

Mutiny

Against the Virus that is Capitalism

The world proletariat has in the past celebrated May Day in some dramatic situations: from the imperialist world wars which forced workers to kill, die and produce for their class enemy — their own capitalist class — to the many occasions when the ruling class has unleashed its repressive machine to crush those struggles aimed at making exploitation less onerous, and the chains of the bosses' oppression a little less heavy.

This year, the working class, our class, will be unable to take to the streets. In many cases, workers will not even be able to resort to the usual methods of struggle (pickets, occupations, marches) due to a sneaky enemy, only apparently disconnected from capitalist social relations: coronavirus. In reality, this virus is the legitimate offspring of capitalist society, like the "localised" wars that are tormenting millions of people, like the emigrants looking for a less miserable life, like the refugees forced to flee and survive in inhuman conditions, like the environmental disaster that is hitting the living beings of the planet. The relationship between climate upheavals, predation of the last remaining natural spaces and the spread of "new" pathogens is now a fact ascertained by the vast majority of scientists, at least of those not totally subservient to the powers that be. It is in this capitalist context that the new pandemic has arisen.

The coronavirus pandemic is battering the whole world. It has upset a social and economic order that appeared immutable. It has dramatically laid bare the reality of human relations in this society based on the exploitation of one human being by another in the name of profit.

After years of cuts, thousands, if not millions, of workers have to cope with a broken and dysfunctional health system. Worse still, many more in the so-called emerging countries are faced with a situation where even a half-decent health system has never existed. In these countries, exploitation does not even have the weak brakes — which have been under attack for a long time — that exist in the "West": precarious work, underemployment, starvation wages: in short, "nineteenth-century" exploitation", are the rule. Worst of all are countries like the USA which, despite being the centres of "advanced" capitalism, leave millions and millions of proletarians without health care worthy of the name,

because their wages are too low to pay for private insurance. Not to mention the millions of "invisible" super-exploited immigrants without a residence permit who are essential for many sectors of the economy (e.g. agriculture), many of whom remain unemployed, without unemployment benefits, and with no access to medical treatment in general.

The overall picture that emerges is of a health system incapable of curing everyone and which chooses not to save the elderly and the ill, the groups who, so far, have had the greatest number of victims. They are the sacrificial victims for a system which, at the same time, has no problem making everyone work into their late 60s and beyond. No matter how much suffering and how many sacrifices the world working class has to endure, as long as this exploitative system remains standing, it will attack indirect wages (social and health services) and deferred wages (by reducing pensions and delaying retirement age). Wherever these 'high status' schemes still exist, they will be used up as petrol for the under-powered engine of the capitalist economy.

Millions of people, wage workers, are forced to work every day in extremely harmful environments under worsening conditions. In these factories and workplaces any discussion regarding the dangers of the pandemic comes up against the bosses' interests and the only thing they consider legitimate: their profits.

Never in this epoch of crises has the historical crisis of capital been so enormously amplified. This pandemic has exposed the glaring incompatibility between the interests of the bosses and the working class. Never has the fundamental question been more sharply posed: our lives against their profits.

This system, both in the present situation and in the longer term, pretends that we are all equal as citizens as far as our health needs are concerned. The current reality shows that this is not the case.

The coronavirus crisis is highlighting what a state the capitalist system has been in for years and if the pandemic lasts much longer, things will get much, much worse. The rebound effect, which the usual "gurus" predict for the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2020, is a pious illusion. Their projections are based on worthless statistics, just like their analyses of the positive trend of the world economy before the 2008 crisis which, with very few exceptions, they had not predicted.

Now they are predicting a reduction in global GDP of 10-15% by the end of the year with an increase of hundreds of millions of unemployed and underemployed workers. The economic recovery, if indeed there is to be one, will need a lot of time before it can assert itself, and will only be temporary and unresolved in this decadent phase of the capitalist

system. Even if, hypothetically and with a great deal of luck, the spectre of Covid-19 goes soon, it is not as if everything will resume as before a week later.

China is economically on its knees: the latest data have estimated its first fall in GDP for half a century. The USA is up to its ears in debt and deficits and, in the space of three weeks from the end of March to the beginning of April, 26 million workers have asked for unemployment benefit, but this is only the beginning. Moreover the apparent prosperity of the United States is only based on the supremacy of the dollar and the most powerful armed forces in the world. Central Europe, Germany included, was already in a technical recession before the pandemic. The signs of a slowdown in the world economy were already obvious last year and the future looks increasingly bleak.

