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## The Second Wave of the COVID-19 Counterrevolution

On the ruling class strategy and the perspectives  
of the workers and popular resistance

by Michael Pröbsting

## English-Language Theoretical Review of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), New Series No.41, July 2019

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*Picture on the cover: Saba Saba March in Nairobi (Kenya) on 7 July 2020, initiated by the Revolutionary Socialist League (Sympathizing section of the RCIT) and other organization.*

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# The Second Wave of the COVID-19 Counterrevolution

## On the ruling class strategy in the current conjuncture, its inner contradictions and the perspectives of the workers and popular resistance

By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 20 July 2020

### Introduction

The purpose of the following essay is to provide an overview of the new wave of lockdowns which the ruling class is undertaking under the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will analyze the specific features of the new lockdown policy and what its difference is to the “first wave”. Likewise, we will elaborate on the plans of the bourgeoisie, their inner contradictions and the role of the class struggle which has caused them massive problems.

In addition we will discuss new statistical material about the real nature of this pandemic and how dangerous it really is. Furthermore, we will discuss new examples of the treacherous policy of the *Lockdown Left*, i.e. the reformist and centrist left-wing organizations which support the lockdown policy. Finally, we want to undertake an outlook about the future perspectives of the counter-revolutionary COVID-19 offensive as well as the popular struggles against it.

Hence, this essay should be seen as an update of the RCIT’s analysis of this historic event which we have provided since its beginning and which we have termed the *COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution*. At this point we will not repeat our extensive analysis of this political water-

shed which reflects a dramatic acceleration of the contradictions between the classes and the states and which also represents a global shift of the ruling class policy towards state bonapartism. For a detailed analysis of this development we refer readers to our new book “*The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution*” as well as more than 50 essays, statements and articles which the RCIT has published on this issue in a number of languages since the beginning of February.<sup>1</sup>

### The localized version of Lockdown policy is spreading

The next lockdown offensive under the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic is coming. The WHO, all imperialist governments and the bourgeois media are drumming their warnings about the “*second wave of the Corona Virus*” which shall make another period of harsh restrictions for the popular masses “*inevitable*” and “*unavoidable*” in order “*to protect the population*”.<sup>2</sup> The RCIT has predicted such a development some time ago: “*It is nearly unavoidable that the ruling class all over the world will at one point in the near future declare a second wave of the COVID-19 (or any other) pandemic. They will again try to confuse the consciousness of the*

## Books of the RCIT

### Michael Pröbsting: The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution

#### What It Is and How to Fight It

#### A Marxist analysis and strategy for the revolutionary struggle

In *The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution* Michael Pröbsting analyses the dramatic events in spring 2020 which have opened a new historic era. A triple crisis has shocked the world. The Third Depression has begun, characterized by a devastating economic slump of the capitalist world economy which is certainly no less dramatic than the crisis which started in 1929.

In addition, there is a wave of anti-democratic attacks of a scale which has not been seen in the imperialist countries since 1945. This has triggered a global turn towards Chauvinist State Bonapartism and the creation of a monstrous Leviathan-like state machinery.

And finally, the world faces COVID-19 – a pandemic which endangers many lives and which is exploited by the ruling classes in order to spread fear, to deflect attention from the capitalist causes of the economic crisis and to justify the turn towards chauvinist state bonapartism.

*The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution* also shows that large sectors of the reformist workers movement and the

so-called left fail to understand the meaning of this triple crisis. Similar to the situation in 1914 after the beginning of World War I we can observe a gigantic wave of opportunist capitulation by many self-proclaimed socialists as they support or at least do not denounce the global lockdown and the suppression of democratic rights which the ruling classes are imposing in the name of combat against the pandemic. *The COVID-19 Global Counterrevolution* offers a Marxist analysis of this historic crisis and elaborates a revolutionary perspective for the struggles ahead.

The book contains an introduction and 6 chapters plus an appendix (176 pages) and includes 5 figures and a diagram.

The COVID-19  
Global  
Counterrevolution

What It Is and How to Fight It

By Michael Pröbsting



Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

*masses and provoke fear and insecurity as a cover for imposing additional surveillance technologies and other anti-democratic attacks.”*<sup>3</sup>

In the last few weeks parts of Beijing were put under lockdown and so were Bihar, Chennai, Karnataka and other regions in India. Australia’s Melbourne, the Portuguese capital city Lisbon as well as parts of Catalunya and northern Spain followed recently. Likewise, lockdown conditions were tightened again in the Greater Buenos Aires Area. And these are just a few prominent examples.

The first wave of lockdowns had a global character. It started in China in late January, Europe followed from early March onwards and by April more than half of the world’s population were forced to live under lockdown conditions. Since May, an increasing number of countries have relaxed the most draconic measures. However, it is important to point out that in many countries respectively regional parts of these, sectors of the population are still living under some forms of lockdown.

Nevertheless, it seem legitimate to us to speak about a second wave. This is the case not only because the bourgeois governments and their media dramatically increase their warnings about a “second wave of the corona virus” against which “we must protect our societies”. We also speak about a second wave because the next lockdown offensive will be different from the first one to a certain degree.

While the first wave was characterized by a global and nearly total lockdown – brining the world to a standstill so to say – the next wave will rather see local, temporally limited and graded lockdowns. Hence, the lockdowns will be limited to specific regions or cities (or even parts of cities). In addition, there will be more nuances – from total confinement of people in their houses, to constellations where they are allowed to go to work and to buy essential things but not any other outdoor activity to measures which allow people outdoor activities but only under the conditions that not more than 5 people stay together etc.

