, for the duration of the pandemic, proletarians from India, at home and abroad, have been particularly shafted by the crisis. One only has to recall the images and videos that were available for all to see at the beginning of the pandemic’s widespread distribution in February and March of 2020 of desperate and destitute Indian seasonal migrant workers trapped and stranded on the streets of gulf countries like the UAE, unable to return home. The videos from the UAE were just one example of a similar story that played out across many other countries with Indian migrant workers.

Millions of workers in India take seasonal jobs long distances away from their hometowns and cities. These jobs may be in other Indian cities, but often they are in far-off countries. As is common with migrant workers in capitalism, they are forced to leave family and friends and become the most complete embodiment of the wage-laborer. Their home is wherever they can find work, and their entire life is dictated by where and to whom they can sell their labor power for periods of time that leave sleep as their only “free” time. The lockdowns that governments instituted in March 2020 meant that the livelihoods of these migrant workers were either

destroyed or put at extreme risk, as the states in which they resided wouldn’t dispense with state funds to support them. Out of work and out of pay, they were forced to get home however they could. Often this meant on foot, traversing thousands of miles of land and/or sea. The Institute for Human Rights and Business reports that:

Millions of vulnerable, poor Indians who worked away from their homes in India’s towns and cities came to an identical conclusion – that they should not heed state governments’ assurances to stay where they worked; that they could not rely on the State for any financial or physical support; and with no trade union rights workers they will have little means to compel employers to support them. They decided to walk back to their villages. One report suggests at least 200 workers died on their journey, but the actual figure is likely to be higher, since statisticians and economists find India’s Introduction One report suggests that at least 200 workers died on their journey, but the actual figure is likely to be higher, since statisticians and economists find India’s record-keeping of deaths to be inaccurate or unreliable even under normal circumstances. In the process, they may have exposed themselves to the virus, or exposed others to the virus – spreading the pandemic instead of containing it.

So it is that India’s seasonal migrant workers were the first to feel the full brunt of capitalism’s Covid crisis. As the IHRB mentions, numbers for the Indian migrant workers that died from Covid (or other causes) during this process are difficult to come by. But we can only infer that the human cost was tall and cruel.

As sad as the story of India’s migrant workers is, it is itself only one chapter in the nightmare of Covid capitalism’s rampage in India. While they have faded from the headlines since April, Covid is still killing massive numbers of Indian workers. The official peak of Covid in India came during May and June of this year. The official death tolls demonstrate a nearly consistent death rate from



Covid of between 3 and 4 thousand Indians per day, and often higher. The images and videos coming out of India during this period clearly conveyed the utter catastrophe which befell the workers of India. Pictures of Indian workers working day-and-night cremating and burning the bodies of dead Covid victims circulated viral on social media, captivating the world's attention and empathy for a few weeks. This was met by some symbolic gestures from governments across the world, namely the United States, to try to "alleviate" the suffering that the country was experiencing but of course nothing material came out of the ordeal. The workers of the world and India are left to fend for themselves.

Officially, India's death count stands at nearly 450,000. At this point it is probably predictable what this is going to be followed with. While the official death count points to an already gross 450,000 deaths, the more likely and "unofficial" death toll is much higher. However the Indian case is distinguished by just how much larger this unofficial count is. In Brazil, we saw how the unofficial death count added around a sixth of the original to the original. In South Africa, the unofficial count was the official count multiplied by three. In India, it is the official number multiplied by ten. A DC think tank called the Center for Global Development concludes that "between 3.4 and 4.7 million more people died in that pandemic period than would have been predicted. That's up to 10 times higher than the Indian government's official death toll of 414,482". The population of India is nearly 1.4 billion people.

Likewise, it is also predictable that the economic impact from Covid capitalism's crisis has fallen like an iron cudgel on workers in India. Before Covid, the "United Nations estimated the number of poor in the country to be 364 million in 2019, or 28 [percent] of the population". Both the UN and WHO measure poverty as "the percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day at 2011 international prices". From this, we get a clear picture of the desperate state of Indian

workers even before the latest crisis of capitalism. A population (likely made up largely of workers) greater in numbers than the United States that made less than two dollars a day. With the pandemic and the crisis, it is expected that around 75 million more people in India were pushed under the poverty line.

The increase in poverty has brought a concomitant increase in hunger among workers in India. If the hungry in India were a country in and of themselves, they would be the 8th largest country, behind Nigeria's 200 million. The Conversation writes that "Some 196 million people are undernourished, and malnutrition is the top cause of death and disability" in the country. Among the hardest hit by hunger and malnutrition are the migratory workers throughout India, taking up work in cities and villages far from their homes and families. Because of how far away they work, they are often unable to use their state ration cards to get food help from the state. The Guardian reports about how, "day labourers and women who work as domestic help or maids, all migrants from other states, whose ration cards are registered at their home addresses or who have no ration card at all" are those facing the worst of hunger because of this issue.

## Our way out of covid capitalism as workers

Asia, Africa, Latin America, the United States. The story of Covid capitalism repeats itself. We looked at three examples from capitalism's periphery but in reality they only touch the surface, as in every country a unique story of pain and sadness for workers exists. If we wanted to, we could fill tombs writing about the ways that workers have been impacted in different countries in ways that, while manifesting differently, share core similarities. Workers in Peru endured the worst official Covid deaths per capita out of any country in the world. In Israel and Palestine, Palestinian workers are essentially excluded from getting vaccinated at all as Israel maintains its blockade on the Palestinian

territories which essentially function as open-air concentration camps, and as Israel donates expired vaccines to Palestinians. In Iran a corrupt and incompetent bourgeoisie has enacted a painstakingly slow vaccination campaign as more than a hundred thousand workers have died of Covid. This comes at the same time as Iranian workers wage valiant struggles against the bosses and the state.

