



# Coronavirus – Axe Falls on the Working Class

Capitalism's continuous plunder and destruction of the natural environment is forcing animals such as bats, rodents and other small creatures into our cities. They bring their diseases with them and pass them on to humans. We have no immunity to these new viruses and the result is epidemics like SARS, MERS and the present pandemic Covid-19. Capitalism is the real mother of the virus! The effects of Covid-19 have been devastating. By November more than 50 million people worldwide had been infected and officially 1.2 million had died. These figures are certainly a big underestimation. In addition the IMF estimates the pandemic will plunge 90 million more people into extreme poverty, which means being forced to survive on less than \$1.90 per day.

In Britain the second wave of infections is relentlessly building up. The priority of our rulers, of course, is to get as many of us as possible back into wage labour, producing profits for them, as soon as possible. Our deaths are collateral damage. Their scheme of a 3 tier local lockdown where some areas continue working while others are under different levels of lock down was aimed at this but the virus has run riot and continuing with this scheme was going to cause even more economic damage than abandoning it. Our rulers have been forced to impose another lockdown of the whole country and to extend the 80% wage scheme for workers prevented from working. This scheme left 2 million workers earning less than the minimum wage in April and the situation in November will be worse. For workers on below minimum wages who were previously just surviving, and those forced onto universal credit, this will mean even more hardship, missing meals, not paying the rent or even homelessness. Between 4 and 5 million children are now living in poverty.

The capitalist response to Covid is relentlessly creating misery! The government tells us we are all in this crisis together but that's a lie. It's not just wage cuts but also deaths from the virus which are falling most heavily on the working class and in particular on the most deprived and savagely exploited sectors, such as the sweatshops in Leicester and elsewhere where poor housing and overcrowding increases transmission of the disease. The ruling class has not taken pay cuts. Johnson even complained that his

£150 000 salary was not enough to live on. According to the Swiss bank UBS, billionaires have actually seen their fortunes increase during the pandemic. They have risen by 27% since April and their net worth is now worth \$10.2tn, equivalent to 12% of global GDP. Global inequality is becoming more and more obscene. The UK government, meanwhile, has used emergency powers legislated under Covid to hand out literally tens of billions in contracts to cronies and Tory donors, without any competition or oversight, in a display of shameless corruption.

## The Eye of the Storm

The situation in Britain will get a lot worse in the months ahead. In November 5.5 million workers were on the 80% of wages furlough scheme. Many could not pay their bills on 100% of their wages and were going into debt. This 80% subsidy will be scaled down from December onwards just as the second wave of the virus infections is expected to peak. The new lockdown is expected to bankrupt many businesses, particularly in the services sector – approximately 80% of the UK economy. This will produce a mass of redundancies and many of those on furlough will be forced onto benefits. It is estimated that 1 in 8 of the working population will be unemployed, raising unemployment to 4 million or more. Since the benefits system, just like the health system, has been shredded over the last decade this is already creating massive hardship but will get much worse. We are at present in the eye of the storm but the



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full destructive force of this crisis is not far ahead. The collapse of the economy is matched only by what happened in the 1930s and is making the state less able to cushion the full effect of the meltdown.

## Economic Collapse

The global economy had not recovered from the great recession of 2007/8 and was teetering on the brink of another economic crisis when Covid-19 struck. The virus has made a bad situation a whole lot worse. The capitalist class has met this disaster with massive injections of funds from the central banks. By October central banks have pumped \$11.7 trillion, equivalent to 13% of global GDP, into the system. Almost none of this money has gone into productive investment. Instead it has gone into loan guarantees to industry to prevent bankruptcy, buying government debt, grants to locked-down workers and schemes to prevent social unrest. In the first 6 months of 2020 the British state has been forced to spend £300bn on measures to combat the virus. Each passing month and each new lockdown increase the amount which needs to be borrowed or printed. The national debt is now 104% of GDP and the GDP itself was predicted to contract by 10.4% in 2020 by the IMF. This calculation was made before the November lockdown so it will be even worse. The Bank of England is consulting commercial banks about introducing negative interest rates, the first time in its 326 years history. Economic figures which would normally be regarded as catastrophic are appearing every day. In short, capitalism worldwide is in a crisis of

historic proportions. Interest and capital on these debts will have to be paid off or the currency will have to be devalued leading to massive inflation. Who is going to shoulder the burden of all this? Already Sunak has stated his intention of balancing the budget. As in all previous crises our rulers will try to load the effects of this crisis onto the backs of the working class.

## Need for Collective Struggle

An indication of what is to come is shown by our rulers' refusal to give the majority of essential workers a pay rise. After getting the country to join in a weekly clap for the wonderful work the health workers, particularly the nurses, were doing, they refused to give them a pay rise! Demonstrations by nurses have been ignored. Instead, a pay rise was given to their armed retainers – the police and army. The very forces they will use against us if there is any serious resistance on the streets to the austerity and taxes they plan to heap on us.

