

# **The Police and Surveillance State in the Post-Lockdown Phase**

*A global review of the ruling class's plans of expanding the bonapartist state machinery amidst the COVID-19 crisis*

*By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 21 May 2020, [www.thecommunists.net](http://www.thecommunists.net)*

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## Introduction

There are a number of indications that the phase of global total lockdown – which has been imposed since March under the cover of the COVID-19 crisis – is gradually coming to an end. Some governments have either relaxed the most severe conditions of their lockdown regime – at least in parts of the respective country – or they have announced dates when they will do so in the foreseeable future.

In this article we will not repeat the RCIT's comprehensive analysis of the COVID-19 crisis which we have outlined since the beginning of February in several dozen documents including a Manifesto and new book. <sup>1</sup> To summarize it briefly we characterize the current historic situation as a *Triple Crisis*, consisting of a combination of:

- 1) The *Third Depression* of the capitalist world economy, i.e. the worst slump since 1929-33;<sup>2</sup>
- 2) A global shift of the ruling class towards *chauvinist state bonapartism*, i.e. a dramatic expansion of its repressive state apparatus, an acceleration of Great Power rivalry (first and foremost between the two largest imperialist powers U.S. and China) <sup>3</sup>, as well as an increase of chauvinism against migrants;
- 3) The COVID-19 pandemic, a serious pandemic which has cost the lives of 300,000 people worldwide until now. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The RCIT has analyzed the current crisis extensively since its beginning. Starting from 2 February we have published more than three dozen documents which are all collected at a special sub-page in our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/collection-of-articles-on-the-2019-corona-virus/>. In particular we refer readers to the new book by Michael Pröbsting: *The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution: What It Is and How to Fight It. A Marxist analysis and strategy for the revolutionary struggle*, RCIT Books, April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-covid-19-global-counterrevolution/>; see also the RCIT Manifesto: *COVID-19: A Cover for a Major Global Counterrevolutionary Offensive. We are at a turning point in the world situation as the ruling classes provoke a war-like atmosphere in order to legitimize the build-up of chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes*, 21 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-a-cover-for-a-major-global-counterrevolutionary-offensive/>.

<sup>2</sup> See on this e.g. the above mentioned book by Michael Pröbsting: *The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution* (chapter I) as well as Michael Pröbsting: *No, the Corona Virus is not the Main Cause of the Global Economic Slump! Bourgeois Media Officially Recognize the Beginning of another Great Recession*, 3 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/corona-virus-is-not-the-main-cause-of-global-economic-slump/>; Chapter "*Another Great Recession has begun*" in RCIT: *World Perspectives 2020: A Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries*, 8 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2020/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Another Great Recession of the Capitalist World Economy Has Begun. The economic crisis is an important factor in the current dramatic shift in the world situation*, 19 October 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/another-great-recession-of-the-capitalist-world-economy-has-begun/>; see also Michael Pröbsting: *The Next Looming Great Recession. Observations on the Latest Stock Market Slump and the Structural Crisis of the Capitalist World Economy*, 12 October 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-next-looming-great-recession/>

<sup>3</sup> See on this e.g. the latest RCIT statement: *Escalating Cold War between the Great Powers amid the COVID-19 Crisis. Workers and oppressed must oppose both U.S. and Chinese imperialism!* 14.05.2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/escalating-cold-war-between-the-great-powers-amid-the-covid-19-crisis/>

<sup>4</sup> See on this e.g. Almedina Gunić: *How could WHO and World Bank exactly predict COVID-19? The shady role of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/how-could-who-and-world-bank-exactly-predict-covid-19/>;

In this article we will focus on dealing with possible measures of the ruling class to expand the state repression and suppress democratic rights in the Post-Lockdown phase.

### **An expected development**

It is not surprising that the phase of a total global lockdown is coming to an end. We have predicted this development in various RCIT publications. We noted at the beginning of the current counter-revolutionary offensive that *“it is likely that the ruling classes will keep the global state of emergency for weeks if not months.”*<sup>5</sup> Likewise, we explained *“that the current state of emergency with a comprehensive lockdown in large parts of the world (...) is an extreme situation which will not and can not last very long.”*<sup>6</sup>

The reasons for this are pretty obvious. The drastic lockdown caused massive economic damage, hunger among the popular masses as well as extraordinary social trauma. The capitalist class does not want to continue such a total lockdown for much longer as it needs to revive the value-creating production. Likewise, the popular masses are not prepared to accept their imprisonment for much longer. This is particularly the case in countries where the consequences of the lockdown – e.g. mass unemployment, hunger, expulsion of rural migrants from cities, brutal state repression, etc. – are much more drastic and noticeable than the consequences of the Corona Virus.

It is only the middle class intelligentsia (doing their jobs now via “Home Office”), with their liberals and opportunist leftists, who believe in the possibility and desirability of an indefinite continuation of such a state of emergency controlled by the bonapartist state machinery until a vaccination has been found (may be at the end of the year, may be next year).

Furthermore, the bourgeoisie could already use the period of lockdown in order to drastically expand the repressive state apparatus. As we noted, the ruling class’s *“goal is to advance their counterrevolutionary attacks as much as possible in this time [of lockdown, Ed.] so that they can present the popular masses after this period with the implementation of radical political and economic changes as a fait accompli.”*<sup>7</sup> Hence, in addition to the above mentioned negative consequences of an overstretched lockdown, it also does not need it any longer for its political bonapartist goals.

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Almedina Gunić: COVID-19 and the cruel Double Standard of Imperialism. What agreement with measures like social distancing and lockdowns really means, 20th March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-and-the-cruel-double-standard-of-imperialism/>

Almedina Gunić: No, most likely it is not COVID-19 that is going to kill you. A manageable epidemic became public enemy number one distracting from the real killers, 16 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/no-most-likely-it-is-not-covid-19-that-is-going-to-kill-you/>;

see also the above mentioned book by Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution (chapter I).

<sup>5</sup> RCIT Manifesto: COVID-19: A Cover for a Major Global Counterrevolutionary Offensive

<sup>6</sup> Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution (chapter II), p. 46

<sup>7</sup> RCIT Manifesto: COVID-19: A Cover for a Major Global Counterrevolutionary Offensive

## The Lockdown was not directed against the pandemic

One could object that the governments have no reason to end the lockdown phase because the COVID-19 pandemic has not been overcome yet. But such an argument ignores the real purpose of the lockdown. The ruling class never conceived the lockdown primarily as an instrument against the pandemic. As the RCIT emphasized since the beginning of the crisis, the bourgeoisie created the panic about the Corona Virus not because it feared for the public health. It did so rather, on one hand, for political reasons (justifying the expansion of the police and surveillance state, finding a scapegoat for the Third Depression, using it as an instrument against Great Power rivals). On the other hand, there exist weighty economic reasons as the current crisis offers extraordinary business opportunities for a number of corporations in certain industries like drugs, biotechnology, robotics, Artificially Intelligence and the whole IT industry, the whole online retail sector, etc. We note in passing that it is no secret that various corporations have close connections with and are significant donors for ruling parties and influential institutions (take e.g. the close relations of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the WHO leadership).<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that the lockdown is not particularly effective in combating the mortality resulting from the Corona Virus – as the RCIT has pointed out from the beginning. The countries that have imposed draconic lockdowns from early on have the world's highest number of fatalities per capita (Belgium, Spain, Italy, and France). Britain, another leading country in this sad league, imposed the lockdown sometime later.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, a number of countries which didn't impose a lockdown experienced a very low mortality rate (e.g. South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Iceland).<sup>10</sup>

