

Down With the Lockdowns!

The Working Class Must Defend Itself

Miserable health care, decrepit housing, production for profit, imperialist domination: the very nature of capitalist class rule fuels the economic and health crisis that has ravaged the world since the outbreak of Covid-19. The parasitic bourgeoisies have responded to the pandemic with the means that best serve their interests, forcibly locking up their entire populations at home, pending vaccination.

The bourgeoisies' lockdowns are a *reactionary* public health measure. Workers must oppose them! Lockdowns may well temporarily slow the spread of infections, but they *weaken* the fighting ability of the working class. By shutting down whole branches of industry and services, they have caused an economic crisis and thrown masses of people into unemployment. Closures of schools and childcare facilities have increased the oppressive burden of the family. State repression has been severely increased as democratic and working-class rights have been gutted. Gatherings, protests, travel, strikes, union organizing: all have been restricted or banned. Lockdowns aim to prevent working-class struggle, the only way workers can genuinely protect their health and combat the social causes of the crisis.

Invoking "shared sacrifice," the capitalists have launched a blitzkrieg against the working class. Union-busting, massive layoffs, wage cuts and speedups are the "new normal." Faced with the combined threats of a deadly virus and the capitalist onslaught, the working class stands disarmed.

Around the world, the pro-capitalist leaders of both trade unions and workers parties have loyally collaborated with the ruling class in its offensive. In the name of national unity and fighting the virus, they are betraying the working class.

From the British and Australian Labor parties to the German Social Democratic Party and Die Linke, the French Socialist and Communist parties and the South African Communist Party, the labor misleaders play a key role in enforcing the lockdowns, locally and nationally, and showing them down the throats of workers and the oppressed. From the American AFL-CIO to the Mexican and Italian trade unions to the Japanese Rengo, Zenroren and Zenrokyo federations, union leaders urge their members to support the bourgeoisies' measures: stay home and get screwed!

The urgent need to defend the health and livelihoods of the working class directly poses the task of forging a new leadership of the workers movement. Unions need to fight *against* the capitalist state shutting down industries and *for* safe working conditions. The decrepit health care and housing infrastructure needs to be rebuilt and expanded *now*. The expropriation of the capitalists' best real estate combined with massive public works programs is necessary to provide decent living conditions for working people.

At every step, the basic interests of the workers and oppressed run up against the pillars of capitalist class rule.

Break with the Labor Traitors— Reforge the Fourth International!

The current crisis sharply poses the need for women's emancipation from the shackles of the family, for ending racial oppression and for liberation from imperialist exploitation. The only way forward for humanity is through workers revolutions and the establishment of an international socialist planned economy.

Faced with the utter bankruptcy of the established leaders of the workers movement and their pseudo-Marxist lackeys, the vital question posed for the class-conscious proletarians is the need for a leadership based on the revolutionary program of Trotskyism—authentic Marxism-Leninism. The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) strives to build an international Leninist vanguard party, the essential instrument for bringing revolutionary consciousness to the proletariat and achieving workers power. *Reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution!*

Down With Class Collaboration and National Unity!

For the last year, the position of the ICL was to accept the lockdowns as necessary. We repudiate this position. It was a capitulation to the “national unity” rallying cry that all classes should support the lockdowns because they save lives.

For this supposedly universal cause, the labor tops have willingly sacrificed the proletariat's interests. Like public health in general, fighting the pandemic does not stand above class antagonisms. Behind the capitalists' concern for “saving lives,” they in fact pursue their class interests. The bourgeoisie's interest in public health is to maintain a workforce fit enough for exploitation at the cheapest possible cost while protecting its own health. Contrary to this reactionary aim, the proletariat has an interest in securing the best living conditions and health care for all. These clearly counterposed class interests cannot be reconciled, pandemic or not. It is only through its independent mobilization *against* the bourgeoisie that the working class can defend its health and safety.

The bourgeoisie blackmails workers with the idea that fighting for their interests spreads disease—that union meetings and protests threaten public health; that health care workers kill people by fighting for better working conditions; that schools and day care centers must be closed to protect children. This is a big lie! Fighting against the lockdowns is the necessary starting point to address the social causes of the current disaster. Union meetings are *essential* to workers' self-defense. *Struggle* by health care workers is the road to better health care. Fighting against school and day-care closures is the *precondition* for better schools and child-care—and furthers the struggle for women's emancipation.

In *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938), Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky insisted:

“In a society based upon exploitation, the highest morality is that of the social revolution. All methods are good which raise the class-consciousness of the workers, their trust in their own forces, their readiness for self-sacrifice in the struggle. The impermissible methods are those which implant fear and submissiveness in the oppressed in the face of their oppressors.”

The bourgeoisie always uses supreme moral imperatives such as “saving lives” to justify its crimes. The German and French imperialists use the European Union to plunder the proletariat across Europe in the name of “peace” and “social progress.” The American imperialists and their NATO allies have devastated Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and many more countries in the name of “democracy” and “freedom.” They invaded Somalia in 1992 to “feed the starving.” When the bourgeoisie urgently cries about “saving lives,” this is *always* used to instill submission to the ruling class and rally national unity behind its interests.