This development does not come as a surprise and has been predicted by Marxists. The RCIT noted in March, at the beginning of the first offensive of the COVID-19 counterrevolution, that “it is likely that the ruling classes will keep the global state of emergency for weeks if not months.”<sup>4</sup>

We explained that while the phase of total lockdown will end sooner or later, the ruling class will continue to exploit the pandemic as an excuse for huge attacks on democratic rights and the expansion of the bonapartist state apparatus. Hence, we wrote in April in our book on the COVID-19 counterrevolution: “We are aware 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. (...) 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 other words, the ruling class can and will use the threat of pandemic as justification for an indefinite period of expansion of the repression apparatus, surveillance of the population and state of emergency.”<sup>5</sup>

## **New information concerning the severity (or not so severity) of the pandemic**

Before we discuss the reasons and the nature of the second wave of lockdowns let us briefly recapitulate the nature of the Corona Virus pandemic and the approach to it by the capitalist class. The RCIT has always rejected silly claims of Trumpian clowns which belittled the Corona Virus as a “hoax” or a “little flu”. In our very first article on this issue, written by comrade Almedina Gunić, we estimated, based on the limited information available at that time, that “the virus is less deadly than SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV but more deadly than Influenza (the flu) compared to the overall contact it gets.”<sup>6</sup> And in our *Manifesto* we stated: “The COVID-19 pandemic is certainly a significant health crisis.”

At the same time, we have also strongly rejected the bizarre hysteria which the capitalist governments, their institutions, media and “experts” have created and which they still continue to spread. We have demonstrated in a number of documents that the pandemic, while severe, is neither unprecedented nor significantly more dangerous than various other pandemics which humanity has experienced in the past decades (e.g. AIDS/HIV, Ebola, severe influenza). At this point we will not repeat listing all the numbers and facts which we have presented in various works in the past months.<sup>7</sup>

Let us just draw attention to a few revealing facts. As we already pointed out, about 2.6 million people die of respiratory infections each year world-wide – without much notice.<sup>8</sup> The 1968 *Pandemic* (also misnamed “Hong Kong flu”) killed an estimated one to four million people globally.<sup>9</sup> Bear in mind that the world population at that time was only half of today!<sup>10</sup>

It is also worth reminding that millions of people die each year because of other preventable health risks like tobacco (8 million)<sup>11</sup>, alcohol (3 million)<sup>12</sup> or obesity. However, alcohol, tobacco and fast food are a big business for capitalist corporations. Hence, the bourgeois media don’t create a public hysteria about such issues.

In addition, let us not forget various long-time pandemics in poor countries which still have not been eradicated because treatment offers no profits for the monopolies. For example, 1.5 million people die every year – 440,000 in India alone – because of tuberculosis.<sup>13</sup> Malaria kills more than 400,000 people every year.<sup>14</sup> However, these deaths take place in the semi-colonial countries and not in the imperialist metropolises. We therefore repeat what we already said in our book on the COVID-19 counterrevolution: “In contrast to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the COVID-19 disease has – until now – primarily affected the imperialist countries, first in East Asia and then in Western Europe and the U.S. One could add numerous other diseases which are plaguing the poor countries of the Global South. Therefore Marxists have to take care that they don’t adapt to the ideology of imperialist self-centeredness: when a pandemic wrecked the poor countries, it causes no more than a few crocodile tears from the UN and some financial crumbs. However, when the rich countries face such a pandemic, “the world stands still.”<sup>15</sup>

It is evident that the longer this pandemic exists, the more it becomes undeniable how hollow and cynical the bourgeois hysteria about the supposedly “biggest danger for humanity” is which shall serve as justification for the draconic measures of the ruling class destroying the economic

basis and living conditions of billions of people!

One of the controversial issues is the question how many people are really dying because of the Corona Virus. As a matter of fact, countries do not use all the same methods. Some countries have demonstrably unreliable statistics. In addition, it has happened in various countries that one and the same government has changed the methods of counting. For example, the Austrian government did declare all those people as COVID-19 death who were infected by the virus when they died (irrespective if the virus was the cause of their death or not). This was the method of counting at the time of the severe lockdown in March and April when the conservative-green coalition government had an interest to present high numbers of COVID casualties as it wanted *“that the people should be afraid”* (quote of Prime Minister Sebastian Kurz).<sup>16</sup> From the moment when the government started to ease the lockdown – and hence it had a political interest from that moment to present lower death numbers – it officially changed the method of counting. From now on, only those were counted as COVID-19 death who had demonstrably died because of the virus.<sup>17</sup> There can be no doubt that such politically motivated changes in the methods of counting have also taken place in other countries.

For all these reasons there is a strong argument to look at the development of the so-called excess mortality, i.e. the number of total death in the current period (irrespective of the official causes) in relation to the total number of death in the past. Such a method circumvents the issue which death causes have been officially attributed to fatalities in the past few months.

Of course, even this counting method has certain weaknesses. It is known that the draconic lockdown has caused a number of unnecessary deaths. For example, people who were ill or could not move died in their homes as nobody came to help them; people with other illnesses died because they could not go (or were too afraid to go) to hospital in this period, etc. The figures for excess mortality have definitely a certain tendency to overestimate the deadliness of the Corona Virus. Furthermore, it is also necessary to add a word of caution. When statistics about excess mortality are provided, it is always important to look which years are used for comparison. Currently, most bourgeois statistics compare the number of death during the current pandemic only with the last 2-3 years. This is done for political reasons in order to make the figure of COVID-19 death look more dramatic. If possible, one should try to find comparisons with the figures of the last two or three decades. In addition, one should also take into account the changes in the size of the total population. A larger number of absolute deaths are nothing abnormal if in the same period the size of the total population has grown in similar magnitude. Nevertheless, having stated all these limitations and potential difficulties, it seems to us that the figures for total mortality are the most informative method of those currently available.

## Telling figures for Europe, Sweden and Ischgl

In our last extensive essay on the COVID-19 counterrevolution, published in May, we already provided official figures showing that in a number of European countries as well as in Tokyo there has been no excess mortality at all (even if one compares this only to the last few years). However, in some, large European countries like Spain, France, Italy and Britain, there have been a visible rise of excess mortality for a brief period.<sup>18</sup> In early July, EuroMOMO – the official website for mortality statistics in Europe – published a study on excess mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to this study, Europe experienced an excess mortality for a few weeks in late March and early April. Unfortunately the study focuses on presenting figures of “excess mortality” which methodological bases are not explained clearly (*“Substantial excess mortality is defined as an excess level equivalent to four z-scores above the expected baseline.”*) It is hard to avoid the impression that this is not an accident but a deliberate method in order to confuse the facts.