The working class produces not only all the goods and services which pay for our wages but also all the profits which the capitalist class share out among themselves. This is why our rulers are desperate to keep us working even if conditions are unsafe and some of us die. More workers are refusing to accept this. There have been strikes against work in unsafe conditions in many countries. In the UK postal workers have struck in many cities, there have been wildcat strikes by food workers in Northern Ireland and power workers at Alstom gas plant. Cleaners for Ridge Crest Cleaning have struck. "We are not prepared to die for your profits," should be the general cry, but many workers have continued to work in unsafe conditions and unfortunately there have been many deaths, particularly among essential workers in health, food and transport. A collective refusal either to work in unsafe conditions or to accept pay cuts is needed. A fightback which spreads on a mass scale could halt all the capitalist attacks which are coming. But this would only be a start; a temporary victory. A more fundamental struggle for a new society is needed. A society organised to produce for human needs not for capitalist profit. Capitalism itself is the real problem, it is the real virus driving us to destruction. Capitalism needs to be overthrown!

# Turning the Planet into an Uninhabitable Hell

While capitalism's latest child, Covid-19, rains death down on us, capitalism's destruction of the planet is actually taking us down a path towards human extinction. According to a United Nations report published in September, the world has failed to meet any of the targets set in 2010 to protect biodiversity and one fifth of all countries are at risk of their ecosystems collapsing. The report concludes that "We are turning our only home into an uninhabitable hell for millions of people." In addition to the biodiversity destruction, global heating gets steadily worse. None of

the carbon emissions reduction goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Conference have been met. Instead we are heading for at least double the agreed temperature rise this century, between 3 and 5 degrees centigrade! Despite a fall in carbon emissions due to the coronavirus pandemic, CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere have continued to rise steadily and are now 417ppm – a rise of 33% since 1960. This means one thing only – more global heating. Polar ice sheets melt, forest fires rage from the US to Australia to Siberia, coral reefs die and we approach

the dreaded tipping points, the points of no return where no human action makes any difference; yet the capitalist system is incapable of changing course!

The UK government is doing next to nothing either to slow a decline in biodiversity or to lower our carbon emissions. Boris Johnson made a speech at the UN biodiversity summit in October, where he promised to protect 30% of land for biodiversity. However, the proposed protected area refers to land protected for beauty, not wildlife; and some of it is poor in biodiversity due to decades of

overgrazing. This and his latest commitment to more wind turbines, which he previously dismissed as "seagull slicers", are just, well, hot air.

## Liberal Protest will Fail

The environmental movement Extinction Rebellion (XR) organised a week of action in September including marches and disrupting the distribution of newspapers. This coincided with the presentation of the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) bill by Green MP Caroline Lucas. The CEE bill attempts to get the government to stick



to and go further than its commitments of limiting global temperature rise this century to 1.5°C. The bill aims to create a “Citizens’ Assembly,” one of XR’s demands, to decide the necessary measures needed. Of course, anything which reduces profits, including this bill, will never be agreed by parliament, since parliament is the executive of the capitalist class. Its job is to protect profits.

XR attempts to make the capitalist class embrace a green capitalism, but this is turning out to be like trying to persuade a shark to become a vegetarian. The failure of XR has led some of its leading members to form a more radical organisation, but one with fundamentally the same aim. Roger Hallam, one of the founding members of XR, split to start this new organisation, known as Beyond Politics, which trades under the name Burning Pink. This group want to take more disruptive action and dismiss XR as ineffective and middle class. They have got themselves arrested for various stunts. The state is, of course, watching and in August Hallam and four other members of the group were arrested in their homes, charged with conspiracy to cause public nuisance and remanded in gaol. In the statements of those arrested and published by Burning

Pink, they make clear that they see themselves as part of the liberal tradition of the suffragettes, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mandela. One of the co-founders of Beyond Politics, Valerie Brown, plans to stand for election as London mayor. The group is clearly not beyond bourgeois politics. Despite the talk of putting environmental control into the hands of citizens’ assemblies, which Hallam in a new pamphlet “Common Sense” describes as revolution, there is no mention of the real problem which is capitalist production. There is no understanding that the capitalist system itself demands continual accumulation of capital if it is not to collapse. This equals continual growth. Continual growth, such as the present doubling of global GDP every 25 years, on a finite planet is impossible. It equals environmental destruction and pollution on a global scale leading to a new mass extinction.

No Solution in Capitalism

Why have decades of climate conferences, pious resolutions to halt global warming and environmental destruction led to a situation where global heating and environmental destruction are both accelerating? The answer is because



capitalist production is for profit and capitalists will not reduce pollution if that reduces profits. Rather than admit this, members of the ruling class, like fossil fuel capitalists and others, have spent decades financing climate change denial lobbies and think tanks to rubbish climate science.

The truth is that only through abolishing capitalism and building a society that produces for human needs instead of profit, does humanity have any chance of survival. We call such a society communism. It has nothing to do with the state capitalism which existed in Russia. It is a society without classes, where the means of production are social property

and production is for human need, where states and borders are abolished and control is by a system of workers’ councils. Only in such a society, by means of global planning and ending the massive waste production of today, can we begin to reverse the terrible damage which capitalism has inflicted on the planet. The struggle to create a higher system of production is really the only real struggle against environmental destruction. Anyone who seriously wants to save humanity from extinction has no choice but to join the struggle for a new society.