For Union Control of Safety!

The capitalist state—constituted at its core by the police, prisons, army and courts—is an apparatus of organized violence to maintain the rule and profits of the exploiting class. While Marxists support certain state-enforced public health measures beneficial to the working class, such as mandatory vaccinations, it is suicidal to rely on the state to protect health and safety.

The Stalinists of the Communist Party of Greece are experts in distorting such ABCs of Marxism. One of the main demands they raise in the unions is:

“Organized sanitary control to prevent spread of the virus, under the responsibility of state agencies, at the port of Piraeus, at Cosco [shipping company], on the ships, in the shipbuilding and repair zone, in factories and industrial units employing thousands of workers.”

—*Rizospastis* (1 April)

This means tying the working class to the capitalist state and spreading illusions in the benevolence of its health agencies. Workers have to fight for *union control of safety*. The unions, *not* the capitalist state, should determine what conditions are safe to work under.

Unions are the elementary defense organizations of the working class. Their purpose is to defend workers on the job, not fight for the workers to stay home. Contrary to this, in many countries the leaders of the teachers unions have fought for governments to keep schools shut in order to “protect” teachers and students. This is a craven refusal to fight for safe schools. Against the “stay home and wait” politics of the union bureaucrats, a class-struggle leadership must be built based on mobilizing the union ranks and the whole labor movement against closures, for better schools and safe workplaces.

Union organizing drives are urgently needed to unite and strengthen the proletariat. Temporary and subcontracted workers need to be brought into the unions with full union wages and benefits. Unionizing employees with little social power—in retail, restaurants, bars, delivery services, etc.—will bring them under the protection of the organized working class.

Reopen the Economy! Fight Unemployment!

Tailing the labor traitors, the pretenders to Trotskyism have been prostrating themselves before the bourgeoisie. Lutte Ouvrière, the International Marxist Tendency (IMT), the World Socialist Web Site, the Internationalist Group, the Trotskyist Fraction—Fourth International & Co.: all have embraced the lockdowns, betraying the proletariat.

The IMT, for example, demanded: "All non-essential production should be immediately brought to a halt. Workers should be sent home with full pay for as long as it is necessary" (marxist.com, 20 March 2020). This is an utterly reactionary call that could only lead to more layoffs! The IMT wants to throw whole layers of the working class out of work and onto welfare.

The working class derives its social power from its role in production. The labor movement needs to *oppose* layoffs and furloughs by fighting for union-run hiring and training, and for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay in order to spread work among all hands. The current crisis cries out for *increased* production and services: more and better medical care; mass construction of public housing; spacious and well-ventilated buildings for schools and day care; better public transport. Reopening and expanding the economy is necessary to meet the needs of working people and to combat unemployment and pauperization.

For Quality Health Care, Free at the Point of Service!

The system of production for profit cannot provide adequate health care. Expropriate without compensation the private and religious hospitals and pharmaceutical companies! For mass, union-run training and hiring of medical and hospital workers! Abolish patents, so vaccines and medicines can be mass-produced throughout the world!

Facing the crumbling ruins of the health care systems, reformists of all stripes have raised calls to nationalize health care. For one, Left Voice, U.S. section of the Trotskyist Fraction, calls to "nationalize all health-related industries under workers' control" (*Left Voice*, 13 April 2020). Don't be fooled by the left-sounding rhetoric of these social democrats. Left Voice advocates *stricter* lockdowns, which would further inhibit any kind of mass action by the prole-

ariat, rendering the fight for better health care impossible.

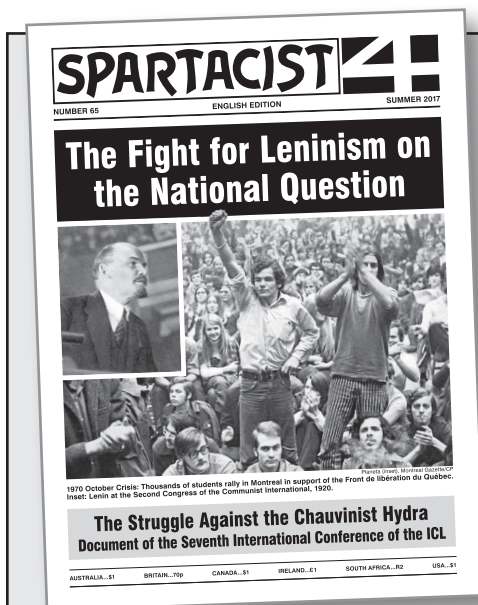
Here is Left Voice's model for workers control: "In Argentina, workers are showing us how this can be done. Worker-controlled factories without bosses across the country are beginning to produce for need instead of greed." What Left Voice is talking about is the takeover of a few bankrupt and peripheral factories in capitalist Argentina. This is *not* a model for what is needed. Left Voice's perspective is for workers management of a nationalized health care system in the framework of capitalism, i.e., institutionalized class collaboration. Freeing health care from the profiteers can only be achieved through sweeping away the bourgeois state, replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat and expropriating the capitalist class.