No matter what country, workers deal with the same shit. The master class which holds the real levers of power just wears different masks and maintains their class dictatorship through different means (some through a false "democracy" which is really only a democracy for those that can pay, and some through brute force and totalitarian one-party control). While some of the "left-wing of capital" (this is a term that includes leftists of all stripes, from those in the DSA who try to corral workers into supporting capitalist politicians under the guise of socialism, to the more "radical" types like the Stalinists and essentially all Trotskyists who lead the working class on futile "anti-imperialist" campaigns to support this or that bourgeois autocrat) try to distract the working class by having them fight not for their own liberation, but for different types of capitalist management, we, those involved in 1919, those of us in the Internationalist Workers' Group and Klasbatalo, those of us in the Internationalist Communist Tendency, and those of the Communist Left in general, understand that as workers it makes sense for us to put our class first and fight for our own interests and emancipation.

The ruling class has tried to use Covid as an alibi for the pain and suffering that workers have been through and are currently experiencing, but in truth Covid is an outgrowth of this system. At first this claim may seem like a stretch. But the fact is that the live animal market in Wuhan from which it appears that Covid originated from is really a manifestation of a system which puts profits over health and safety for the public and the environment. The crowding of these different

species together in such close proximity for the sake of making some money spawned this virus. And it is likely that with capitalism's further destruction of the environment, there will be more deadly viruses like Covid to come.

A point which is just as important is that capitalism is going to lead workers into misery with or without viruses. This should really be obvious, as this is a system designed to put profits before humanity and happiness. The fact that we live in a world of material abundance at the same time as we have billions impoverished across the globe, with hundreds of millions lacking access to the most basic essentials of life such as food and water, means that something is fundamentally wrong with the system that we live in.

This system, called capitalism, can't be reformed. If that were the case, it would have reformed and resolved its contradictions and negatives long ago. But the history of our class, the working class, tells a different story. We are condemned to lives in which we sell our labor-power, effectively our lives, to one or another boss for as long as we require food, shelter, clothes, etc. (that is to say, until we die). At the same time, the class which rules us, the capitalist class, neglects us, lets us perish from diseases or an impending climate crisis, and makes the situation even worse by using us as cannon fodder in their global resource wars.

There is an alternative to this system. It is called communism, but we shouldn't get hung up on the name. The alternative is a stateless, classless, moneyless society. In this society decisions will be made collectively by a world human community, going from the local level to the top. With the abolition of classes, we won't have resources like food getting hoarded, unused, in warehouses because people don't have enough money to buy it. Instead we will feed, nourish, clothe, and house the world. People will live truly human lives.

We will also deal more effectively with deadly viruses such as Covid. Communism will not do away with every problem that exists and diseases are bound to come up regardless of the specific mode of production that we live in. However, by putting the lives of humanity before the profits of a few capitalists, we will be in a much better shape to effectively deal with outbreaks such as the one we have been living through for the past year and a half. And by cooperating as a world in the field of science, we will not have vaccine imperialism and vaccine sabotage, but will instead find cures quicker as we marshal the resources of all of humanity towards helping ourselves.

Achieving this new world will not be easy. It will be difficult, and the odds are stacked against us. But if we want to live lives of dignity, and if we want the same for the rest of our class, then we have no choice but to struggle towards that future.

Our class, the working class, is the only social force across the world which can bring about this future. Not only do we have the numbers, but we are uniquely situated in history as a class which has an interest not in becoming some new ruling class for eternity, but in abolishing classes altogether. So to get to this future our class needs to be united and organized, ready to take on the ruling class and impose its historic agenda for humanity after having learned of its own power through its own struggle, not delegated to unions or politicians. Currently Iranian oil workers are leading the way for our class by struggling on their own as a class outside of the unions,

forming their own organs of class power to struggle for better conditions, which ICT members have covered. But again, we need to be organized for this, and can't just put our faith that events will magically lead themselves to victory. We need to build an international organization that unites those of our class which share the commitment and urge to struggle for this better world, which can act as the spearhead of our class, teaching and guiding our brothers and sisters, and imbuing them with the same sense of solidarity and class consciousness that will cause us all to overthrow the global dictatorship of the capitalist class and imprint our own vision of society through the global rule of the workers' councils.

Call it a party, call it an organization, call it whatever. In the end it will be an international, revolutionary organization of the working class which struggles in the workplaces and the streets, and not in parliament or election campaigns. The Internationalist Communist Tendency, of which 1919 is a journal, is dedicated to this goal. We want to reach militant, class-conscious workers of every country so that we can work towards building this organization of the future. And we do this through education, agitation, and organization, struggling in our own workplaces and intervening in others where workers have taken up the fight against the bosses. If you are down to help and work towards this future and goal we have described, then reach out, get involved, but most importantly, take the struggle to your workplace, school, neighborhood, community, etc. We have a world to win.

-JC, Internationalist Workers Group

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Abahlali baseMjondolo. "The Financial Times in London interviewed Thapelo Mohapi for this report on the riots." Facebook, July 25, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/abahlalibasemjondolo/posts/4525540517476165> (accessed September 26, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Artiga, Samantha, Latoya Hill, Kendal Orgera, and Anthony Damico. "Health Coverage by Race and Ethnicity, 2010-2019." Kaiser Family Foundation, July 16, 2021. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health->

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# AUKUS: Another preparation for imperialist war

The world may have been consumed by a pandemic for more than a year and a half, but imperialism takes no holidays. All through this time, there has been a developing arms race between the US and China, brinkmanship by both sides in the South China Seas, military exercises by China aimed at Taiwan as well numerous penetrations of Taiwanese air space by the Chinese air force. All this time there has been a series of secret negotiations of China's rivals in the "Indo-Pacific" which culminated in the announcement of the AUKUS agreement between the US, the UK, and Australia last week.

The AUKUS agreement may have come as a bombshell (even to other Western allies) but Australia has been on a sharper collision course with China ever since the pandemic began, and there have been other deals it has made in preparation for this one. The strategic use of the term "Indo-Pacific" links all of them. It neatly also

draws India and Japan into the network of anti-Chinese alliances that have recently been established. This started with the Australian Federal Government taking a stronger grip over foreign policy.