In addition, it is also becoming increasingly difficult to deny that the bourgeoisie (and their pseudo-leftist servants) extremely exaggerated the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of course, in contrast to initial claims by the clown in the White House, it is not a "hoax" or a "little flu". Quite the opposite, it poses a serious threat to public health which requires a serious program of mass testing, free health care and the expansion of the public health sector under workers and popular control.<sup>11</sup>

However, in contrast to the war-like hysteric proclamations of Conte, Macron and Xi, it does also not pose an "unprecedented, extreme danger" which would kill far more people than other pandemics which the world has experienced in the past decades. These hysteric claims are simply not true and

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<sup>8</sup> See on this e.g. Reynaldo Saccone: Los negocios de la pandemia, El Socialista N°459 (13/5/2020), Argentina. <http://www.uit-ci.org/index.php/noticias-y-documentos/temas-generales/2569-los-negocios-de-la-pandemia>

<sup>9</sup> Statista: Coronavirus (COVID-19) deaths worldwide per one million population as of May 19, 2020, by country, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104709/coronavirus-deaths-worldwide-per-million-inhabitants/>

<sup>10</sup> An interesting study has been published recently by a team led by an Israeli military scientist and mathematician. This study compares the development of the pandemic in all countries where statistics are available. It arrives at the conclusion that there is a similar pattern of the spread of coronavirus – rapid increase in infections to a peak in the first phase, and decline from then on – regardless of response policies, i.e. with and without lockdowns. (Isaac Ben-Israel: The end of exponential growth: The decline in the spread of coronavirus, 19 April 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-end-of-exponential-growth-the-decline-in-the-spread-of-coronavirus/>)

<sup>11</sup> See on this e.g. RCIT: A Revolutionary Action Program to fight COVID-19! Workers and Oppressed: Don't trust the State of the Rich and Powerful! Trust only Yourself! April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/health-program-covid19>

are only invented in order to justify the lockdown policy and the expansion of the police and surveillance state. As the RCIT already pointed out in past documents, there have been various pandemics – from severe influenza, swine flu, Ebola to HIV/AIDS – which did also cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people a year. (Let alone the much higher numbers of annual deaths from tobacco, cancer, heart disease, etc.) The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception to such health catastrophes.

In Austria, the first known case of infection has taken place already on 5 February. Since this happened in Ischgl, a Tyrolean ski resort town which became a major coronavirus hotspot for Austria and other European countries, one can assume that virus has been spread already to a sizeable part of the population.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, neither Austria as a whole nor Vienna, its capital city with 1.9 million people, have experienced any excess mortality this year (the currently available mortality statistics go till 3 May). This is both true for those below as well as those above the age of 65 years. It is also noteworthy that there have been periods in the past years (heat wave in summer 2015, severe Influenza in 2016/17) in which more people died than this year.<sup>13</sup>

The same is true for various other European countries (with prominent exceptions like Italy, France, Spain and UK). Here too, the number of total mortality rate has been not above the average of the past years.<sup>14</sup>

This is also true for countries where no lockdown has been imposed. Tokyo, the densely populated capital and most populous prefecture of Japan with 37.4 million people, experienced no excess mortality this year until the end of March (the last official data), despite the fact that the first cases of Corona Virus have been established already in late January.<sup>15</sup> According to official data from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, *“the capital saw 33,106 deaths in the three months through March, 0.4 percent fewer than the average of the previous four years for the same period.”*<sup>16</sup> Bear in mind that Japan had no lockdown until the end of March.

In Sweden, another country which didn't impose a lockdown (and which also refrained from mass testing) and which has been harshly attacked for this by most EU governments (as well as by the Lockdown Left), mortality has been higher in April than it was in the previous years. However, it is noteworthy that the country, according to its *Statistics Office*, experienced an even higher number of fatalities, in relation to the size of the population, in December 1993 and January 2000 when it suffered from severe seasonal influenza.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> APA: Erster Fall in Ischgl bereits am 5. Februar, 2 April 2020, <https://www.bvz.at/in-ausland/covid-19-erster-fall-in-ischgl-bereits-am-5-februar-epidemie-viruserkrankung-wien-coronavirus-199213571>

<sup>13</sup> Ramon Bauer, Peter Frühwirt, Roman Seidl and Franz Trautinger: Vienna Mortality Monitoring, 11. Mai 2020 <https://wien1x1.at/site/mortalitymonitor/>

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. the figures for individual European countries on EuroMOMO, the official website for mortality statistics <https://www.euromomo.eu/graphs-and-maps/>.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. William Pesek: Japan's economy plagued by virus risk, 2020-01-30 <https://www.asiatimes.com/2020/01/article/japans-economy-plagued-by-virus-risk/>

<sup>16</sup> Gearoid Reidy: Tokyo mortality data shows no surge in deaths during pandemic, Bloomberg, May 12, 2020 <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/12/national/tokyo-overall-mortality-data-shows-no-surge-deaths-pandemic/>

<sup>17</sup> Reuters: Coronavirus pushes Swedish deaths to highest since 1993 in April, 18 May 2020 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-sweden-toll/coronavirus-pushes-swedish-deaths-to-highest-since-1993-in-april-idUSKBN22U1S4>

Furthermore, a number of studies indicate that the mortality rate of the COVID-19 pandemic is higher than influenza (about 0.1%) but much lower than has been claimed by the ruling class's Lockdown propagandists. The reason for this is that many more people have been already infected by the virus than the official statistics indicate. This has been clear from early on as various studies from Italian villages, New York, Santa Clara (California) or the German town of Gangelt in Nordrhein-Westfalen where mass testing or representative tests had been conducted.

A new official study in Sweden suggests, according to state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, that to date "a little more than 20 percent" had probably contracted the virus in Stockholm.<sup>18</sup> Other studies make similar assessments that 20-25% of Stockholm's population has been infected.<sup>19</sup> If we take the figure of 20% and relate it to the number of COVID-19 death in Stockholm to date (1,855), this would indicate a mortality rate of 0.397%.<sup>20</sup> This is, by the way, a very similar mortality rate which has been observed in the study on Gangelt.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic is a serious threat to public health but not an "unprecedented catastrophe". It needs to be combated by a public health program under workers and popular control. It is not justification at all for an anti-democratic lockdown policy and the expansion of state repression. Democratic, progressive and socialist forces must never support such a policy of the ruling class.

### **Which "new normal" is the ruling class planning for?**

So if the ruling class is forced to relax or to give up the draconic lockdown policy, does this mean a return to the status ante, i.e. the situation before the beginning of the lockdown? Definitely not! As we said above a crucial purpose for the whole shock-and-awe "coup d'etat" of spreading panic and quarantining the whole population was to use such for advancing a massive global counterrevolutionary offensive. In fact, the "new normal" will be built upon the drastic measures which have been imposed in the past few months.