Based on this problematic method, the study states: *“At the peak level of mortality, in week 14, an excess of 35,802 deaths across all ages was estimated, of which 32,815 (92%) were persons aged ≥ 65 years. In comparison, the highest excess mortality in any week during the previous 4 years reached 16,165 deaths (all ages) in week 2 in 2017, i.e. during the severe 2016/17 influenza season”*.<sup>19</sup> So, we take note that the COVID-19 pandemic has been double as severe as the influenza epidemic three years ago. So even this figure indicate that the current pandemic is severe but hardly an Armageddon-like scenario!

This becomes even more evident if we do not use the dubious method of “excess mortality” used by EuroMOMO but the total figures for mortality. According to the study mortality *“peaked in all countries during week 14 (30 March–5 April)/2020, when a total of 88,581 deaths (all ages) was reached.”*<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, the study does not provide exact figures for the total number of deaths in the peak period of the 2016/17 influenza season. However, the figure provided in the study indicates that slightly more than 70,000 people died in this peak period in early 2017.<sup>21</sup> Naturally, this relativizes the dramatic nature of the COVID-19 figures even more.

This becomes even more evident if we look at the concrete example of Sweden. As it is known the bourgeois and “left-wing” supporters of the bonapartist policy have attacked Sweden since the beginning because it refused to impose a lockdown. It is exactly because Sweden avoided a lockdown that this country is a useful example to examine the true severity of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let us start by stating the fact that Sweden’s total COVID deaths per million in population as of 15 July is 549. This is lower than the deaths per million figures for Belgium (844), Britain (662), Spain (608) and Italy (579) – all countries which have imposed a draconic lockdown.<sup>22</sup> The same is true for other large cities and regions which also imposed such a lockdown like New Jersey and New York which had 1,763 resp. 1,669 death per million.

In addition, contrary to the panicking propaganda of the WHO and many bourgeois media which claimed that Sweden would see a rising number of death, the actual

numbers both of severe hospital cases as well as of deaths have constantly declined since April and are currently hovering around single-digit daily figures.<sup>23</sup>

As we have explained above, there is a controversy about the methodology of counting COVID-19 deaths and comparing countries. So let us look to the total mortality. For this we use the official data of Sweden's public health authorities as it is reported on Wikipedia. In Table 1 we see the figures for total mortality from 1 January to 3 June for each year from 2015 to 2020. As we can see, the number of death in this period in 2015 was 41,032 while in 2020 it was 43,322, i.e. 5.6% higher. Again, this can hardly be characterized as a dramatic figure which could justify mass confinement of a whole population as it was done in other countries!

Even more informative are Figure 1 and 2. They compare the total mortality over a longer period, concretely for the period October to May in the years from 1990 to 2020 respectively for the years 1900 to 2020. Unfortunately, the figures only provide graphs and not exact data. However, it is evident that the number of total death in the current COVID-19 period is more or less the same like that in the last three, four decades. In other words, contrary to the bourgeois Lockdown hysterics, there is simply no excess mortality in Sweden!

In fact, the mortality rate is even lower. This is because the figures in these statistics only give the absolute numbers of death. However, it is necessary to compare these figures with the size of the total population. Concretely, one needs also to take into account that between 1990 and 2020, Sweden's population grew from 8.5 million to 10.1 millions.<sup>27</sup> In summary, the concrete figures for Sweden completely rubbish the hysterical nonsense of the bourgeois cheerleaders of the reactionary Lockdown policy!

A similar development seems to be the case in Britain – the country with the second-highest COVID-19 death per head in the world. A recently published article points out: *“For the true death impact of Covid-19, one must look at overall deaths. In the UK case, headlines focus on “excess deaths” by comparison with the average of the previous five years. But after adjusting for the increase in both population (about 2 million or 3 per cent) and a death rate which had risen from 9.1 to 9.4 per thousand between 2014 and 2019 due to ageing, deaths for the first half of 2020 were similar to the five-year average despite a brief Covid-19 spike.”*<sup>28</sup>

Let us now take another example – Ischgl in Austria. This is a Tyrolean ski resort town which became a major coronavirus hotspot for Austria and other European countries. Because of this, Ischgl has become an object of scientific attention. An extensive testing program was conducted in which 1,473 people (79% of the whole population) took part. Such a comprehensive study has hardly been undertaken in other cities and hence the results are highly telling. The study shows that 42% of the total population has been infected with the virus (albeit 85% of them were not aware of this).<sup>29</sup> However, only 8 people had to be treated in hospital and only two died.<sup>30</sup> This is the equivalent of a mortality rate of 0.1%.

As we have shown in past works, this result roughly coincides with the results of other studies from regions where mass testing or representative tests had been conducted (e.g. Italian villages, New York, Santa Clara in California, Stockholm or the German town of Gangelt in Nordrhein-

Westfalen).<sup>31</sup>

These examples demonstrate very clearly how careful and skeptical one must be when bourgeois politicians and their media present every day dramatic figures about the vast number of people dying, “about the worst pandemic in history”, etc. Yes, this is a serious pandemic – but, no, this is neither doomsday nor an unprecedented pandemic worse than others in the last decades.

### The worst pandemic in Africa? Really?

Another interesting comparison can be seen when looking to Africa. In early July, there have been officially 10,297 deaths as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The WHO stated that this figure is not far from the truth. *“The World Health Organization (WHO) does not think there are manifold undetected coronavirus infections in Africa with people dying unreported, the regional director of the organisation said on Thursday. “We think that there is a certain underestimation of cases,” Matshidiso Moeti told a news conference, adding that the WHO was working with countries to improve their surveillance. Africa has reported 416,063 confirmed coronavirus cases with 10,297 deaths, while 196,944 patients have recovered, according to a Reuters tally based on government statistics and WHO data.”*<sup>32</sup>

Now, compare this figure of 10,297 deaths to the far more devastating mortality resulting from the HIV/AIDS infection. According to official figures from the United Nation, the estimated death toll of this pandemic in Sub-Sahara Africa stood at a total of 470,000 in the year 2018.<sup>33</sup> Hence, it is an example of particular cynicism that the ruling class in Africa – with the full support of all imperialist institutions – imposes a draconic state of siege against the population when a relatively small number of people dies because of the Corona Virus but doesn't lift a finger when many more people are killed because of HIV/AIDS!