## The Foreign Arrangements Scheme

Until recently Australian law allowed all states, territories, local councils, universities and even private companies and individuals to enter contracts with foreign governments and their entities without notifying the federal government. As of March 2021, the federal government must be notified before any deals are made or contracts are signed. This comes as a result of the Arrangements Scheme which was brought into force in December 2020.<sup>1</sup> The scheme means that the federal government can now veto any contract that an Australian state (or any other entity) has made with a foreign government or

entity if the claim can be made that it goes against Australia's foreign policy. Immediately the main deal vetoed by the government was Victoria's 2018 Memorandum of Understanding with China to be part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was laid out in more detail in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Foreign Minister Marise Paine says that the move was not intended to target China. However, not only were the other deals quashed quite obscure and decades-old (one being between Victoria's Department of Education and Training and an Iranian government agency, the other a Memorandum of Understanding designed to encourage scientific cooperation between Syria's Ministry of Higher Education and the Victorian Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training), but it is quite clear that this was one more step towards a closer alignment between the Australian state with that of the US. Others would soon follow.

## Rising Tensions and Trade

The Foreign Arrangements Scheme is just one of the many indicators of rising tensions between China (Australia's largest trading partner), Australia and each sides' allies. Over almost the past two years tensions have been escalating and the relationship between the two countries has especially deteriorated since Australia supported the growing call for an international inquiry into China's handling of the coronavirus. Both this belief that China is solely to blame for the pandemic and trade related tensions have helped fuel a rise in hate crime related violence and racism against people of East Asian descent, which has led to many international students leaving the country and warning others not to come to Australia when the borders reopen.<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese state has turned away shipments of some commodities, for example 96 percent of exports from the \$300 million USD southern rock lobster industry previously went to China but after claims from authorities that a lobster shipment had tested positive for the heavy metal cadmium, the trade was effectively shut down.<sup>4</sup> While high

tariffs have been placed on many other products – such as beef, barley and wine.

One commodity that has not been subject to these restrictions is that which Australia is the world's largest producer of and is its biggest export to China: Iron ore. This has both meant that Australia's GDP in 2020 ended up increasing despite the pandemic and the fortune of Australia's richest person and largest landowner, mining magnate Gina Rinehart, has tripled (she is currently worth \$31 Billion USD) throughout the past year and a half. With this said, demand from China for Australian iron ore could be slipping, imports by volume fell for four consecutive months (April-June). There are no real signs however that this decrease is due to the tense relations between the two countries and could instead be reflective of the state demanding companies to reduce carbon emissions, construction restrictions caused by new covid outbreaks in many Chinese provinces, and a slowdown in manufacturing.<sup>5</sup>

In June, Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the UK's Prime Minister Boris Johnson struck a trade deal during a meeting in London – the UK's first major trade deal since Brexit. The agreement is said to eliminate tariffs on Australian exports such as Hardy's and Jacob's Creek wines, confectionery, and swimwear, and make it easier for Australians to live and work in the UK. In return it scraps the requirement for Britons under the age of 35 to work for 88 days on farms during their stay in Australia.<sup>6</sup>

## The G7 Summit, Military Alignments and AUKUS

The recent 47th G7 summit was hosted in Cornwall between the UK, the USA, Japan, Italy, Germany, and France, along with representatives from the European Union, Australia, South Korea, India, and South Africa in attendance. During the Summit, the G7 largely laid its focus on China and demanded freedoms and a high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong, denounced human

rights abuses in Xinjiang, and stated that a full investigation into the origins of the coronavirus was needed. On top of this, it also aimed to counter China's growing influence by offering less advanced nations an infrastructure plan that may rival China's BRI by supporting projects such as wind farms in Asia and railways in Africa.<sup>7</sup>

In November 2020 Scott Morrison and Japan's prime minister Yoshihide Suga reached a broad in-principle agreement on a defence pact that allows each country's forces to train on each other's territory. The two countries are now in the closing stages of the agreement, which will be the first time in 60 years that Japan has approved a deal which permits foreign troops to operate on its soil.<sup>8</sup> In May of this year Japan's defence minister Nobuo Kishi warned that the balance between Japan and China's military has "leaned heavily towards China in recent years and is growing by the year" and stated that the country must boost its military at an increased pace in order to counter this.<sup>9</sup> In July Japan's ambassador Shingo Yamagami called on the Australian government to consider joint military exercises in the East China Sea, stating that the shipping lane is of as much importance to Australia's security and prosperity as the South China Sea. Australia and Japan have already been working together to monitor and prevent fuel transfers between ships which are bound for North Korea and banned under UN security council resolutions. These moves have been supported by the US with President Joe Biden having met with Suga in April, affirming toughened support of the U.S.-Japanese alliance to take on challenges posed by China and North Korea in order to secure their "shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific".<sup>10</sup> Biden has just recently announced that at the end of September he will be hosting Morrison, Suga, and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a meeting at the White House on Climate Change, COVID-19 and China.<sup>11</sup>

On September 15th, as part of revamped efforts by the US under Biden to gather its allies against

China, Biden, Morrison and Johnson signed the AUKUS pact, which not only involves Australia to now be building nuclear submarines at the Corp in Osborne, South Australia, but also entails enhancing military interoperability, new forms of meetings and engagements between defence and foreign ministers and officials, and deeper cooperation across cyber, applied AI, quantum technologies and undersea capabilities.<sup>12</sup> These new submarines are quieter, faster, and will allow the Australian military to deploy for longer periods of time, with the White House declaring that they will allow "us to sustain and to improve deterrence across the Indo-Pacific". Morrison has insisted that Australia is not looking to build nuclear weapons (which will make the country the seventh in the world with nuclear submarines but the first of those which does not have nuclear weapons) and it is alleged that the entirety of the nuclear aspect of manufacturing will take place in the UK and US. Although Biden referenced France at the AUKUS meeting and ensure that they will remain a key partner in the Indo-Pacific region, France's minister of foreign affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, has expressed feeling stabbed in the back and that trust has been betrayed by Australia in regards to the abrupt scrapping of the former \$65 Billion USD contract with France for the Shortfin Barracuda (diesel-electric submarines), which was only confirmed several weeks ago after having been signed in 2016.<sup>13</sup> The full impact this kerfuffle could possibly have on NATO is yet to be determined, but the contradictions of the imperialist order are likely to deepen, as a comrade's recent article explained has already been shown with Turkey.<sup>14</sup> Biden is currently pushing for a phone call with France's President Emmanuel Macron in a bid to clear the air, but this AUKUS deal comes only weeks after the US' hasty retreat from Kabul without warning its allies in Europe. It's still "America First" when it comes to potential global conflict.