In our recently published book *"The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution: What It Is and How to Fight It"* we predicted such a development: *"Anyway, it is clear that important elements of such state of emergency and control measures over the population will remain in place for a long period – all of this under the cover of containing and preventing a pandemic. In fact, we see already the ruling classes preparing the population for the "necessity" to continue the surveillance of the population indefinitely. (...) In other words, the ruling class can and will use the threat of pandemic as justification for an indefinite period of expansion of the repression*

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<sup>18</sup> 1 in 5 in Stockholm have virus antibodies: Sweden, May 20, 2020 <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-stockholm-virus-antibodies-sweden.html>; Study: In Stockholm, one-fifth of people have Covid-19 antibodies, May 21, 2020, <https://www.corona24.news/c/2020/05/21/study-in-stockholm-one-fifth-of-people-have-covid-19-antibodies.html>; Johan Ahlander, Niklas Pollard: Swedish antibody study shows long road to immunity as COVID-19 toll mounts, May 20, 2020 / <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-sweden-strategy/swedish-antibody-study-shows-long-road-to-immunity-as-covid-19-toll-mounts-idUSKBN22W2YC>

<sup>19</sup> Johan Giesecke: The invisible pandemic, The Lancet, 5 May 2020, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31035-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31035-7)

<sup>20</sup> See also Josh Michaud: Sweden's Coronavirus Strategy Should Not Be the World's, But Aspects of It Are Worthy of Consideration, 20 May 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/sweden/2020-05-20/swedens-coronavirus-strategy-should-not-be-worlds>

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution (chapter II), pp. 64-65

*apparatus, surveillance of the population and state of emergency. In summary, we currently see the formation of chauvinist state-bonapartist regimes – of an “all-powerful state”, to put it in the words of a Bloomberg commentator.”*<sup>22</sup>

We also tried to outline possible scenarios of such a “new normal” in which we referred to various plans to expand the police and surveillance state.<sup>23</sup> By now we are already in a position to give a clearer picture as various plans and projects of the ruling class have become known. Basically, it seems to us that there are two basic trends of state bonapartist measures which will be essential for the “new normal”. These two trends are:

- 1) A massive increase of surveillance and repression of the popular masses;
- 2) A “partition” of countries in different zones, depending on their numbers of infected persons.

In the following we will provide a survey how these crucial developments are taking place in different parts of the world.

### **China: the most successful regime in making “Big Brother” omnipresent**

China is definitely that country in the world in which the expansion of the high-technology surveillance is most advanced. This has been no doubt being helped by mainly two factors: a) the country, as an emerging imperialist power, is home of a number of highly advanced technology corporations.<sup>24</sup> It also has the material resources to implement such systems; b) it is ruled since decades by a Stalinist-capitalist dictatorship which can build on a centralized and experienced political superstructure, i.e. a highly bureaucratized bonapartist state machinery.

As we already pointed out in our book, China has been quick and effective in implementing a comprehensive surveillance system. In the past months, the regime – in close cooperation with Chinese tech giants like Tencent and Alibaba – has rapidly developed an online “health code” system. All Chinese citizens are required by law to use this app on their smartphones. After downloading the app, users enter their name, identity card number, telephone number and sometimes a photo. In

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Pröbsting: *The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution* (chapter II), p. 46

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, see sub-chapter „*What will be the “new normality”?*“, pp. 48-53

<sup>24</sup> On the RCIT’s analysis of China’s rise as an emerging imperialist power see the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. In particular we refer to the book by Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left’s Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective*, RCIT Books, January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>. In addition, we refer readers in particular to the following works by the same author: *The China-India Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements?* 18 August 2017, *Revolutionary Communism* No. 71, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/>; *The China Question and the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, December 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-csr-pco-on-china/>; *China’s transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power*, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4>.

addition, they have to input into this app their personal medical information, travel history, and COVID-19 contact history. This app tracks an individual's travel, contact history, and biometric data (for example, body temperature) directly through one's smartphone. "A colored QR code is then generated with a color designated to identify their level of health risk. Specific standards vary across provinces, but the basic color scheme rules the same nationally. A green QR code allows an individual to travel within the city; a yellow one implies potential risks that require an at-home quarantine for 7-14 days; and a red code imposes a 14-day quarantine either at home or a centralized location. After the quarantine requirement is fulfilled, the code automatically reverts to green, permitting local travel again."<sup>25</sup>

This health QR code helps the regime to comprehensively control the movement of people. "To enter many offices, restaurants, parks or malls in China nowadays, people must show their status on an app that determines whether they are a coronavirus threat. (...) The apps have become a necessity for travel in China, to book train or plane tickets or enter many public places, though not all establishments require them, such as supermarkets."<sup>26</sup>

There exist already several tracking apps in China. There is one by the State Council, China's cabinet, which uses GPS locations shared by telecommunications companies. It allows authorities to look back at someone's travel history in the previous 14 days and see if they visited areas considered high risk or were exposed to anyone with COVID-19. In addition, there are a number of different apps used by provincial administrations. In general, these systems are based on a Covid-19 health QR code and have been operated largely through social media and payment platforms such as WeChat and Alipay. The system determines a person's health status based on factors such as travel history, duration of time spent in an outbreak-stricken area and relationships to potential carriers of the virus, and the system refreshes the colour codes at midnight on a daily basis.<sup>27</sup>

At the moment, this surveillance system experiences several problems. One of them is that there are currently about 100 types of health code in operation around the country, according to the state news agency Xinhua. The regime plans to standardize them but at the moment, people who have specific app face difficulties to use this app when they enter another province. This is in particular a major problem for migrant workers who constitute a significant part of China's working class. This problem is also exacerbated by the fact that the QR code systems are operated by two Chinese tech giants – Tencent and Alibaba – which are in fierce competition and which have lobbied regional administrations to implement their respective apps. The apps from these two corporations are often not compatible. Furthermore users have filed cases reporting a green health code suddenly switching to red for unknown reasons, imposing an immediate quarantine on the user enforced through the loss of access to public spaces and services.<sup>28</sup> However, given the centralized nature of the Stalinist-

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<sup>25</sup> Shining Tan: China's Novel Health Tracker: Green on Public Health, Red on Data Surveillance, CSIS, May 4, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/trustee-china-hand/chinas-novel-health-tracker-green-public-health-red-data-surveillance>

<sup>26</sup> Ludovic Ehret: Green or red light: China coronavirus app is ticket to everywhere, AFP, 13 May 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/13/asia-pacific/china-coronavirus-app/>

<sup>27</sup> Cissy Zhou: Coronavirus: China gives green light to more domestic travel by unifying its chaotic QR health codes, 1 May, 2020 <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3082542/coronavirus-china-gives-green-light-more-domestic-travel>

<sup>28</sup> Shining Tan: China's Novel Health Tracker: Green on Public Health, Red on Data Surveillance, CSIS, May 4, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/trustee-china-hand/chinas-novel-health-tracker-green-public-health-red-data-surveillance>



capitalist dictatorship one can assume that it will sooner or later succeed in implementing a national standardization of all these different systems.