As we said at the beginning we do not deny that COVID-19 is a serious pandemic. However, it is not the only serious pandemic and it is not qualitatively worse than other pandemics which humanity experienced in the past decades. We repeat: at no point did the COVID-19 pandemic present such a kind of danger for the population that it could justify such draconic measures like lockdown and state of siege for whole regions or even countries.

Moreover, it is a pandemic which demonstrably can not be successfully fought via a draconic lockdown policy. Leaving aside that Marxists, out of principle, can never support bonapartist measures of the capitalist state, the recent experience in Western Europe has shown that the lockdown policy could neither stop high numbers of death nor could it avoid another wave of the pandemic.

### Capitalism and care homes as deadly traps for old people

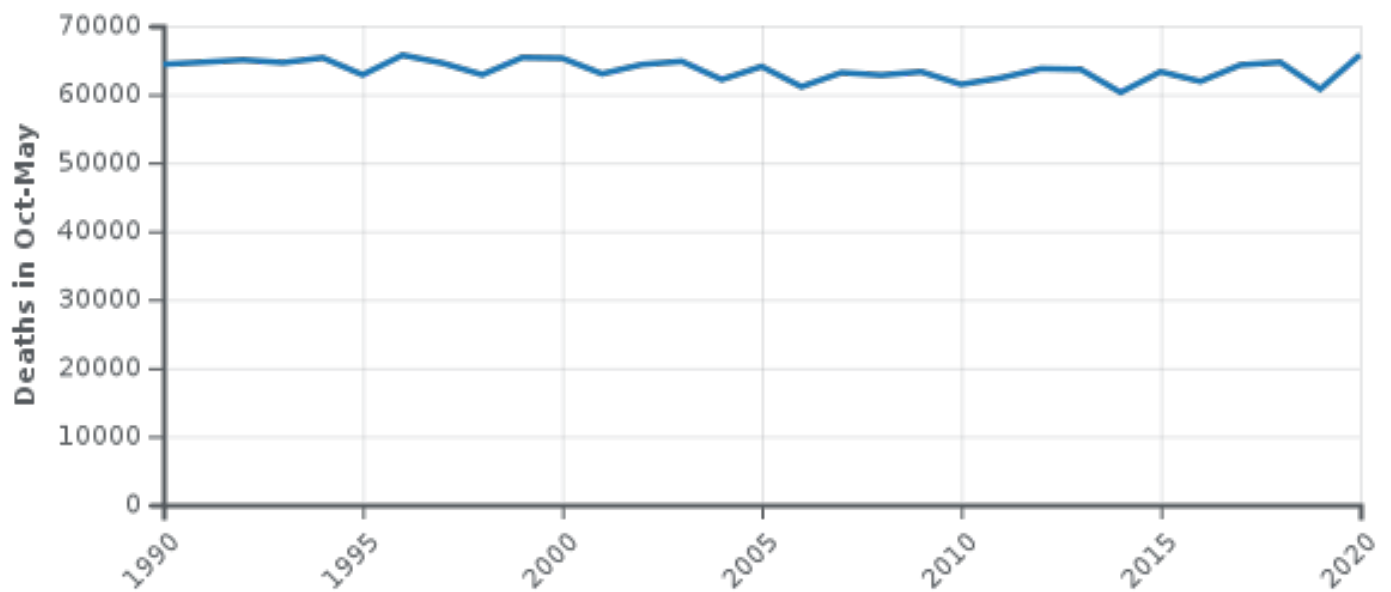
It is evident that there are specific factors which make this pandemic more dangerous. First and most, it is obviously dangerous for old people and people with a medical record. As the figures from the above-mentioned EuroMO-MO study show, 92% of those who died in Europe were persons aged over 65 years. More specifically, the virus has been particularly devastating for old people living in care homes. According to a study, on average the num-

**Table 1. Sweden: Total all-cause deaths from 1 January to 3 June, 2015-2020** <sup>24</sup>

*Total all-cause deaths from 1 Jan to 3 Jun excluding 29 Feb, calculated from SCB*

2015: 41,032  
 2016: 39,061  
 2017: 40,660  
 2018: 40,970  
 2019: 37,868  
 2020: 43,322

**Figure 1. Sweden: Total all-cause deaths October to May, 1990-2020** <sup>25</sup>



**Figure 2. Sweden: Total all-cause deaths October to May, 1900-2020** <sup>26</sup>



ber of deaths in care homes account for half of the total victims.<sup>34</sup> As a report from *Euronews* states, “Europe’s care home sector is concentrated in the hands of a few large private groups, often run by pension and investment funds.”<sup>35</sup> These corporations run the care homes in order to make huge profits. As a result, the workers are badly paid and working under precarious conditions. They are often migrants living in bad housing conditions. Likewise, health conditions in these care homes are bad. Hence, it is not surprising that a number of these workers have become ill and hence transmitted the virus to many old people in the care homes. The whole lockdown regime didn’t – and couldn’t – save these old people from infection.

The same report gives also the contrasting example of a care home with 106 residents near Lyon in south east France. At the beginning of the lockdown half of the staff moved in the home bringing their suitcases and sleeping bags. They isolated themselves for several weeks in order to avoid infection. However, within the home, people were not confined to their rooms. “Our residents are not isolated to their rooms,” says director Valérie Martin. “They are still able to have social contact with the other residents, as well as with us, as we see them all the time. They don’t have the feeling of being abandoned or loneliness.”