Both Canada and New Zealand's Prime Ministers Justin Trudeau and Jacinda Ardern were visibly absent from the AUKUS meeting, with it unknown as to whether Canada was invited, but Trudeau



declaring that “this is a deal for nuclear submarines, which Canada is not currently or anytime soon in the market for.”<sup>15</sup> Whereas Ardern has stated that New Zealand was not approached “nor would I expect us to be,” but that as per New Zealand’s nuclear free policy the new Australian submarines will be banned from entering New Zealand’s waters. However, Ardern also claimed that the new agreement “in no way changes our security and intelligence ties with these three countries, as well as Canada.”<sup>16</sup>

Australia has also been deepening its military ties with South Korea. Australia’s Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Defence Minister Peter Dutton sat down in September with their South Korean counterparts and committed to enhance cyber, security and critical minerals cooperation, along with military exercises and more naval and air force training opportunities to commence and be made available from 2023. The meeting came as a result of North Korea admitting to having carried out a series of tests using long-range cruise missiles which are said to have the capacity to take out most of Japan.<sup>17</sup>

On the other side of the alignments, China, Russia and North Korea have been strengthening their ties with each other recently, with Chinese analysts trying to make the transparent claim that “ties among China, Russia and North Korea are totally different in nature from the US-Japan-South Korea alliance” and that they are simply cooperating to safeguard regional peace and stability.<sup>18</sup> Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea and subsequent sanctions put into action by the west, collaboration between China and Russia has been accelerating – with expanded trade, high tech cooperation, and growing political support for one another. In June the two countries renewed the Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation for a further five years while celebrating its 20th anniversary. The Chinese and Russian militaries have been regularly doing drills together since 2005, since then having expanded to also include joint naval exercises. As of 2018 they

have expanded to larger scale exercises.<sup>19</sup> Most recently the two nations’ militaries conducted drills in Northwestern China in August and September under the banner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is a Eurasian security bloc claiming to have a focus on “counterterrorism”. In addition to China and Russia the SCO is composed of India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

### What does all this mean for the working class?

It is evident from all that has been written above that the kaleidoscope of global imperialist alignments is moving particularly swiftly at present. The United States has ceased to regard China as principally a source of cheap manufactured goods and a convenient holder of US debt and is now openly focusing on its military potential, particularly in the Pacific. Biden is now focusing on re-assembling traditional US allies in a direct, concrete nuclear force aimed against China’s Pacific doorstep. The fact that this has been so hastily put together that long-standing allies like Canada and New Zealand have been kept in the dark and France has had its nose put out of joint, shows a complete lack of long-term strategic planning. Yet Australia, for all its trade interests with China, feels obliged to comply with the US war plan. In the process it is set to become a nuclear power (at least in the sense of having armed nuclear-powered vessels) but what does that mean for the majority of us who are simply getting on with our lives and earning a crust? The message this sends out is that serious imperialist war is once again on the horizon.

The capitalist system is at the end of a cycle of accumulation which only a massive devaluation of capital through generalised war can restart. The main strategy of the ruling class has been devaluing working class wages, but this is not enough to jumpstart the economy and they know this. Over the past 70 odd years, after the

devastation of the second world war, the capitalist states have done all they can to avoid resorting to the ultimate devaluation of capital once more, but with a system in such deep crisis, increasing tensions, trade wars, and clear imperialist maneuvers, a third world war can all but be ruled out.

While world leaders may struggle to remember each other's names (see: Biden forgetting Morrison's name at the AUKUS meeting, instead calling him "that fella down under"), as communists we always remember where it is we stand when it comes to never supporting any side in these alignments, nor any other nation-state for that matter. This is the case both right at this moment and if there were to be an outbreak of generalised war. The only position we can take is

to work towards the formation of a class party, to call for the self-organisation of the global working class and for imperialist war to be turned into a civil war, where workers go to war in "their own" countries against the ruling class and fight for the abolition of wage slavery and all it entails. This abolition and the bringing about of a new society which is based on human needs and fulfilment rather than on profits is the only hope we have of not only putting a permanent end to war, oppression and exploitation, but also the only chance we have at saving the planet and ourselves from extinction due to environmental catastrophe.

EK (Internationalist Communists Oceania)

## Notes

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# Agricultural migrant workers during pandemic capitalism

There has been an ongoing shortage in labor for agriculture and adjacent industries, such as food processing, tourism and hospitality. All of these industries have a dependence on the labor of seasonal migrant workers. This issue was already trending in 2019 before the outbreak of Covid-19 but has been exacerbated by the pandemic. In a report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics it was cited that the employment of agricultural workers is only expected to increase by 1% over the next decade. This is slower than the average for all other industries.

First, we should give a clarification on what the H-2 visas are, and their significance in capitalism in the United States. The origins of the current H2 visa program -for migrant labor can be found with the first bracero program. The capitalist who controlled the agricultural Industry had a demand for labor due to labor shortages caused by the first period of generalized war, or the first world war.

This first program was known as the 'First

Bracero' period; it ended with the onset of the great depression, which was when the post war cycle for profitable accumulation came to end.

This program underwent many reforms, but increases in the worker's protections didn't mean much when faced by the needs of capital to maximize profits, through the increased production and realization of surplus value. In the case of agriculture this is through extracting surplus – value in it's absolute form.

The basis for the modern program is the 1986 Immigration Reform Control Act, this made a separation between visas that the capitalist who control the agricultural Industry can use to recruit workers, ones for the capitalist who control the non agricultural Industry can use to recruit labor. Originally the program was called the H -1A (non agricultural ) and H -2A (agricultural) visas. The ones today are the H2 – A (agricultural and no cap) and H2 – B (non agricultural and with a cap).