In addition, the regime continues to impose draconic local lockdowns if the number of infected people significantly increases in a city. For example, the authorities of Shulan city in Jilin province, one of China's three northeastern provinces, have raised the city risk level from medium to high, as the confirmed cases in the city had increased to 15 by 11 May. As a result, Shulan has amped up its virus-control measures – residential compound lockdowns, ban on non-essential transport, and shutting down schools.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to these compulsory mobile tracking apps, the Chinese state is also increasingly deploying drones as well as small mobile robots on the streets as we already pointed out in our book. These robots are able to measure the temperature of pedestrians and warn them via loudspeaker to wear face masks and to follow the instructions of the authorities.

We conclude this chapter by pointing out that the Stalinist-capitalist dictatorship does not make any secret out of its “Big Brother” policy and its close connections to the high-tech corporations. As an example, we draw attention to an article published by the *Global Times* – the mouthpiece of the regime in Beijing. In this article, the author – a professor from a University in Beijing – proudly brags about the surveillance skills of the regime. Let us reproduce some excerpts from this article.

*“Since the outbreak, nearly 4 million community workers in urban and rural neighborhoods across China have been collecting data every day. Their updated reports every 24 hours have enabled the country with 1.4 billion people to extract valuable information for COVID-19 control in real time. To curb the spread of the highly contagious novel coronavirus, the Chinese government has introduced extensive quarantine measures, rigorous health checks, and unprecedented data reporting synergy. Using digital tools like big data and artificial intelligence (AI) has become key to turning the tide. National and local authorities are working closely with large technology companies like China’s e-commerce platform Alibaba, technology company Tencent, and search engine Baidu to innovate smart application solutions for relevant diagnoses, monitoring, forecasts, security checks, healthcare, work resumption, and even avoidance of panic buying.*

*Mobile phone data has been used to track users’ daily locations and health status. Community workers have innovative apps and mini programs to improve their work efficiency. Thanks to the apps and online programs, they inform people where they can get masks or delivered food, or how many people returned home from travel, and where they came from. They also can tell whether new returnees traveled on the same flight or train with the confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients. Upon their arrival, returnees must first register at their neighborhood center and get a paper or electronic pass. By simply scanning a QR code on their smartphones, information over their whereabouts for the past 14 days can be shown. Their information is registered in a database for checking whether they’ve fulfilled quarantine requirements. Some Chinese high-tech companies are now providing free AI and big data analysis services for the public. (...) Baidu and MEGVII, a Chinese AI company, have developed a AI-powered fever detection system, which use infrared and facial recognition technology to scan more than 200 people every minute in public transportation venues. If a passenger appears with a temperature of 37.3 C or above, an alert will be issued.”<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> Zoey Zhang: China’s Travel Restrictions due to COVID-19: An Explainer, 13 May 2020, China Briefing, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-travel-restrictions-due-to-covid-19-an-explainer/>

<sup>30</sup> Yi Song: High-tech magic: China’s COVID-19 fight, *Global Times* 2020/5/13 <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1188251.shtml>

Such dystopian nature of the Stalinist-capitalist dictatorship demonstrates once more how extraordinary silly and reactionary it is that numerous Stalinists, Bolivarians and pseudo-Trotskyists claim that China would be a “socialist” or “progressive” country! <sup>31</sup>

### **Moscow follows the Chinese model and creates a “Cyber Gulag”**

The authorities of Moscow, the capital city of imperialist Russia, have imposed a city-wide lockdown. <sup>32</sup> Most of the city's 12 million residents must remain indoors, barring a few exceptions — like trips to the supermarket or pharmacy, taking out the trash or briefly walking the dog. In order to enforce this lockdown, Mayor Sergei Sobyenin introduced a so-called “smart control system” under which Muscovites' home addresses and pictures will be stored in a centralized database that police will have access to. Muscovites and residents of the Moscow region -- anybody 14 years old or above -- must download a QR code if they want to move around their city. By registering on a government website or downloading an app on their smartphones, citizens can declare a route and purpose in advance; they then receive a QR code that can be checked by the authorities. The measure will initially only apply to people using public transport, but authorities say restrictions will gradually scale up to passes for short trips around neighborhoods. Police will scan these codes and fine people without a permit or if they intentionally provided false information. Those who still go to work can get a special unlimited pass, but for personal matters -- such as driving to a store or a dacha (a country house) -- residents can only get two passes a week, each valid for one day. <sup>33</sup>

According to the authorities, the new tracing “tools will merge with existing street cameras and face recognition software to quickly identify residents who stray from their homes and/or quarantines”. <sup>34</sup>

One does not need to be Einstein to understand that the authorities introduce such a comprehensive surveillance system not primarily in order to contain the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, it is not only Russian Marxists but also liberals and bourgeois democrats who are deeply worried. “*The pandemic will go away, but the system will stay,*” said Mikhail Klimarev, executive director of the Internet

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<sup>31</sup> See on this e.g. chapter VIII, IX and X in Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry*

<sup>32</sup> On the RCIT's analysis of Russia's rise as emerging imperialist powers see, in addition to the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>, the following works: Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, Special Issue of Revolutionary Communism No. 21 (March 2014), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>.

<sup>33</sup> See on this e.g. Moscow Times: Moscow to Enforce Virus Quarantine With QR Codes, Smartphone App, 1 April 2020, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/01/moscow-to-enforce-virus-quarantine-with-qr-codes-smartphone-app-a69819>; Mary Ilyushina: Moscow rolls out digital tracking to enforce lockdown. Critics dub it a 'cyber Gulag', CNN, 14 April 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/14/world/moscow-cyber-tracking-qr-code-intl/index.html>

<sup>34</sup> Charles Maynes: Moscow To Launch New Surveillance App To Track Residents In Coronavirus Lockdown, 1 April 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/01/825329399/moscow-launches-new-surveillance-app-to-track-residents-in-coronavirus-lockdown>

Protection Society.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Leonid Volkov, a chief strategist of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, wrote on his Telegram channel: "One thing is clear, the coronavirus will eventually leave but this digital concentration camp will remain."<sup>36</sup> And Daria Besedina and Maxim Katz, local opposition lawmakers who voted against the system, also dubbed it a "cyber Gulag" and "digital concentration camp."<sup>37</sup>

### **The U.S.: "the ancient past known as February" and today**

It would be totally wrong to assume that China and Russia would be the only countries working to build a system of total surveillance. Western imperialist states, impressed by the Chinese model, have also started to work on such programs. The U.S. tech giants Apple and Google announced in early April that they are teaming up on a major effort "to help health officials trace coronavirus exposure risks". They plan to "to make technology available by mid-May that would use Bluetooth on people's phones to detect when people have come into contact with individuals diagnosed with the virus. The feature would be designed to work with apps by public health authorities on devices that run Apple's iOS and Google's Android. In the coming months, the companies said they would roll out an update that would embed the technology into the iOS and Android operating systems, which are used on about 99 percent of smartphones globally. The change would apply to all versions of Google's Android released since late 2015."<sup>38</sup>

In fact, the ruling class in the U.S. is polarized between the reactionary Trump Administration which refused to take any measures against the pandemic and a coalition of politicians and corporations which hope to gain – politically and financially – from the lockdown policy. The renowned writer Naomi Klein has recently published a highly insightful article which elaborates on the interests of various billionaire owners of corporations like Google, Oracle, Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook, Bloomberg, and others as well as on their close connections with politicians like New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. Here are some interesting excerpts from her article.