As a result, not a single one of the staff or of the residents became infected. If the workers would get higher wages and secure jobs so that they can live in better conditions and/or if they would receive substantial bonus payments so that they accept living in isolation in such care homes for several weeks, many deaths among these old people could have been easily avoided. As the saying goes, it is the capitalist profit-system, not the virus, which is the pandemic!

Furthermore, it is an undisputed fact that disproportional high numbers of deaths in the Western imperialist countries have been among the poor and the oppressed layers (Blacks, migrants, etc.). Again, we see that the mortality strongly increases with bad social living conditions.

All this demonstrates that in order to limit the mortality of the pandemic, the workers and oppressed have to fight for higher wages, for sufficient health protection, for better housing and living conditions, etc. As we have stressed many times, this can not be achieved when the workers are living under conditions of a state of siege without having democratic rights to assemble and to demonstrate. In order to fight for better lives, the workers and oppressed must break down the lockdown regime!

### **The real nature of the ruling class bonapartist offensive under the cover of COVID-19**

At this point, we want to recapitulate briefly our analysis of the real reasons for the reactionary lockdown policy. The RCIT has repeatedly explained that the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020 in a world situation which had been characterized by several key factors.

- a) A capitalist world economy which had begun in the second half of last year and which is the worst slump since 1929, i.e. the *Third Depression*;<sup>36</sup>
- b) A global wave of mass struggles in numerous countries on all continents;<sup>37</sup>
- c) The tensions between the Great Powers have massively accelerated in the past years as the Global Trade War resp.

the Cold War between the U.S. and China demonstrate.<sup>38</sup>

While we do not and can not know the exact considerations and plans within all the imperialist governments at that time, there can be no doubt that they must have had this highly volatile world situation in mind. Well-known imperialist think tanks like *Carnegie Endowment* are running websites which regularly update trackers about mass protests all over the world.<sup>39</sup> The *Center for Strategic and International Studies* has published a study called “*The Age of Mass Protests, Understanding an Escalating Global Trend*” in March 2020 about which we reported.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, various bourgeois economists were already aware of the beginning economic depression.<sup>41</sup> Since all these institutions play a key role as advisors of the ruling class, the latter was surely aware of the explosive world situation.

Of course, the bourgeois whips pretended in public articles and speeches that their reaction to the Corona Virus is guided purely by health consideration. But Marxists, in contrast to the opportunist left, must not believe the phrases of the well-paid politicians and journalists of the ruling class.

It has been likely the case that many members of the ruling class have been worried about the Corona Virus for reasons of personal safety. This is hardly surprising since the most prominent risk group of the Corona Virus – old men – is strongly represented among the top layers of the bourgeoisie. They are all the more worried because there is currently no vaccine available.

So while the ruling class might have been worried about their own health, it certainly did not impose a lockdown because it feared for the public health. If that would have been their main concern, why have all the capitalist governments systematically cut the budgets for the public health sector since many years?! And if they initially imposed the total lockdown out of concern for public health why did they later relax or withdraw it?! Does any intelligent person want to suggest that all the ruling classes around the world were concerned about public health in March but no longer in May?!

May be some bourgeois politicians did really believe that it is possible to overcome the pandemic via a prolonged lockdown. One can not exclude this. But then we have to say that these people have been idiots and they were obviously wrong as the worst affected countries resp. big cities all had imposed such draconic lockdowns (see above).

No, we repeat what we did already state from the very beginning of this crisis in a number of documents. The objective main role of the reactionary Lockdown policy of the ruling class was not to combat the pandemic but rather to promote specific political and economic interests of the monopoly bourgeoisie. They consciously generated fear and panic (see e.g. the internal minutes of the Austrian government quoted above) in order to utilize such a climate for political objectives like 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, etc.

Furthermore, the capitalists in important industrial sectors couldn’t overlook the fact that such a crisis offers extraordinary business opportunities. It is clear for every intelligent observer that a number of corporations – in industries like drugs, biotechnology, robotics, Artificially Intelligence and the whole IT industry, the whole online



retail sector, etc – expect massive profits.

Opportunist “left-wing” supporters of the Lockdown policy have criticized us of adhering to “conspiracy theories” because we point out the reactionary political and economic interests of the ruling class behind the cover of the COVID-19 pandemic. We repeat that such criticism demonstrates an abysmal naivety – bordering to criminal stupidity – since it betrays the idea that the ruling class *would not* put their power and profit interests first in the midst of the worst economic depression and a global wave of popular uprisings! Has there ever been a ruling class in history *which was not guided* in its major policy decisions by the specific political and economic class interests?! Why should this have been different this time when a pandemic emerged?! Because they say otherwise in their public statements?! Well, dream on, Lockdown Left!

As we have pointed out in our works, the ruling classes soon understood that the COVID-19 crisis is a huge political opportunity. Take the example of James Boughton, a well-known bourgeois economist and historian who has served for decades at the International Monetary Fund. At the beginning of the lockdown offensive he explicitly said so when he referred to past crises in South Korea and Indonesia which were catalysts for dramatic neoliberal attacks on the rights of the working class and the popular masses. Referring to the COVID-19 crisis, he said in early March: “*Only in a crisis are governments able to rally people to accept necessary but painful reforms. Every crisis is also an opportunity.*”<sup>42</sup> Does the Lockdown Left want to claim seriously that this was an isolated example and that the capitalist governments which are all advised on a daily basis by people like Boughton did not have similar con-

siderations?!

Finally, let us add another thought. It is well known and undisputed among Marxists that there is nothing like an “objective” or “neutral” economic or social policy. There is a bourgeois and there is a socialist economic resp. social policy. It is either in the interest of the ruling class or in the interest of the working class and the oppressed. Curiously many self-proclaimed “Marxists” seem to forget that there is also no “objective” or “neutral” health policy. Here too, such a policy is either in the interest of the oppressor class or the oppressed classes.

Now, we ask, how can people who claim to be adult and intelligent, or even Marxists, believe that the capitalist class all over the world – in bourgeois democracies as well as bourgeois dictatorships – decided to launch a health policy which would be in the interest not of themselves but of the workers and oppressed?!