One of the factors that has been causing difficulties in securing labor has been the decline of the rural population. This has led agricultural lobbies and farm unions to call for immigration reforms that would ease restrictions on recruiting and hiring H2 – A migrant workers. These are the capitalists who would benefit the greatest from such reforms; other sections would be those who control the tech industry. They may support loosening restrictions for immigration but no entity within capitalism will support the total dissolution of borders and immigrant control. This is why it's important to expose the links between capitalism and the brutal system of borders and immigration control. Capitalists use the system of national borders to regulate the labor market. The progressive section of capitalist support "diversity" – only to the extent that it benefits the state and capitalist accumulation, while they also support the brutal system of borders to regulate the labor market and bolster national sentiment in order to bond workers with their exploiters in a sense of national togetherness.

There isn't a cap for how many can be recruited on H2 – A visas, and in 2021 there has already been a 33% increase in cap for H2 – B visas increasing the amount by 20,000. The census data released in early August 2021 shows that most of the population gains in rural areas have been comprised of workers from Latin America. Most are migrant workers who are on H2 – A and H2 – B visas.

The other cause for the slow growth in agricultural workers is the industry's inability to compete for labor – power. Most agribusinesses are finding themselves outcompeted for labor by the capitalists who run the logistics and warehouse industries. Along with the growing backlog for guestwork programs caused by emissaries being shut down on account of covid 19, also the long term effects of former president Trump's increased restrictions on immigration as apart of his administration's attempt to reorient USA capital, into a protectionist direction before the pandemic and a near complete ban during

the early months of the pandemic, all while increasing the Border Patrol's ICE's repression against "illegal" immigrants, this entails increasing the amount of encounters "legal" immigrants have with the agency as well. These agencies help capital secure a more exploitable workforce under constant fear of violence.

The H2-A visa is used by the capitalists who run the agricultural industry to employ migrant labor on a seasonal basis. The H2-A visa again has no cap, and unlike the H2 – A visa the H2 – B visa is mainly used to employ workers for food processing plants, forestry, also some seasonal hospitality and custodial positions.

Both the H2-A and H2-B visas regulate that the migrant workers can only sell their labor-power to a single employer (which is oftentimes a staffing agency), with a demand for seasonal migrant labor. Many H2-A visa recipients are hired by 'Farm Labor Contractors' (FLMs); this allows the bourgeoisie to bypass the minimum wage, housing, transportation, anti-discrimination and meal/kitchen regulations that come with the visa program.

Around 73% of surveyed participants of the guest work program said that they were either unreimbursed or partially reimbursed for travel expenses, also a substantial portion stated that they were charged substantial recruitment fees by employers. This means many were placed into debt before starting their jobs, which correlates to increased abuses, thefts and lack of freedom. Many had to put their personal property up for collateral to secure said loans, on top of their families expecting remittance. Quitting isn't an option for many no matter how bad the working and living conditions are.

Currently H2 wages must either be equal to the current local prevailing wages, state minimum wage or whatever is agreed upon. Most surveyed participants of the guest work program cite substantially greater wages than what's prevailing where they're from as the main reason

for participating in the program. However, the CDM receives the most legal complaints about wage violations than any other single legal issue. Wage violations took on a variety of forms, mainly fraud and purposefully making the process misleading, 43% of surveyed workers stated that their wages were less than what was promised in the recruitment process, many netted below legal minimum wage after illegal kickbacks. Also 23% of surveyed workers reported that they had to pay for their own equipment (PPE and Hand tools) out of their wages, 7% had to pay for their own housing which is prohibited and 6% had to pay for transportation to the worksite from their housing along with illegal kickbacks which brings wages well below federal minimum wage, some reported that they netted around \$1.25 an hour.

Since as a whole the agricultural industry generates a low profit, the wages of agricultural workers also remain low. As a result of that there is less of a demand for labor-power in comparison to other industries such as logistics. Since the bourgeoisie cannot be as competitive in the purchase of labor-power in agriculture, they must resort to extracting labor-power in its absolute form – through low wages, a longer work week, and offering no benefits or insurance through employment. This is irreversible and can't be reformed because the capitalist mode of production is based on a fundamental law; the production of surplus value and the realization of profits. This unequal relationship between capital and labor involves extorting the maximum amount of profit possible. The expanded reproduction of capital in this instance is based on increasing the amount of absolute surplus – value that's being produced by workers and appropriated by the capitalist. In this sort of accumulation of surplus – value the organic capital composition doesn't grow at a significant pace.

### Impact of Covid

The already miserable situation for agricultural

workers in the United States, as well as across North America in places such as Canada and Mexico, has been aggravated further with the onset of the Covid pandemic. Whereas a large number of workers in Western countries or the "metropolises" of capitalism were able to (for a month or so at least) work from home at the height of social distancing, there were likewise a large number of workers deemed essential to the continued functioning of capitalist society. Among these were workers in healthcare, food services and, critically for this piece, workers in agriculture. Neither capitalism nor any society could function without the production of food, and capitalism understood that if it did not keep agricultural workers working away in the fields and processing plants, then social breakdowns and crises even larger than what we saw in 2020 would arise.

Due to this necessity, farms and agricultural/food processing plants remained much more open during the pandemic, including the earliest months of March-July of 2020 when the danger of the virus seemed even greater than what we now know it is, with an ensuing visible impact on the health and lives of agricultural workers.

In general, cases and deaths among agricultural workers match those of the general population. However, counties containing large amounts of agricultural workers have higher Covid cases and deaths on average than other US counties. JL Lusk and Ranveer Chandra point out in their comprehensive case-study of the impact of Covid in agricultural workers in the US that "a 1% increase in the number of hired agricultural workers in a county is associated with a 0.04% increase in the number of COVID-19 cases per person and 0.07% increase in deaths per person". Applied across the United States, where some counties hold much higher amounts of agricultural workers than others, this results in huge disparities in cases and deaths.

Before the pandemic, the conditions of agricultural workers, especially in the processing

plants, were already poor, cramped, and unsanitary. These conditions were magnified by the pandemic as frequent outbreaks of Covid in plants and farms across the country attracted media attention, with the fear that these outbreaks could contaminate the food supply. There was only hypocritical concern for the workers in the bourgeois press, if they mentioned them much at all.