*"It has taken some time to gel, but something resembling a coherent Pandemic Shock Doctrine is beginning to emerge. Call it the "Screen New Deal." Far more high-tech than anything we have seen during previous disasters, the future that is being rushed into being as the bodies still pile up treats our past weeks of physical isolation not as a painful necessity to save lives, but as a living laboratory for a permanent — and highly profitable — no-touch future. Anuja Sonalker, CEO of Steer Tech, a Maryland-based company selling self-parking technology, recently summed up the new virus-personalized pitch. "There has been a distinct warming up to human-less, contactless technology," she said. "Humans are biohazards, machines are not."*

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Jan Lindenau: Are QR Coronavirus Quarantine Passes for Muscovites Workable? Experts Doubt It, April 2, 2020 <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/04/02/are-qr-coronavirus-quarantine-passes-for-muscovites-workable-experts-doubt-it-a69828>

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Charles Maynes: Moscow To Launch New Surveillance App To Track Residents In Coronavirus Lockdown, 1 April 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/01/825329399/moscow-launches-new-surveillance-app-to-track-residents-in-coronavirus-lockdown>

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Mary Ilyushina: Moscow rolls out digital tracking to enforce lockdown. Critics dub it a 'cyber Gulag', CNN, 14 April 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/14/world/moscow-cyber-tracking-qr-code-intl/index.html>

<sup>38</sup> Leah Nylen and Mohana Ravindranath: Apple, Google team up on big effort to trace coronavirus cases, 10.4.2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/10/apple-google-team-up-coronavirus-179215>

*It's a future in which our homes are never again exclusively personal spaces but are also, via high-speed digital connectivity, our schools, our doctor's offices, our gyms, and, if determined by the state, our jails. (...) This is a future in which, for the privileged, almost everything is home delivered, either virtually via streaming and cloud technology, or physically via driverless vehicle or drone, then screen "shared" on a mediated platform. It's a future that employs far fewer teachers, doctors, and drivers. It accepts no cash or credit cards (under guise of virus control) and has skeletal mass transit and far less live art. It's a future that claims to be run on "artificial intelligence" but is actually held together by tens of millions of anonymous workers tucked away in warehouses, data centers, content moderation mills, electronic sweatshops, lithium mines, industrial farms, meat-processing plants, and prisons, where they are left unprotected from disease and hyperexploitation. It's a future in which our every move, our every word, our every relationship is trackable, traceable, and data-mineable by unprecedented collaborations between government and tech giants.*

*If all of this sounds familiar it's because, pre-Covid, this precise app-driven, gig-fueled future was being sold to us in the name of convenience, frictionlessness, and personalization. But many of us had concerns. About the security, quality, and inequity of telehealth and online classrooms. (...) And most of all, we had concerns about the democracy-threatening wealth and power accumulated by a handful of tech companies that are masters of abdication — eschewing all responsibility for the wreckage left behind in the fields they now dominate, whether media, retail, or transportation.*

*That was the ancient past known as February. Today, a great many of those well-founded concerns are being swept away by a tidal wave of panic, and this warmed-over dystopia is going through a rush-job rebranding. Now, against a harrowing backdrop of mass death, it is being sold to us on the dubious promise that these technologies are the only possible way to pandemic-proof our lives, the indispensable keys to keeping ourselves and our loved ones safe.”<sup>39</sup>*

Likewise, the Australian government has launched an app based on a Singaporean one that uses Bluetooth wireless signals to track the user's COVID-19 contact history. We see a similar development in New Zealand where the government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern launched a contact-tracing app for mobiles “to help people tracking their movements”.<sup>40</sup>

In many countries, including the U.S. and Australia, the lockdown policy and surveillance are being used against national and ethnic minorities. Dhakshayini Sooriyakumaran, the Director of Human Rights at the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility, points out: “*In many countries, security forces focused their efforts to enforce coronavirus-related restrictions on underprivileged communities. In Australia, Indigenous peoples and migrants are being disproportionately targeted for public health order compliance fines. In the US, there are widespread reports that police officers are using coronavirus stay-at-home orders and policies making masks mandatory to harass and abuse Black Americans. The rolling out of mass tech-enabled surveillance will help governments expand the existing systems of surveillance and discrimination, which have long been reserved solely for marginalised groups, to their entire populations. Israel, for example, is now using the surveillance tools it developed to monitor Palestinians in the occupied territories to track the movements of the country's entire population. If the tech-enabled surveillance wave triggered by the coronavirus pandemic continues unchallenged, the governments could not only use these new surveillance opportunities to*

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<sup>39</sup> Naomi Klein: Screen New Deal. Under Cover of Mass Death, Andrew Cuomo Calls in the Billionaires to Build a High-Tech Dystopia, 8 May 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/05/08/andrew-cuomo-eric-schmidt-coronavirus-tech-shock-doctrine/>

<sup>40</sup> New Zealand to roll out 'digital diary' app to help people track movements, 18 May 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-new-zealand/new-zealand-to-roll-out-digital-diary-app-to-help-people-track-movements-idUSKBN22UOGE>

*increase the isolation and oppression of already marginalised communities, they could also create new groups of "undesirables" and restrict their access to most basic rights and services."* <sup>41</sup>

### **European Union: surveillance and the model of "red/green zones"**

European governments are also pushing to install mobile tracing apps in order to monitor its citizens' movements. As indicated above, such a monitoring technology would allow the governments to refrain from another lockdown and, instead, to control the movements of the people via tracing apps. Tellingly, a recently published article by the Associated Press started with the words: *"Goodbye lockdown, hello smartphone."* <sup>42</sup>

As we have stated repeatedly in our documents of the last months, an important political purpose of provoking public fear about the pandemic and imposing the lockdown has been the creation of a political atmosphere which would allow the governments to break the taboo issue of surveillance. <sup>43</sup> Currently, two alternative systems are considered, the *Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing* (PEPP-PT/PEPP) and the competing *Decentralized Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing* (DP-3T) protocol. Britain is working on its own system and Norway has already rolled out one of the earliest - and most invasive - apps, Smittestopp, which uses both GPS and Bluetooth to collect data and uploads it to central servers every hour. <sup>44</sup>

Whatever system will be implemented within the European Union, it is obvious that this opens a new era. No doubt, this will be still far away from the totalitarian conditions in China. But it will clearly constitute a qualitative step forward in undermining bourgeois democracy and its replacement by state bonapartism.

The European governments are aware that this is a difficult project as large sections of the population strongly reject such a "Big Brother" future. This is why they needed to employ a "shock-and-awe" tactic for which the COVID-19 pandemic provides an excellent pretext.