### Why is the ruling class opting for a local lockdown strategy?

As we have demonstrated at the beginning of this essay, the ruling class in many countries – from China and India, Europe, Australia, to Latin America – is increasingly opting for a localized variant of the lockdown policy. The reasons for choosing this strategy are pretty obvious. First and foremost, the policy of total lockdown could have been only a temporary strategy. In an essay published in late May, we predicted such a turn to a different strategy. “*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*

## Books of the RCIT

### 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

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting analyses the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers – the U.S., China, EU, Russia, and Japan. He shows that the diplomatic rows, sanctions, trade wars, and military tensions between these Great Powers are not accidental or caused by a mad man in the White House. They are rather rooted in the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system. This rivalry is a key feature of the current historic period and could, ultimately, result in major wars between these Great Powers.

*Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* demonstrates the validity of the Marxist analysis of modern imperialism. Using comprehensive material (including 61 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that a correct understanding of the rise of China and Russia as new Great Powers is crucial for assessing the character of the current inter-imperialist rivalry.

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting critically discusses the analysis of modern imperialism by a number of left-wing parties (left social democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and others). He demon-

strates that most of these organizations fail to understand the nature of the Great Power rivalry and, consequently, are not able to take an internationalist and revolutionary stance.

The author elaborates the approach of leading Marxist figures like Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg to the problems of Great Power rivalry and imperialist aggression against oppressed peoples. He outlines a Marxist program for the current period which is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future.

The book contains an introduction and 29 chapters plus an appendix (412 pages) and includes 61 figures and tables. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

#### 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



By Michael Pröbsting

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and repression of the popular masses; 2) A “partition” of countries in different zones, depending on their numbers of infected persons.”<sup>43</sup>

In the same essay, we explained the fundamental problems of this policy and why such a modification has been necessary from the ruling class point of view. “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).”<sup>44</sup>

For these reasons, it was clear from early on that the bourgeoisie would not – and could not – impose an indefinite total lockdown. However, there were some developments in the past months which influenced and shaped the state bonapartist policy of the ruling class.

First, at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the ruling class did hope to limit the damage to a short, sharp recession so that the economy could soon grow again rapidly (a so-called “V-recession”).<sup>45</sup> However, in its latest “World Economic Outlook Update” from June 2020, the International Monetary Fund noticed disenchanted: “COVID-19 Crisis: More Severe Economic Fallout than Anticipated”. It currently predicts a “deep downturn in 2020” with an unprecedented decline of annual global output by -6.1% (in Market Exchange Rates) resp. -4.9% (in PPP). And the initially optimistic outlook for next year has been modified to a cautious hope for a “sluggish turnaround in 2021”.<sup>46</sup>

Those Western imperialist countries which imposed the most draconic lockdown measures also experienced the worst slumps (France: -12.5%; Italy: -12.8%; Spain: -12.8%).<sup>48</sup> In summary, the lockdown resulted in an acceleration of the already ongoing recession of the capitalist world economy – in a much more devastating manner than the leaders of the bourgeoisie initially hoped.

The effects of the current depression are even more severe in the semi-colonial world. A new study published by the United Nations warns that the poorer country might have been massively thrown back in their development. “The pandemic abruptly disrupted implementation towards many of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals, Ed.] and, in some cases, turned back decades of progress.”<sup>49</sup>

However, there has been a second and substantially more significant factor which influenced the strategy of the ruling class. As we predicted from the beginning, the lockdown provoked a growing popular sentiment of hatred and various mass protests. In the above-mentioned RCIT Manifesto published in mid-March we stated: “It is not possible to predict how long this situation [the counterrevolutionary situation opened up with the global total lockdown, Ed.] will last. It might be a matter of only a few months. However, what

is clear is that the counter-revolutionary offensive of the ruling classes will create explosive political contradictions. Sooner or later, it will be difficult for the state-bonapartist regimes to justify their massive attacks on democratic rights. It will become soon obvious that while they give billions of dollars to the big capitalists, many workers face unemployment and wage cuts. (...) Likewise, a massive increase of global tensions between the Great Powers is inevitable. 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.”

Such a “major domestic crisis” opened up in early June in the U.S. – the most powerful imperialist state – and spread to other countries. This uprising and its global repercussions – taking place despite and against the draconic lockdown measures – meant that the popular masses tore down the reactionary state of siege imposed by the ruling class. It opened up a pre-revolutionary situation in the U.S. which has inspired many millions works, oppressed and youth around the world.<sup>50</sup>

The latest wave of protests goes partly beyond the issues of racism and police violence. In some cases they are a direct protest against governments and their reactionary lockdown policy (e.g. in Serbia or Israel).

These two developments – a global slump worse than expected and an unprecedented popular uprising in the U.S. with global repercussions – have created additional contradictions within the ruling class and have resulted in certain modifications of its policy.<sup>51</sup>

The following statement of the French government reflects a recognition of the new situation. The newly appointed French Prime Minister Jean Castex said on 8 July: “We must be ready for a second wave, but we would not proceed to a general lockdown like in March, as that has terrible economic and human consequences. Any new lockdown would be targeted.”<sup>52</sup>

Observing these contradictory developments, a remark by Karl Marx comes into one’s mind. In a letter to the German workers leader Ferdinand Lassalle he commented about the possible effects of a war: „The war would, of course, have serious, and without doubt ultimately revolutionary consequences. But initially it will maintain Bonapartism in France, set back the internal movement within England and Russia, revive the pettiest nationalist passions in Germany, etc., and hence, in my view, its initial effect will everywhere be counter-revolutionary.”<sup>53</sup> To a certain degree, the COVID-19 counterrevolution had similar consequences. At the beginning, it opened a counter-revolutionary global situation. However, it provoked such dramatic contradictions that this soon resulted in political explosions and mass rebellions.