The fresh money that the European Central Bank and the Federal Reserve (both already over a trillion dollars) are supposed to be forking out will inflate the coffers of the banks but go to very few companies. Speculative bubbles will continue since firms' profit rates are too low to justify new investments; though there will be exceptions like the big players, which enjoy the intervention of the State when bank funding is insufficient.

After the very old, health workers and those who are clear victims of the cuts in health services, murdered by capitalism, the others to be hit are the factory workers, and the most oppressed sectors of our class which beyond "normal" exploitation have to endure the racist oppression of the bourgeoisie, working in the most precarious of situations where they are the least paid and most easily blackmailed. It is no accident that the "hotspots" of the epidemic have started precisely where the bosses have forced, and are forcing, workers into work, even if this means enormously increasing the possibility of infection because distancing is either impossible or very difficult. Moreover there is either no personal protective equipment or it is inadequate. The greatest numbers of deaths are to be found in the workers' suburbs of New York and some of the

industrial provinces of Northern Italy to give just two examples.

However the business world, indifferent to the massacre in progress, is pressing for a return to "normalcy" as soon as possible, that is, to the production of surplus value in all firms, to the detriment of the health of those both inside and outside the workplace. We hope therefore that workers once again struggle to defend their lives and the health of everyone. The mobilisations in recent weeks, in Europe and in other areas of the world, which have forced the unions to run to keep up with angry workers, have shown us how to transform impotence into resistance, on the basis of our immediate needs, instead of making sacrifices in the name of profit. But this is not enough.

From now on, we need to link the defence of the health of every worker to the perspective of a different society. We need a new social model that no longer puts production in conflict with human health, or with the delicate balance of the natural environment, already massively endangered by the destructive rapacity of capital. Never before has the contradiction between the collective health and well-being of humanity been in such stark contrast to the logic of profit. Otherwise, the logic of capitalism will be a war which would destroy just about everything, giving the capitalist system economic room for a new cycle of accumulation.

The virus attacking us is capitalism. Fighting this disease means building the communist alternative to this system of exploitation and death. This means connecting with workers to build and secure the political instrument of working class struggle: the internationalist and revolutionary class party, the future International.

We have always been committed to this task but today it is more important than ever, given that the situation is changing rapidly and time is of the essence.

There is an alternative to this system exists. The task of building it falls on those who are tired of being exploited and used by capitalism. Let's get ready for our appointment with history.



Gramsci



between
Marxism
and
Idealism

Onorato Damen

Prometheus Publications

Available
from radical
bookshops
or through
us at the
Klasbatalo
email
address.

Capitalism and Covid: Paycheques and Rents

For the working class the cost of a roof over our heads is a major expenditure, one that can push households further into debt and ultimately onto the streets. This report from our ICT affiliate in Canada shows how the coronavirus lockdown is exacerbating the housing problem for the working class. As in the UK, there has been no general rent moratorium, and many tenants have simply stopped paying their rent and left the problem a personal one for the future. In places like Montreal, which has a history of housing struggles, there are signs that tenants in some areas will once again get together to refuse to pay. For the revolutionary political organisation the question is how such an upsurge of fighting spirit amongst one grouping within the working class (tenants) can be broadened into a wider class resistance: one that will make it possible for us to highlight that this is part of a worldwide attack by global capitalism and allow us to pose the necessity for an equally global working class political organisation to get rid of the decrepit system which is bringing us all increasing misery.

After decades of a generalized assault on the working class, left limping since the great recession of 2008, driven increasingly into uber-style jobs often living in uber cars, the Coronavirus and the crisis of the boss economy come like a blow to the solar plexus. A core condition plaguing our class is, of course, all too often working in low paying jobs and barely being able to afford increasingly expensive housing. Indeed, in the US from “1960 – 2014.... inflation-adjusted rents have risen by 64%, but real household incomes only increased by 18%” and in “2000 – 2010: household incomes actually fell by 7%, while rents rose by 12%”. In the Canadian city of Hamilton in 2018 alone there was “a 24 per cent increase year over year, according to the National Rent Report” while in the American city of Los Angeles “the average rent in the city... has ballooned to \$2,527, a whopping 65% increase since 2010” with the national average at “36% over the same period”. The stagnation, or decimation, of wages next to rising rents is not a coincidence, a blip, something that some policy band aid could fix. The reality goes to the heart of the fundamental crisis of capitalism, the declining rate of profit.