One challenge which the European governments face in this context is to convince its population to use such a mobile tracing apps. The easiest solution would be to obligate the people to install this app on their smartphones, as the Chinese regime has done. The Austrian government, led by the conservative party of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, has repeatedly pushed for such compulsory regulation. However this has created a public backlash. Nevertheless it is continuing to prepare the public mood for such a move. Antonella Mei-Pochtler, a senior advisor of Kurz who has been also

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<sup>41</sup> Dhakshayini Sooriyakumaran: Surveillance will not save us from COVID-19, 21 May 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/surveillance-save-covid-19-200520095528251.html>

<sup>42</sup> Kelvin Chan: European virus tracing apps highlight battle for privacy, Associated Press, 4 May 2020, <https://apnews.com/eb37b9ada939dfaff40925533c977b5c>

<sup>43</sup> See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: COVID-19 Crisis: Internal Document Reveals Austrian Government Plan to Spread Fear, 28 April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/covid-19-crisis-internal-document-reveals-austrian-government-plan-to-spread-fear/>

<sup>44</sup> Kelvin Chan: European virus tracing apps highlight battle for privacy, Associated Press, 4 May 2020, <https://apnews.com/eb37b9ada939dfaff40925533c977b5c>

employed as a Managing Director at the Boston Consulting Group, recently stated in an interview with the *Financial Times*: “This will be part of the new normal. Everyone will have an app.”<sup>45</sup>

It is, by the way, telling that the leading circles of the bourgeoisie are fully aware of the anti-democratic nature of this strategic push. Mei-Pochtler admitted in the same interview that such monitoring technology is “on the borderline of the democratic working model”. Naturally, the Austrian government is only one example and similar processes are taking place in many other countries.

Such mobile tracing apps are of course only effective if they are used by a large majority of the population. Since many people do not trust their governments there is natural resistance to install such apps. Even Singapore, ruled by authoritarian governments since decades, finds it difficult to force its population to use this technology. In March, it released TraceTogether, an app that uses Bluetooth technology to help public health officials do contact tracing. As of April 1, only 12% of the people had opted to download the contact tracing app. Hence, Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien-loong made a public appeal to the country’s citizens to download the app in a national address on 21 April.<sup>46</sup>

In general, we think that it is likely that the governments might wait for a “second wave of the pandemic” in order to create the political conditions to enforce its project of a compulsory mobile tracing apps.

As the process to force the population installing mobile tracing apps on their smartphones will take some time, several governments are now implementing a system which divides each country into so-called “green zones” and “red zones”. This conception has been developed by Miquel Oliu-Barton and Bary Pradeliski, two university professors, and has been intended as a Europe-wide system in order to allow travelling within the continent (and, hence, to save the profits for the tourism industry in the summer period). While this system has not been adopted by the EU until now, it has been already implemented by a number of countries like France, Italy, and Spain.

Basically, the “green/red zones” concept is based on existing provinces or districts in each country. Those regions where the virus is not under control are labelled as “red zones” and those where the virus is under control as “green”. Naturally, such a designation would not be decided by the regions itself but by the central authorities.<sup>47</sup>

While people living in “green zones” are free to travel to other green zones, people from the “red zones” are not allowed to leave their territory except with special permission. “By differentiating between red and green zones, the spread of the virus across the entire territory is minimised. This is the case because travel to and from red zones would be limited to necessary travel only – such as that by key workers –

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<sup>45</sup> Sam Jones: ‘Arrogance’ blinded big countries to virus risk, says Austria adviser, May 4 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/87495a18-f7a1-4657-a517-ba2b16c146dc> ; see also ORF: Kurz-Beraterin Mei-Pochtler: „Jeder wird eine App haben“, 4 May 2020, <https://orf.at/stories/3164322/>

<sup>46</sup> Shirin Ghaffary: What the US can learn from other countries using phones to track Covid-19, 22 April 2020, <https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/4/18/21224178/covid-19-tech-tracking-phones-china-singapore-taiwan-korea-google-apple-contact-tracing-digital>

<sup>47</sup> Miquel Oliu-Barton, Bary Pradeliski : Green-zone travelling: A pan-European approach to save tourism, EsadeEcPol Policy Insight, May 2020; see also: Coronavirus and travel: Could this idea from Spain save Europe’s summer holidays? Euronews with AP, 13 May 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/05/13/coronavirus-and-travel-could-this-idea-from-spain-save-europe-s-summer-holidays>; Hanno Charisius: Coronavirus: Lockerungen in Frankreich - ein Modell für ganz Europa? 8 May 2020, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/gesundheit/lockerungen-frankreich-coronavirus-1.4900602>

*and rigid testing routines would be implemented. As the resurgence of the virus within the green-zone travelling network would have detrimental consequences it is paramount that the conditions for EU green labels are stringent.”*<sup>48</sup>

It does not need much explanation to understand that such a “green/red zones” system can only be realized by an expanded police and surveillance apparatus. Otherwise it is not possible to control if citizens are legitimately staying in a given zone or not. Likewise, it is impossible to enforce the travel ban for people living in a “red zone” without a vast repression apparatus.

As we mentioned above, European governments are currently cautious to publicly announce plans for a compulsory implementation of the mobile tracing apps. They leave it open and do not exclude that it might be voluntary, i.e. that people can choose to install this app or not. On the surface this appears to be a significant difference. However, in practice it is highly likely that even a formally voluntarily solution would in fact more or less become compulsory. Once the governments have managed to technically solve all issues with such an app and once they have succeeded in gaining public support for it via a vigorous campaign (a new pandemic crisis, media campaign etc., similar to what we have experienced in the past few months), they will have created the preconditions to enforce a general acceptance of such an app. For example, the authorities could follow the Chinese and Russia example that it is only possible to get a job, to enter public transport, a restaurant, a mall, a football stadium etc. if one can show via such a health code app that he or she is not infected. In such a scenario, use of such an app would not be formally compulsory but in fact it would have such effect for all those who are not living socially isolated, i.e. for the popular masses.

### **India: State Bonapartism under semi-colonial conditions**

India, the second most populous country in the world after China, is also implementing a series of measures in order to expand the repressive state apparatus. True, the ruling class has to operate on the basis of very different objective conditions than China, Russia or the Western imperialist powers. As we have elaborated in extensive studies, India is not an imperialist but rather a semi-colonial country, albeit with specific characteristics.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Miquel Oliu-Barton, Bary Pradelski : Green-zone travelling: A pan-European approach to save tourism, EsadeEcPol Policy Insight, May 2020, p. 5

<sup>49</sup> See on this the following works by Michael Pröbsting: India: A Prison House of Nations and Lower Castes (On the Reasons for Modi’s Coup in Kashmir). Essay on the social and national contradictions of Indian capitalism and the rise of Hindutva chauvinism, 16 August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/india-is-a-a-prison-house-of-nations-and-lower-castes/>; The Kashmir Question and the Indian Left Today. Marxism, Stalinism and centrism on the national liberation struggle of the Kashmiri people (Pamphlet), 26 September 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/kashmir-question-and-indian-left-today/>; The China-India Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements? 18 August 2017, Revolutionary Communism No. 71, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/>; Semi-Colonial Intermediate Powers and the Theory of Sub-Imperialism. A contribution to an ongoing debate amongst Marxists and a proposal to tackle a theoretical problem, 1 August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/semi-colonial-intermediate-powers-and-the-theory-of-sub-imperialism/>. See also Michael Pröbsting: Is India a New Emerging Great Power? In: Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory,

Nevertheless, the chauvinist right-wing government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is putting strong efforts to utilize the COVID-19 pandemic to build up the bonapartist state apparatus. Already in April, the federal authorities launched the app *Aarogya Setu* - meaning Health Bridge - a Bluetooth and GPS-based system developed by the country's National Informatics Centre. The app alerts users who may have come in contact with people later found to be positive for COVID-19 or deemed to be at high risk.<sup>50</sup>

The government makes the use of this app compulsory for all workers, both private and public, as well as for members of the military. Installation of the app is also mandatory in regions declared as containment zones. Stranded Indians abroad who wish to be repatriated also need to install it on their mobile phones before entering the country. In some regions, the police have already stepped in to enforce the use of the app. In Noida, a burgeoning satellite town close to New Delhi, police have made it a punishable offense if people don't use the app. App users must answer questions posed by a chatbot about whether they have any COVID-19 symptoms, pre-existing health conditions and about their travel history. Those suspected of being infected are contacted by health authorities, who track cases in a database.