One important consequence of this development has been that the plans of the ruling class to ban all larger demonstration have suffered a setback in various countries. The spontaneous wave of mass protests – beginning in the U.S. and spreading to many other countries – which simply ignored these bans have forced government to back down, at least for now, and to accept such public assemblies. While it remains to be seen how long this breathing space will last, this development certainly shows that the

counter-revolutionary offensive of the bourgeoisie is not unstoppable and can be beaten back.

Furthermore, the fact that the “second wave of the Corona Virus” is coming now makes it impossible for the bourgeois governments to claim that the draconic restrictions of the total lockdown policy have been an effective instrument in fighting the pandemic.<sup>54</sup>

As a result of these developments, one can observe now a growing number of judges in the imperialist countries who oppose the radical shift towards state bonapartism. To give a few examples: In Catalunya, a court overturned the imposition of the general lockdown in the region.<sup>55</sup> A similar decision was made in Germany where a court overturned the lockdown in the town of Guetersloh.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, there has been some opposition by judges against the general ban of demonstrations. A German court overturned the general ban of demonstrations.<sup>57</sup> A similar decision was made by an Austrian court.<sup>58</sup> It is certainly true that judges, in general, don’t like to be pushed aside by too-powerful politicians and police commanders. However, the fact that they are demonstrating their opposition more openly now than in the first period of the lockdown reflects a shift within the bourgeoisie.

Another example of the increasing cracks within the ruling class can be seen in Israel. As it is known, the extreme right-wing government of Netanyahu did use the draconic “anti-terrorism” laws – initially imposed in order to increase the brutal oppression of the Palestinian people – for a comprehensive surveillance of the whole population (“contact tracing program”) by its internal security service *Shin Beit*. As a result many thousands of Israeli Jews were forced into quarantine because they had supposedly “been in contact with a confirmed carrier of the coronavirus.” However, the authorities were now forced to officially admit that at least 12,000 people “were being forced to stay home by mistake, likely due in part to technology that fails to discern whether two people were actually within six feet of each other, close enough to transmit the virus.”<sup>59</sup>

As an aside, we draw attention to two additional important conclusions from this tracing disaster. If many thou-

sands of Israeli Jews have been put in quarantine because of a defect contact tracing program, how many thousands of Palestinians are currently in prison because of “information” of the same program?! And, secondly, Israel is not only a developed capitalist country but is also well-known as a global leader in the field of state-of-art military and surveillance technologies. If Israel’s contact tracing program is so error-prone, similar high-tech surveillance programs will hardly operate more accurate in other countries!

### Excuse: A crisis characteristic for the present period of capitalist decay

The famous Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz once said that “each period had its own wars”. Lenin highlighted this remark in his “*Notebook on Clausewitz*”.<sup>60</sup> Taking an analogy, we can say that the current pandemic and the COVID-19 counterrevolution is the equivalent to “the war of our epoch”.

Of course, we do not mean “war” in a literal sense. But it is a war-like event in the following sense. First, the current crisis has obviously devastating economic consequences as we already noted above. Looking for historic parallels, we can compare the magnitude of the current recession with the economic collapse at the beginning of World War I. While output per capita shrunk in 1914 by -6.7%, the forecasts for 2020 predict a similar decline of -6.2%.<sup>61</sup> (See Table 3)

In addition, recently published data by the World Bank show that never before in the history of capitalism has there been a recession in so many countries at the same time. In 2020, more than 90% of all economies will experience contractions in annual per capita Gross Domestic Product. This share will be “higher than the proportion at the height of the Great Depression of 1930-32”.<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, it is a truly global event not only in an economic but also in a political and social sense. The pandemic affects the whole world at the same time. Similarly, there is a simultaneous shift of ruling class policy towards state

**Table 2. IMF Forecast for the World Economy in 2020 (in PPP)**<sup>47</sup>

World	-4.9%
United States	-8.0%
Euro Area	-10.2%
Japan	-5.8%
United Kingdom	-10.2%
China	1.0%
India	-4.5%
ASEAN	-2.0%
Russia	-6.6%
Brazil	-9.1%
Mexico	-10.5%
Saudi Arabia	-6.8%
Nigeria	-5.4%
South Africa	-8.0%

bonapartism. Because of these combined features we have a counter-revolutionary event which occupies all of society.

The current developments are also characteristic as they reflect the features of the present period. We see the combination of the most modern high technologies with elements of barbarism. The most modern technologies are used to analyze the pandemic and to develop new vaccines. Likewise, unprecedented technologies for surveillance are rapidly advancing. We see a massive deployment of robots and Artificial Intelligence in all areas of life. At the same time, hunger is spreading, people are dying because of a pandemic and mobs of violent police are running amok. As we have noted in our Manifesto *"an imperialist Leviathan is now being built-up by the ruling class in full force – under the pretext of fighting a pandemic. The era of relatively extensive bourgeois democracy in the imperialist states will soon be over."*

Add to this that all these developments take place in a period characterized by the dramatic ecological crisis and climate change caused by the profit-driven system of capitalism.

All these developments reflect the nature of the current historic period with a modern, indeed super-modern, class society in decay. If we can call – as Lenin and Trotsky did – the whole epoch of monopoly capitalism as an epoch of decay, we can characterize the current period as the final stage of this epoch. In other words, *we are living in the period of decay of the epoch of decay.*

At the same time, the current developments in world politics reflect not only the reactionary nature of capitalism but also the acceleration of its contradictions and the inevitable explosions of class struggle. What a dramatic shift in the world situation have we seen within only a few months: from a global wave of class struggles and insurrections in autumn 2019 to a world in standstill with a counter-revolutionary stage of siege imposed by the ruling class in spring 2020 to a spontaneous popular uprising in the heart of the imperialist beast which spreads to other countries!

Such developments underline once more the *revolutionary* political character of the current historic period as we have analyzed in a number of works.<sup>64</sup>

We conclude this excursion by pointing out that not only do the current developments bear similarities with historic events like the beginning of World War I. The same must be said about the reformist and centrist leaderships of the official workers and popular organizations. Their treacherous capitulation to bourgeois state bonapartism shows that the so-called "left" has similarly failed this historic test as it did in 1914-18 or 1939-45!