In terms of the concrete impact of cases and deaths on agricultural workers, this is what Lusk and Chandra had to say in April of 2021:

"In the 13 month period since the start of the pandemic (from March 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021), the estimated cumulative number of COVID-19 cases (deaths) was 329,031 (6,166) among agricultural producers, 170,137 (2,969) among hired agricultural workers, 202,902 (3,812) among unpaid agricultural workers, and 27,223 (459) among migrant agricultural workers. The cases amount to 9.55%, 9.31%, 9.39%, and 9.01% of all U.S. agricultural producers, hired workers, unpaid workers, and migrant workers, respectively."

With the deaths of these agricultural workers also comes increased economic hardship for the families of the dead. The death of one of these workers signifies the loss of one of the breadwinners, making it even more difficult to pay rent and afford the basic necessities of life. The fact that many of these workers are undocumented migrants compounds this issue as they likely don't have life insurance (or health insurance for that matter), meaning that families have to deal with the tragic loss of a loved one at the same time as they scramble to figure out how they are going to put food on the table and remain in their place of residence. In addition, specifically with the deaths of undocumented agricultural workers comes the end of the remesas that they frequently send back to their families in their home countries, often in Latin America, more specifically Mexico and Central America. These remesas/payments are often

lifelines for their families at home, and is often the motivating factor for the migrant coming to the United States in the first place. This ends up producing the same effect, where the families at home are left to both mourn and grieve as well as try to find a new source of income to stay alive.

It is also perhaps the case that many of the cases and even some of the deaths among the agricultural workers, especially undocumented migrant workers, went uncounted due to their precarious immigration/legal status. Yet even discarding that possibility, capitalism's toll on agricultural workers in just the United States during Covid is clear. Neglect and demands to continue production on the part of the class of bosses has necessarily lead to deaths for almost 13.5k (13,406) agricultural workers over the course of the past year in the US. These deaths could have been prevented had adequate safety equipment and standards been brought in and implemented on the part of the workers themselves, at the same time ensuring a stable food supply, but the reality is that under capitalism profits are prioritized over lives and the good of humanity and this leads to scenarios like the one that we see here. It is also an undeniable fact that by being in the working class and therefore by being compelled to sell one's labor-power in order to survive, these agricultural workers had no other choice but to expose themselves to the virus and potential deaths in order to maintain an income for themselves and their families. Capitalism is a sequence of tragedies and horror stories.

In Canada, while it appears that agricultural workers and in particular migrant agricultural workers (or TMAWs, temporary migrant agricultural workers as they are referred to in Canada) have experienced less deaths from Covid over the last year and a half, the situation has nevertheless been far from rosy. Because of the fact that many of the agricultural workers in Canada are seasonal, this meant that there was a backlog of migrants who were unable to enter

Canada for work because of the pandemic's restrictions on travel. Canadian companies were then confronted with a labor shortage which they compensated for by increasing the workloads for the workers themselves, as well as increasing hours. According to Vivianne Landry and others in their comprehensive study on the pandemic's effect on Canadian agricultural migrant workers, many TMAWs in Canada were "working upwards from 15 h a day, seven days a week, to make up for workers who would be unable to travel".

At the same time as the bosses were demanding huge increases in production and workload on the part of the workers, they withheld overtime and often engaged in gross wage-theft. It was reported in Canada that \$57,369.46 was stolen from these migrant workers, either through unpaid wages or deductions, just in the period from March-June of 2020. Because of the precarious situation of many of these workers owing to their immigration status, making it difficult and dangerous to report such crimes, the real number for wage theft is likely higher.

The increased demands for productivity and longer hours against agricultural workers in Canada has almost certainly led to greater incidences of injuries and work fatalities. We do not yet have possession of the current numbers for work injuries and deaths in the Canadian agricultural industry. However, what we do already know is that agriculture itself has consistently been one of the most dangerous industries for workers in Canada. Between 1990 and 2000, there were 1256 work-related deaths and around 15,000 work-related injuries for Canadian agricultural workers. The constant exposure to animal-borne diseases, dangerous chemicals and equipment, the lack of safety and protective equipment and facilities, the long hours, and the fear (largely due to their immigration status, although also because of the fear of missing out on pay) of reporting sickness and injuries to the bosses or authorities take their toll on the workers. For this last point, it is

estimated that only about 10% of accidents at work which lead to injuries were reported to the Worker's Compensation Board. What we can infer is that the increased productivity demands during the pandemic greatly increased the death and injury toll. These workers would agree, as many have testified to "suffering increased strains, injuries and sickness due to increased pace of work".

In the context of both these work-related injuries and Covid, migrant agricultural workers in Canada have been largely excluded from receiving healthcare. Many lack health cards, have only limited English capabilities and, in combination with their precarious work and immigration status, all of these factors conspire to ensure that migrant agricultural workers remain severely disadvantaged in the realm of healthcare. In fact, one study of almost "600 TMAWs revealed that 93% of them did not know how to make a workers' compensation claim, that 92% did not know how to fill out hospital forms and that 85% of them did not know how to make a health insurance claim". Covid also exacerbated the health crisis for agricultural workers in general because hospitals in Canada were much less capable at responding to non-Covid patients due to the added difficulty of caring for Covid patients in hospitals.

It is well-known that agricultural workers, especially migrants, have had to deal with subpar housing and living conditions. Their quarters are often cramped and overcrowded, with poor insulation, lack of access to proper sanitation facilities, drinking water, and exposure to dangerous agrochemicals. The Migrant Worker Health Project reports the following example of poor housing during Covid for Canadian TMAWs:

"In Southern Ontario, MAWs entering mandatory isolation at a large fruit farm reached out to local advocates and expressed concern over their shared kitchen and bathroom spaces. Housed in a trailer, each worker was provided with their



own bedroom for the isolation period, but after the isolation period workers were told they would be housed two or three to a room. All workers living in the trailer share one small kitchen and one bathroom. They were not provided with adequate sanitation supplies to regularly disinfect shared surfaces, and furthermore, they have been instructed to stay in their housing at all times, even after the 14-day quarantine. These workers are concerned that such crowded and inadequate living conditions will place them at risk for COVID-19 throughout the season."