In short, India's ruling class tries to follow the Chinese example in implementing a massively expanded police and surveillance apparatus. Unsurprisingly, even the main opposition Congress party, an utterly bourgeois force, condemns this attack. Rahul Gandhi aptly called the app "*a sophisticated surveillance system.*"

Of course, the Aarogya Setu app is a huge project and its implementation will need some time. By early May the app has been downloaded by more than 90 million times in a country with a smartphone user base of about 500 million. To popularize it, a campaign featuring Bollywood celebrities was launched.<sup>51</sup>

Despite its relative economic backwardness – compared to imperialist countries – India's government mobilizes significant resources in order to expand also other elements of the repressive state apparatus. Replicating the Chinese innovations, India is also developing robots. For example, Asimov Robotics, a start-up based in Kerala, has deployed robots at entrances to office buildings and other public places to dispense hand sanitizer and deliver public health messages about the virus. Robots developed by Asimov Robotics are also being deployed in hospital isolation wards to carry food and medicines, which eases the pressure on medical staff.<sup>52</sup>

A more developed project is the systematic use of drones for surveillance of the population. Hence, the government, in cooperation with start-ups such as Marut Dronetech, tests the use of drones to monitor adherence to social distancing rules. These drones are also capable to check people's temperature using thermal imaging.

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Volume 48, Issue 1, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03017605.2019.1706783> and <https://doi.org/10.1080/03017605.2019.1706783>

<sup>50</sup> Sankalp Phartiyal: India makes government tracing app mandatory for all workers, 2 May 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-india-app/india-makes-government-tracing-app-mandatory-for-all-workers-idUSKBN22E07K>

<sup>51</sup> Sheikh Saaliq: Virus tracing app raises privacy concerns in India, 8 May 2020, <https://apnews.com/f1e997c322b14ad17cb353830072718b>

<sup>52</sup> Sreevas Sahasranamam: India responds to virus with wave of innovation, 6 May 2020, The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/india-how-coronavirus-sparked-a-wave-of-innovation-135715>



The news agency Reuters published an interesting report about such use of drones in Mumbai, a large city of around 12 million people, of which some 65% live in slums. A further six million people are estimated to live in peripheral districts. Operating from a government building, officials are studying a giant screen showing live drone and CCTV footage of crowded slums. When cameras captured dozens of shoppers thronging a market in Mumbai's low-income Dongri area – often considered Asia's biggest slum with an estimated 1 million residents – violating the countrywide lockdown, officials called in the police to disperse the crowd. According to this report, authorities are using drones, re-oriented traffic cameras, and heat maps to enforce a lockdown in what is one of the most densely populated areas on earth.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, the government has also divided the country in three different zones. Green zones are districts with either zero confirmed cases till date; or, no confirmed case in the last 21 days. Red zones are defined based on the total number of active cases, doubling rate of confirmed cases, extent of testing and surveillance feedback from the districts. The districts, which are neither defined as red nor green, are classified as orange zones. According to the Health Ministry's classification, there are currently 130 red zone districts, 284 orange zone districts and 319 green zone districts across the country. The government has also said that the list of districts will be updated on the weekly basis and changes will be communicated to the states. Depending on the designation of the zone, the freedom of movement within such is either largely restricted or more relaxed.<sup>54</sup>

### **South Africa: Lockdown imposed by a “progressive” government**

Let us finish this overview by briefly mentioning South Africa. Here the capitalist popular front government of South Africa of President Cyril Ramaphosa follows the same policy like the previous mentioned states. After imposing a draconic lockdown the ANC government has now assigned levels of lockdown restrictions for each of the country's roughly 50 districts, depending on the number of active coronavirus infections there. The parts of the country with the highest rates of infection, including metropolitan areas, are likely to remain under stringent restrictions into June.<sup>55</sup>

As in other countries, such a system can only be implemented with the brutal help of the repressive state apparatus. As we have reported, there has been a particularly draconic implementation of the lockdown policy not only in South Africa<sup>56</sup> but in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa as it is often

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<sup>53</sup> Shilpa Jamkhandikar, Alexandra Ulmer: With drones and tests, India battles to keep virus out of Mumbai's slums, 16 April 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-india-mumbai/with-drones-and-tests-india-battles-to-keep-virus-out-of-mumbais-slums-idUSKCN21Y2IE>

<sup>54</sup> Vijaita Singh: Green, Orange zones opened for e-commerce, barbers, 2 May 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-barber-shops-sale-of-non-essentials-by-e-commerce-platforms-allowed-in-green-orange-zones-mha/article31489895.ece>; Yash Shukla: Coronavirus Lockdown: Govt updates list of Red, Orange, Green zone districts; check state wise data, 1 May 2020, <https://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/health/coronavirus-lockdown-govt-updates-list-of-red-orange-green-zone-districts-check-state-wise-data/1945665/>

<sup>55</sup> South Africa to assign coronavirus restrictions by district: minister, 14 May 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-safrica/south-africa-to-assign-coronavirus-restrictions-by-district-minister-idUSKBN22Q2DT>

<sup>56</sup> See on this e.g. SRWP (South Africa): Our Perspectives and Our Tasks in the COVID-19 Crisis (Draft Discussion Document), <https://www.thecommunists.net/forum/srwp-our-perspectives-and-our-tasks-in-the-covid-19-crisis/>

imposed by the army against the urban poor masses living in the slums. <sup>57</sup> This is why the RCIT, jointly with our African comrades, has initiated an international solidarity campaign. <sup>58</sup>

All this confirms, as we have often emphasized in the past, that the ANC government, which is in power since 1994, has a thoroughly capitalist nature. <sup>59</sup> This essence is unswayed by fact that this government includes ministers of the so-called South African “Communist” Party since its inception and that it has been uninterruptedly supported by the labor bureaucracy of the largest trade union federation COSATU. The Stalinists’ decades-long participation in such a capitalist government rather demonstrates once again that this political current has nothing to do with socialism and Marxism! It rather represents an agency of the bourgeoisie within the ranks of the official workers and popular movements. <sup>60</sup>

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Our position on the Corona Virus- a call to action and real social solidarity, SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS’ PARTY WESTERN CAPE REGIONAL OFFICE – HARRY GWALA HOUSE, <https://www.thecommunists.net/forum/srwp-wc-our-position-on-the-corona-virus/>