Join the internationalist communists and fight for the communist programme!

# The US Election is Over: The Capitalist Nightmare Continues!

With the election of Biden to the post of “leader” of the so-called “free world”, many are celebrating. The US ruling class are, of course, delighted to see the back of Trump whom they accuse of having made a complete mess of protecting US interests. The embarrassment of the previous four years can now be swept under the carpet and business as usual can recommence. However, for the US working class there is nothing to celebrate since nothing will fundamentally change. Trump and Biden represent different wings of the same ruling class, but are united with respect to the basic questions facing US capitalism. Differences between them are tactical. The new leader, Biden, was recorded assuring wealthy party donors that “nothing would fundamentally change” in the event of his election!

Generally Democrats consider Trump to have undermined US imperialism worldwide. Examples are his repudiation of the Paris Climate agreement, withdrawal from the World Health Organisation, paralysing the World Trade Organisation, withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement, withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement and weakening of alliances. Leaving the TPP, for example, handed the initiative in East Asia to Beijing. While Biden may reverse some of these things, and though he may pursue US interests through the language of human rights, for example in regard to the persecution of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang, Taiwan sovereignty, repression in Hong Kong, etc., the general thrust of policy to re-energise US imperialism remains the same. Both Trump and Biden see China as the main threat to US economic and military hegemony over the world, and both think the Chinese juggernaut must be stopped, by force if necessary. Preparations for doing this will continue under Biden.

Impoverishment of

US Working Class

The situation of the US working class has become steadily worse over the last 4 decades, and it made no difference whether the administration was Republican or Democrat. There are now more than

550,000 homeless in the US and 11% of the population live in poverty while the real unemployment rate is around 25%. Some calculations, which include those who have stopped looking for work, put the unemployment rate as double this number. Neither party offered any unemployment assistance in their election promises. They saw no point in assisting surplus people whom they could no longer exploit and who were heading for homelessness and destined for the tent cities, which sprung up after the 2008 recession, and now exist in at least 27 major US cities. Since the Covid crisis began, many workers are being forced to work without proper PPE for low wages, adding to the atmosphere of seething discontent. In this period there have been many wildcat strikes over inadequate protection at work and pay. Police murders, like that of George Floyd, added a spark to this tinder box resulting in riots across the country.

As usual, the ruling class has used the election to attempt to channel all this fury into the democratic charade. Both sides never stopped going on about the importance of voting and the dire consequences if the other side won. In a direct appeal to the working class the so-called “radical” Bernie Sanders tried to direct working class discontent into support for the Democratic Party. But in reality the election was only to select which section of the ruling class continues to administer the bitter medicine. All the songs of praise we are now hearing about the wonders of democracy and how Biden represents the will of the people are hypocritical nonsense. Even by bourgeois standards the election system is a shambles. The person who gets the most votes does not always win and the result is sometimes decided via a packed court. This is exactly what Trump is now trying to do. In fact both Republicans and Democrats try to prevent people registering to vote if they think they might vote for the opposition and they shamelessly gerrymander voting boundaries for congress and senate elections. 20 million are simply prevented from voting for one reason or another. An estimated 5.2 million can’t vote because of their felony record, while the present prison population is about 3 million –

something Biden himself helped to establish through his 1994 crime bill. Our rulers are ecstatic about the large numbers voting. They tell us this proves US democracy still works. In fact, the large numbers are because the electorate has increased in size and the turnout was only 62%, 3% up on 2016. Even so, the numbers who didn’t bother to vote still exceeded the votes cast for either candidate; hardly a ringing endorsement of bourgeois democracy!

Capitalist democracy is in reality the fig leaf which camouflages the dictatorship of the capitalist class over society. It legitimises the rule of the ruling class and our exploitation. In elections the exploiters want to con us into thinking that the passive act of voting will solve the problems foisted on us by a system loaded against us. It is an attempt to induce our passivity. The causes of discontent for the US and world working class, are the result of an insoluble and chronic global economic crisis. Workers’ struggles were on the increase before coronavirus bought the system time but they have not gone away. But many of these struggles have

been defensive or simply demanded crumbs from the rich man’s table. We have to go further. The answer to capitalist elections is the self activity of the working class everywhere in a mass movement across all sectors and all countries. Faced with a decaying social system this struggle has to aim to dismantle the capitalist state and replace it with a system of workers’ councils. These will be composed of elected recallable delegates which will end exploitation and create a society in which long-term human needs not short term production for profit will be the determinant of all decisions taken. We have a world to win.

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What We Stand For

**Aurora** is published by the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO).

The CWO stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers' councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: we call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world working class political organisation – a ‘party’ for want of a better word – not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power.

We are not in competition with other organisations but seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world’s population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

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