The Working Class Must Defend All the Oppressed!

The lowest layers of the middle class are being devastated. The criminal support of labor leaders and all the reformist left to the lockdowns has ceded the ground to the far right, allowing sinister reactionaries and outright fascists to posture as defenders of democratic rights and champions of the ruined petty bourgeoisie. A revolutionary party would mobilize the working class to defend all of the oppressed and rally them to the workers' side in the fight against the bourgeoisie.

In Asia, Latin America and Africa, millions of poor peasants are bled dry by landlords and banks while street traders are being starved by the lockdowns. Everywhere, small shops, bars and restaurants as well as students are choked by debt. *Cancel all their debt!*

Millions of white-collar workers have been forced to work from home. "Remote" work fuels layoffs and unpaid overtime, atomizes the workforce and makes anti-union attacks easier and union organizing virtually impossible.

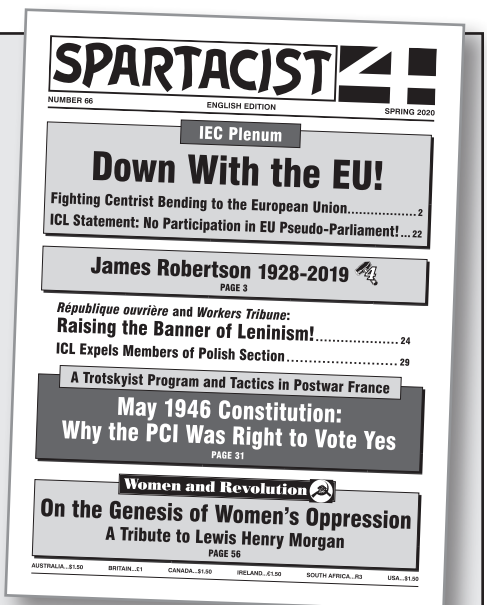


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Strikes are not won on Zoom but on picket lines. Any union worthy of its name needs to oppose “remote” work schemes.

Immigrants form a crucial component of the working class and are disproportionately employed in the hard-hit service industries with miserable pay. To unite its ranks, the working class needs to fight *for full citizenship rights for all immigrants!*

Socialize the Functions of the Family!

The bourgeoisie is trying with all its might to turn back the wheel of history. The lockdowns are dumping childcare, education and care for the elderly entirely onto the family, mainly on women’s shoulders. Women are forced back into the home, losing jobs in greater numbers than men, and are victims of a sharp increase in domestic violence. Children and teens are imprisoned with their parents. Elderly people are left to die alone in lousy care homes.

If the lockdowns have shown one thing, it is that the feminist program of redistributing household tasks inside the family is a dead end. What is needed is to take household chores out of the family: free 24-hour day care, collective kitchens and laundries, quality retirement centers.

The lockdowns have reinforced capitalism’s pillar institutions—the state, the church as well as the family. The emancipation of women can only be achieved as part of a worldwide socialist transformation that will include replacing the family with socialized childcare and housework. *For women’s liberation through socialist revolution!*

Down With Imperialism!

The world imperialist system, where a few great powers compete over the division of the world, exploiting billions, is the very source of the current global crisis. The pandemic cries out for a coordinated international response. But in a system based on interimperialist rivalries and competing nation-states, this is impossible. Imperialism has crushed and stalled the economic, social and cultural development of the world in the interests of the stock exchanges of Wall

Street, Tokyo, London, Frankfurt and Paris. The imperialists are using this crisis to tighten the stranglehold of international finance capital on the dependent countries. *Cancel the imperialist-imposed debt! Down with the UN, IMF, NATO, NAFTA 2.0 and the European Union!*

Defend China! The imperialists are redoubling their efforts for capitalist counterrevolution to overturn the 1949 Revolution and open the Chinese deformed workers state for their depredation. For workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy!

For New October Revolutions!

South Korea, Sweden, Australia? The bourgeois press is filled with never-ending debate about which country has better balanced mass death and mass repression. We Marxists have an entirely different model: the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. By breaking the shackles of capitalist exploitation, the working class under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks made a giant stride for human progress. The Soviet workers state’s public health system was one of its great achievements, despite being forged in the crucible of civil war and imperialist invasion in a landscape already laid waste by world war. The man who led its creation, Nikolai Semashko, wrote in 1919:

“To move the urban poor from musty dungeons to spacious rooms in well-built houses, to really struggle with social disease, to create normal conditions of work for the worker—all this is unattainable if we are to regard private property as something holy and inviolable. The old health system hesitated before it as before an insurmountable barrier; Soviet power—Communist power—has broken this barrier.”

—“The Tasks of Public Health in Soviet Russia,” published in William G. Rosenberg, ed., *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990)

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