<sup>57</sup> See on this e.g. For a people-based approach to the COVID-19 Crisis! Down with State Repression! Joint Statement of the Revolutionary and Progressive organizations of the world, April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/for-a-people-based-approach-to-the-covid-19-crisis-down-with-state-repression/>; RSV: Down With The Iron Curtain Of Hunger! Open Up Nigeria! Mass Testing Is The Key! 29th April, 2020. <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/down-with-the-iron-curtain-of-hunger-in-nigeria/>; RSV: WHAT DOES THE INVITATION OF CHINESE MEDICAL PERSONNEL MEAN FOR THE NIGERIAN HEALTH SECTOR? 10th April, 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/what-does-the-invitation-of-chinese-medical-personnel-mean-for-the-nigerian-health-sector/>; RSV: Nigeria: Against State Repression! For a Mass-based Alternative To The Pandemic! Cancel All Local and National Debt! 8th April, 2020. <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/nigeria-against-state-repression/>; RSV: Nigeria: Oppose the Lock Downs! For Free Mandatory Mass Testing Coupled with Isolation of Suspected/Confirmed Cases! For Free Food and Medical Supplies! Constitute Workers and Peasant Committees to Execute Mass-based Initiative for the Pandemic! Resist State Aggression! 1 April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/nigeria-oppose-the-lock-downs/>; Kenya: Condemnation of the State Repression in Mombasa, Joint Statement of the Revolutionary Socialist League (Kenya) and the RCIT, 29 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/kenya-condemnation-of-the-state-repression-in-mombasa/>; Situation in Zimbabwe During the Corona Virus Pandemic Outbreak, Report by D., Correspondent of the RCIT in Zimbabwe, 31 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/situation-in-zimbabwe-during-the-corona-virus-pandemic-outbreak/>; Yossi Schwartz: Nigeria: Slavery, Colonialism, Imperialism, Military Rule, Plagues...and COVID-19, 2 May 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/nigeria-slavery-colonialism-imperialism-and-covid-19/>

<sup>58</sup> Report of the African Revolutionary and Progressive Organisations Meeting held on 9th May 2020, via Zoom, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/report-of-african-progressive-organisations-meeting-9-5-2020/>

<sup>59</sup> RCIT: South Africa: Forward to the Building of a Mass Workers’ Party Based on a Revolutionary Program! 5.2.2014, <https://rcitarchive.wordpress.com/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/south-africa-workers-party/>; RCIT: Elections in South Africa: No Vote for the ANC! Critical Support for the WASP! Forward in Building a Mass Workers Party! 25.4.2014, <https://rcitarchive.wordpress.com/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/south-africa-election-tactics/>

<sup>60</sup> The RCIT and its predecessor organization have analyzed Stalinism – a fester on the workers movement – on numerous occasions. See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Cuba’s Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism, August 2013, RCIT Books, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cuba-s-revolution-sold-out/>. See also LRCI: The Degenerated Revolution: The Origin and Nature of the Stalinist States, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/stalinism-and-the-degeneration-of-the-revolution/>.

## Conclusions

Surely, our brief survey is far from complete. We have only discussed a selected group of countries, albeit these countries all in all are home of nearly half of the world population. However, we think it has been sufficient in order to provide an overview of some fundamental tendencies which are characteristic for the plans of the ruling class to expand their control over the population in the coming period.

In the RCIT Manifesto on the COVID-19 Counterrevolution we have warned: *“With one stroke, “Big Brother” is here, openly and without any attempt by the capitalist state to conceal it. The massive surveillance techniques will soon be the new normal worldwide.”* Our survey has demonstrated that this was not an “alarmist” statement but rather a pretty accurate assessment of a new era which has begun in March 2020.

Hence, we repeat that the current policy of the ruling classes represent a dangerous global counter-revolutionary offensive under the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic. We emphasize this not because we draw pessimistic conclusions out of such an assessment. As we states in our Manifesto: *“In other words, the global counter-revolutionary offensive can only temporarily cover up the accelerating political and economic contradictions between the classes and the states. Sooner or later, this will result inevitable in new and massive political explosions, probably in the form of major domestic crisis, wars as well as revolutionary uprisings – in the Global South as well as in the imperialist states of the West and the East.”*<sup>61</sup>

And in fact, we see already various food riots (e.g. in African countries, Chile, Central America) and mass protests in the past weeks. It is particularly promising to see renewed popular struggles in countries like Lebanon and Iraq which have played a central role during the pre-revolutionary world situation in late 2019.<sup>62</sup>

However, it would politically totally irresponsible to ignore the huge offensive of the ruling class in recent months and the resulting dramatic changes which have taken place. It would be even more fatal to ignore the fact that the ruling class has massively rearmed and, hence, the workers and oppressed face now an enemy in different shape. On one hand this enemy has substantially weakened because its economy is in tatters and because the contradictions between the Great Powers have massively accelerated. On the other hand, this enemy has also become more aggressive in its determination to forcefully attack the working class and the popular masses.

This is why the vanguard of our class must politically and organizationally prepare for such a new era of the class struggle. We must analyze the new conditions, draw the necessary lessons and regroup.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of this issue see e.g. sub-chapter „ *Do we overestimate the relevance of the counterrevolutionary offensive??”* in Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution (chapter II), , pp. 56-59

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. RCIT: Lebanon and Iraq: Forward with the Popular Uprising! 12 May 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/forward-with-the-popular-uprising-in-lebanon-and-iraq/>; on our analysis of the world situation before the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis see e.g. RCIT: World Perspectives 2020: A Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 8 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2020/>

<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this issue see e.g. chapter III and IV in Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution.

We must take advantage that the historic developments of the past months have sorted the wheat from the chaff. Large sectors of the opportunist left have joined the camp of the COVID-19 counterrevolution and have thoroughly discredited themselves. This is and remains a mark of Cain of the opportunist left, irremovable forever! Such Leviathan Left might continue to talk about “socialism”, “Marxism” or even “Trotskyism”. In fact, they have become social-bonapartists, i.e. servants of the ruling classes’ chauvinist state bonapartism under the cover of “socialism”.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to them, authentic revolutionaries must join forces on the basis of a program of intransigent and independent class struggle. It is the deep conviction of the RCIT that revolutionaries must closely collaborate and if possible fuse their forces on such a program which refuses support for any faction of the monopoly bourgeoisie. Against U.S. imperialism as well as Chinese or any other imperialism! Neither the Trump/Bolsonaro laissez faire “hoax” non-response to the COVID-19 crisis, nor the state bonapartist lockdown and surveillance methods of Xi, Modi and Macron! For an unambiguous socialist, internationalist and democratic program against the Triple Crisis of Third Depression chauvinist state bonapartism and COVID-19 pandemic! This is the road on which the RCIT hopes to fight alongside other revolutionary forces in building a new World Party of Socialist Revolution!

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<sup>64</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the failure of the Lockdown Left see e.g. chapter V in Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution; see also by the same author COVID-19 and the Lockdown Left: The Example of PODEMOS and Stalinism in Spain, 24 March 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-lockdown-left-podemos-and-stalinism-in-spain/>; Social-Bonapartism in Argentina. The Partido Obrero (Tendencia) of Jorge Altamira supports the State of Emergency, 29 April 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/social-bonapartism-in-argentina/>; When Ultra-Leftism marries Social-Bonapartism and Gives Birth to “Post-Marxist” Obscurantism. A reply to the CWG/ILTT, 5 May 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/covid-19-when-ultra-leftism-marries-social-bonapartism/>