In the face of this crisis there has been a long and generalized assault on the working class. Wages have been driven downwards by a variety of methods, such as the implementation of piecework common in the gig-economy, next to an overall assault on “the social wage” as



austerity has ravaged healthcare. In this situation, flipping properties and gentrification has provided capital a way to make a quick buck, of course with the help of the state. Through the easy sleazy rise of real estate speculation, and its massive financialization rents and housing prices have increased by as much as 10 to 20-fold in some places, Montreal being an example. In Montréal and Toronto, we have seen speculators joining with the state to gut what protection was given by the various government measures, such as rental boards; measures that were won over the years by class struggle. This dual precarity of rising rents, declining wages and juggling multiple jobs has placed large swaths of our class in a position where fighting the boss presents itself a major gamble with homelessness as the devastating draw. Enter the coronavirus...

The response to covid 19 has exposed the underlying crises of global capitalism and its priorities. Decades of austerity and cuts have seriously damaged the means to provide the basics to the vast majority of the working class. From the gutting and commercialization of education to the savaging of the medical care systems globally and with governments around the world implementing social distancing and lockdown policies, many workers have found themselves effectively locked out of their previous income. In America “6.6 million people filed jobless claims in the week ending 4 April” with “Over the last three weeks, more than 16 million people have made unemployment claims”. In Canada, as of March, “44 per cent of Canadian households say they’ve lost work”, and of those 44% “66 per cent

of Canadians said their employer is not paying for any lost hours”. In Alberta, a province on the brink since the drop of oil prices in 2014, Premier Jason Kenney has claimed “I fully expect unemployment in Alberta to be at least 25 per cent...”. Nationwide, with “almost 6 million Canadians employed in those sectors that are hardest hit”, and with 50 per cent layoffs in these sectors not improbable, in these industries alone Canada may be facing 3 million jobs lost. The devastation as a result of these layoffs can only be fully understood by reflecting on the already precarious housing conditions facing so many workers. Data in 2016 showed that of renting Canadians only “46% of working tenant households have less than one month of employment income in savings” and 67% with 3 months or less. The worst of these numbers are in the maritime provinces with 70% working households in Prince Edward Island having less than a month’s income in savings available. And with Alberta looking at 25% unemployment, as predicted by the premier, over 50% of working households have less than a month’s income available. Despite various emergency measures described as “vague, non-committal and non-binding rules”, the fact is that for the working-class rent is coming due, and the savings are running out.

Suffering from a series of past defeats the working class has found itself at the mercy of this crisis. Nonetheless, emerging pockets of struggle can serve as a clear reference point for future basic defensive actions. The idea of rent strikes is not foreign to recent news headlines. Even before the corona crisis, rising rents had pushed many

workers towards tenant struggle as a necessary defence against the generalized assault. At this moment it is unclear what the scope and impact of such struggle will take. But what is important to point out is that where there was an existing reference point, a class memory, the working class will be best suited for future actions. So it is not a surprise that in Toronto, a “city (which) has the highest rent rates in Canada, with \$2,322 the average monthly price for an apartment” and “750,000 rental units” the slogan ‘Keep Your Rent’ has been plastered on city walls and has spread across social media posts. This did not appear out of a vacuum. Many tenants in Toronto can point to the Parkdale tenants’ struggles of 2018, in which “a two-month rent strike at a west Toronto highrise... (ended) after a landlord abandoned a bid to raise tenants’ rents by more than double the amount recommended by the government”, to draw lessons from. In Los Angeles, with staggering rent prices and a new hit of unemployment, tenants and activists have declared “a rent strike for May is among the options”.

We can never be certain about the direction of struggle, but what is important is that communists aim to put the housing situation in the context of the overall crisis. We make the connection between the workplace and the apartment, and situate local reference points to the total struggle of our class, in a situation where for more and more wage workers it is becoming impossible to live in the old way (Marx). The necessity to organise politically for the revolutionary overthrow of the bosses and their state is no longer a matter of abstract debate.



What Does Klasbatalo Fight For?

We fight for the political independence of the working class, which means we reject all cross-class alliances with the capitalist class, including its left-wing. We believe the working class must fight on its own terrain: first, to defend itself against the bosses’ attacks; and, second, to achieve its ultimate task, that of establishing the world communist future which will rid the planet of exploitation, oppression, and war. It is towards this goal that we fight for the creation of the world communist party, whose purpose is to clarify the confusions among the class and to unify it towards its ultimate end; we believe this party to be the most potent weapon of our class. While we are for the party, we do not believe ourselves to be the party, nor do we believe that our organization alone will become it; rather, we see it as the product of both the wider class struggle, and of the real work of revolutionaries, of which we see ourselves as only one of many elements. We do not see this party as a government-in-waiting, for the emancipation of humanity depends on the active struggle of the whole working class, and this struggle cannot be replaced by the dictates of a minority.

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/Klasbatalocollective>

Email: klasbatalocollective@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.leftcom.org/en>