This only helps further illustrate the wretched conditions that agricultural workers in Canada, particularly the migrants, are forced to endure just to survive. And with the added variable of the pandemic, it was practically impossible for any of these workers to quarantine themselves or social distance. Capital instead dictated that these workers put their lives on the line for profit, considering it an acceptable price that some may die. It is also worth noting that TMAWs that participate in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program are required to live in employer-provided housing, a factor which makes it so that workers live in the shoddiest living arrangements imaginable, as the miserly bosses decline to spend their precious profits on anything that could properly be called a home. An additional element of exploitation is also present as the employers may take 7-10% of the workers' total wages and use that to cover the housing costs. The worker receives less so that the boss can pay for less.

All agricultural workers in Canada experienced rises in hours and productivity demands, as well as wage-theft and sometimes reductions in salaries by the bosses to cover their losses with the onset of Covid. This is a common feature among these workers of this industry which binds them together and provides the basis for a unified struggle against exploitation. Yet it must also be said that the ease with which the capitalists were able to carry out their agenda of misery and exploitation was facilitated by the

fact that migrant agricultural workers are an especially vulnerable section of our class to being exploited. Migrant workers in Canada are overall subject to a harsh regime of exploitation; the vast majority of the labor laws which apply to Canadian citizens don't apply to migrant workers in the country. This means that basic protections that the working class has historically struggled for, such as the minimum wage, breaks and days off, overtime, or collective bargaining, are at best fuzzy and at worst non-existent for Canadian migrant workers. The regime of exploitation has an added blanket of domination and control over the TMAWs. Because of the fact that the program stipulates that workers be tied to one employer, the employer in question then has enormous power over the workers because they wield in their hands the ability to fire the workers and cause them to be deported back to their home country. The bosses use this weapon against the workers to extract total control over their lives and the workload that they are given and forced to carry out. The liberal bourgeoisie would love to point to the few existing regulations in place to supposedly curb the power of the bosses as proof that these workers have the opportunity to get justice if they simply report the abuses to the authorities. But the truth is that language, money, and time barriers, in addition to a host of other factors, make any plan to report abuse to the authorities both futile and dangerous.

In Mexico, around 6.5 million people, or just above 5% of the country's population of 127.6 million, are "engaged in agricultural work". As in the United States and Canada, these agricultural workers have likewise seen a significant reduction in their living conditions over the course of the Covid pandemic with the capitalist offensive waged against workers to resuscitate profit rates.

In a country like Mexico, in the periphery of capitalism and subject to domination by the larger imperialist powers such as the United States among others, the depravity and poverty of capitalism is on full display. If workers in the

US, Canada, Europe and other locations in the metropolises of capitalism are able to enjoy some modicum of security in their work and material fulfillment in their lives (which in both cases is not the reality), then in Mexico and other nations of capitalism's periphery the workers have nothing. This is demonstrated by the fact that before the pandemic in 2018, it was reported that hired workers in the agriculture industry in Mexico received, on average, 3200 pesos a month, equivalent to around \$165 USD in November 2019. In addition to the poor salaries of Mexican agricultural workers, they face a high degree of precarity in their work situations. According to the International Labor Organization, in 2019 85.7% of the workers in the agricultural sector were employed informally. This number should not be surprising, given that such a large part of the farm worker, or jornalero population in Mexico is made up of internal migrants, or of migrants from Central American countries like Guatemala and Honduras. These migrants move from farm to farm across Mexico, as the landless workers must decide: "migrar o morir" (migrate or die).

Yet the importance of the irregularity of the work of Mexican agricultural workers when it comes to Covid is that this essentially restricts them from seeking any sort of compensation or protection for when they get sick. During Covid, the Mexican government has factored Covid into its sick leave payments for workers, which would cover the wages for the duration that a worker is infected with Covid. Yet this is restricted to Mexicans enrolled in social security, of which only 6 in 10 are enrolled. What this means is that these jornaleros employed informally in the agricultural sector, moving from farm to farm, are excluded from receiving any sort of compensation for when they get sick with Covid. The results of this are obvious. Workers are unlikely to report that they have become sick even with Covid and continue working until they can't anymore. Working long hours to support themselves and their families, they do not have the luxury of taking unpaid days off to take care

of themselves, even if they are sick with Covid, risking their own lives in the process. Perhaps the most egregious example of this came with the death of "Silvestre" in May of 2020. An agricultural worker in Sinaloa, Silvestre was taking the bus back to the farm that he worked at when he died from Covid on the bus ride. Instead of seeking help, the precarious and impoverished situation of the jornaleros in Mexico caused Silvestre to literally work himself to death even as Covid overtook him.

This has been a prime spreader of Covid among Mexican agricultural workers, but another factor is the housing situation for these workers. The Red Nacional de Jornaleros y Jornaleras Agrícolas reports how it is common for jornaleros to live in scenes reminiscent of Engels' 1845 book on the working class in England, without basic hygienic conditions, ventilation, or access to clean drinking water. The REJJA states that agricultural workers "se encuentran en condiciones de hacinamiento y es frecuente la presencia de plagas" (find themselves in conditions of overcrowding and the presence of pests is frequent). The prison-like conditions that the jornaleros work in engenders the fast and easy spread of the virus. There are endless reports of these workers catching and getting either severely sick or dying from the virus, and the living conditions that a system which prioritizes profit over life has put them in is certainly to blame.

In addition to the aforementioned problems that Mexican agricultural workers face in taking days off due to Covid, the very act of seeking healthcare itself is a hurdle and has been long before Covid. Employers are often stingy in granting permissions to go to hospitals, and these hospitals themselves are often extremely far-removed from the farm sites. If they are sick and require medical attention, workers have to not only take time off work from being sick, but must pay for transportation, and potentially spend even more unpaid time away at a far-away hospital. As hospitals have become overwhelmed

during Covid, the potential to even receive medical attention has been diminished yet further.

In the midst of all of this, the Indigenous populations within the jornalero population have proven especially vulnerable, both to the economic oppression and exploitation that workers deal with, but also with Covid and of course their unique racial oppression. A very high proportion of the jornaleros are Indigenous, and 24% speak an Indigenous language, three-times higher than the rate nationally. It was this section of the population that was hardest hit especially at the beginning of Covid but also generally through the duration of it, as the remesas sent by migrant family members in the United States or Canada dried up. This was a factor in causing a spike in internal migrations by these Indigenous families, as landless and without work, they went in search of any way to secure an income and their own survival. In assessing the vulnerabilities of these Indigenous communities to the pandemic, the National Autonomous University of Mexico published a study and concluded that “en términos socioeconómicos, son los municipios con menor capacidad de resistencia, y por consecuencia, menor capacidad de resiliencia” (in socioeconomic terms, [Indigenous municipalities] are the municipalities with the lowest capacity for resistance, and as a consequence, the lowest capacity for resilience). The degraded conditions in terms of health and economics for the Indigenous jornaleros in Mexico has resulted in large Covid deaths and uncountable cases of sickness, in a country where it is estimated that more than 600,000 have died of Covid as of May 2021. The final insult is added to their injury as the Indigenous communities face racial abuse and oppression from bosses that are disproportionately white compared to the general population, and especially compared to the population of jornaleros. They are denigrated for their language, their darker skin, and their traditions. Covid has only further added to this abuse as now the rich bosses have the image of the ‘poor, disease-ridden masses’ in their minds.

There’s no reformist solution for the blight of migrant workers since the capitalist system demands constant growth, this valorization of capital is only obtainable through constantly increasing the amount of surplus value, or valorizable capital workers produce. The sections of the capitalists who have the greatest demand for migrant workers control the Industries that generate lower rates of profit, they also may only demand labor power to exploit on a seasonal basis, in these Industries the extended reproduction of capital is only possible through extracting surplus value in its absolute form. However all factions of the bourgeoisie support the nation-state, the brutal system of borders and sorting people out based on their legal membership to different national compacts. The proletariat, which is a class that enjoys a double “freedom”, freedom from production and the freedom from ownership, can only transform from a class in capitalism which is not fully conscious of the necessity to overthrow the political domination of bourgeoisie; to transform social relations to production doing away with the exploitation of the working class to a class for itself through their own struggles that must stay rooted on class terrain. A minority of the class will retain this revolutionary communist consciousness even in periods where there’s no open class struggle. They can only remain united in a political organization, which is an expression of this consciousness and based on the communist program, that’s been collectively clarified by reflecting on the past struggles of the class. The role of the communist political organization is to give direction to the worker’s struggle, which is to support the demands that the workers movement makes that would progress the struggle forward. This organization must be international, internationalist, and revolutionary, and it is this task, the construction of the future world party of the proletariat, that we in 1919, as members of the ICT in the United States and Canada, have set out to fulfill.

B & JC of the Internationalist Workers  
Group (IWG)

# Notes

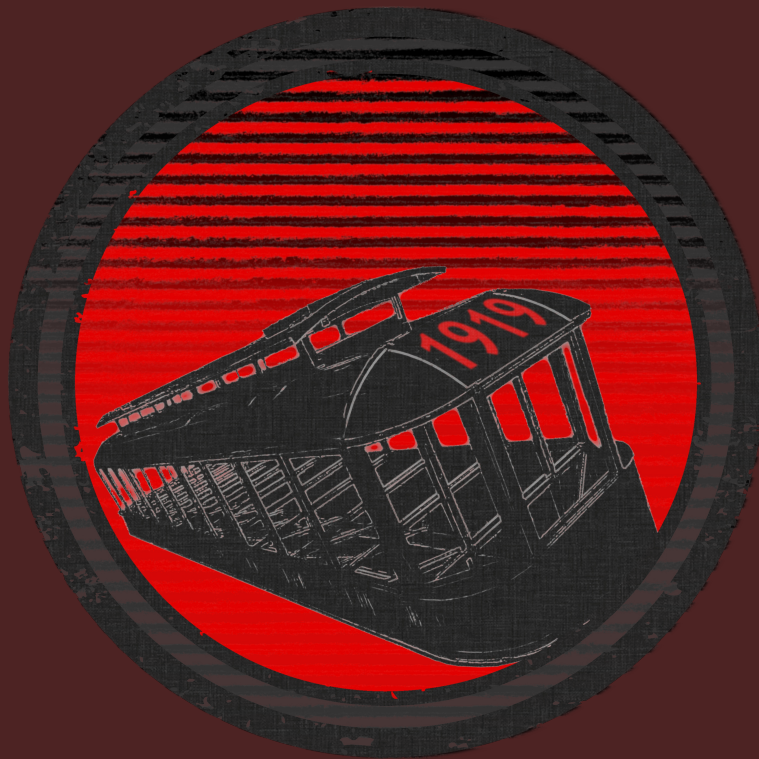
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## About Us

1919 is a joint political journal between the two North American affiliates of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), Klasbatalo and Internationalist Workers' Group. We fight toward the historic task of the working class, communism. Communism is the organization of society directly focused on the fulfillment of need in which the antagonism between the individual and collective is abolished. It is a world which knows no classes, property, state, or bureaucracy. In short, communism is the abolition of political society. To achieve this task, we believe the working class must fight on its own terrain to defend against the bosses' attacks, and to push forth its own interest. We are for the formation of the world communist party. We do not believe that we alone will be this party. Rather, we see ourselves participating in the real work that is necessary for its formation.



## **The Internationalist Communist Tendency**

### **Canada:** Klasbatalo

produces Mutiny/Mutinerie, a broadsheet in English and French,  
and is a joint contributor to 1919  
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### **USA:** The Internationalist Workers Group

produces Internationalist Notes  
and is a joint contributor to 1919  
iwg@leftcom.org

### **UK:** The Communist Workers' Organisation

produces Revolutionary Perspectives (a six monthly magazine) and Aurora (an  
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### **Italy:** Il Partito Comunista Internazionalista

produces Battaglia Comunista (a monthly paper) and Prometeo (a quarterly  
theoretical journal)  
CP 1753, 20101, Milano, Italy

### **Germany:** Gruppe Internationalistischer KommunistInnen

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### **France:** Bilan&Perspectives

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