### **The nature and inner contradictions of the local lockdown strategy**

As we have pointed out above, the massive economic damage as well as the popular mass protests makes it rather unlikely that the ruling class will again turn towards the strategy of a total lockdown.

However, one can not exclude that in some cases governments might go so far again. The latest four days-long riots in Serbia – including storming of the parliament in Belgrade – have been provoked by the announcement of

President Aleksandar Vucic to reintroduce a total lockdown.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Israel's top minister Yuval Steinitz demands that the government *"must impose a 10-day nationwide closure in order to get to grips with the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic that is spreading rapidly throughout the country. (...) people would be allowed to go to work or go out for necessities but would otherwise be largely required to stay at home."*<sup>66</sup> The *New York Times* – a leading mouthpiece of the liberal bourgeoisie in the U.S. – published an opinion article in which the author called for *"decisive action"* and that *"a comprehensive April-like shutdown may be required."*<sup>67</sup>

In any case, the general tendency seems to be to impose local and temporary lockdowns. The basic idea derives from the *"Red Zone / Green Zone"* concept about which we reported in our above-mentioned essay *"The Police and Surveillance State in the Post-Lockdown Phase"*. Depending on the designation by the authorities, a district, city or region can be designated as *"dangerous"* where the *"virus is not under control"*. In such a case, a lockdown (more or less strict) will be imposed by the state apparatus for a certain period.

The advantages of this conception for the bourgeoisie are obvious. The interruption of the economic activity would be much less damaging since it would only affect certain regions and not the whole country. Likewise, the governments seem to be willing to *"allow"* people to go to work – so that they can continue creating the basis for capitalist profits – but to force them staying at home for most of the rest of the time.

Such a strategy requires a massive propaganda by the state and the bourgeoisie media. They will denounce the *"irresponsible"* and *"anti-social"* behavior of people and make them blamable when a local lockdown in this or that district is imposed. It is clear that such a campaign will be directed mainly against *"the plebs"*, i.e. the lower strata of the working class, migrants and poor. Such a strategy gears to divide the working class and to mobilize the liberal middle layers against the popular masses.

While the advantages of such a strategy for the ruling class are obvious, it is also evident that it contains a number of risks and disadvantages. First, it will have negative effects on the economy nevertheless – albeit smaller than in the case of a total lockdown. This is also the case because it makes social and economic life unpredictable. It doesn't make sense to plan an event or a business project in a certain place if this area could be put under lockdown at any time.

Secondly, the whole process of *"localization"* of the lockdown policy will make it more fragmented and disputed. It is inevitable that this policy will provoke regular debates and tension why this or that region has been put under lockdown and why this or that region has not been put under lockdown. This will result in an undermining of the credibility of the lockdown policy and, hence, reduce public trust and support for this policy. The transparency and conceivable *"logic"* of the lockdown policy will suffer from this process and this, in turn, will increase popular mistrust and hatred against the rulers.

Furthermore, such a policy contains a dangerous tendency towards a certain fragmentation of the country into regions with different rules. Such a process will inevitably strengthen the power of local political and police forces – an effect which has been certainly not intended by the rul-

ing class. In other words, the policy of local lockdowns – created against the background of a massive shift towards state bonapartism and political centralization – provokes inevitable a certain counter-tendency. So we see a global trend not only away from globalization and towards strengthening national states and protectionism but also towards localism, i.e. a weakening of the central national state. One could say, we see to a certain degree a tendency towards political (not economical!) re-feudalization in parallel (and potential contradiction) to the tendency towards state bonapartist centralization!

The strategy of local lockdowns will also make it more difficult for the ruling class to atomize and paralyze the working class and oppressed as comprehensive as it was the case during the period of total lockdown. When this or that working class district becomes occupied by the state forces and put under lockdown, another district might remain relatively free and can serve as a rallying point for popular resistance.

Of course, the ruling class will continue trying to suppress democratic rights. In Greece we just see such an attempt where the conservative government has introduced a bill which makes participation in a protest rally held without police permission punishable by up to a year in prison! Protest organizers may also be held liable for damage caused to public or private property during a protest.<sup>68</sup> We note in passing that all these developments demonstrate so evidently that the ruling class is shifting towards an anti-democratic policy of state bonapartism. It is only the silly social-bonapartist left which fantasizes that the lockdowns have been imposed by the ruling class not for political reasons but out of concern for public health!

### Preparing for a new counter-revolutionary offensive

In order to summarize what we have elaborated above we can state that we believe the ruling class is preparing for a second wave of counter-revolutionary offensive under the cover of COVID-19. They have to take into account the economic depression, the additional damage caused by the lockdowns as well as the growing mass unrest against the powerful capitalist state, increasing unemployment and worsening living conditions. Hence, they will likely rely on a policy of local and temporary lockdowns combined with a massive public campaign against “irresponsible” and “anti-social” behavior of sectors of the workers and oppressed.

One should be under no illusions that such a concentrated offensive will not have some negative effects on the con-

sciousness of the masses at the beginning. People will feel insecure when they read and hear everywhere that “death is just around the corner”. In addition, governments will dramatically increase the presence of police and army on the streets and draconically suppress the right to assemble – both for private gatherings as well as for political manifestations.

However, we believe that the counter-revolutionary effects will be less dramatic than they had been in spring. The reason is that the popular masses have made by now experience both with the pandemic itself as well as with state repression under the cover of COVID-19. We think that the hysteria instigated by the bourgeois public will have less effect than this was the case some months ago.

At the same time, hatred and lack of fear among the popular masses have substantially increased as we have seen by the vast numbers of protests not only in the U.S. but also in many other countries. We therefore think that the next period will see both massive counter-revolutionary attacks as well as revolutionary explosions of mass struggles. In our book on the COVID-19 counterrevolution, published in April, we have stated that in the new era repression and state bonapartism, the key slogan is the *transformation of the state of emergency into a popular uprising*. The recent events in the U.S. have fully confirmed this strategic slogan. We are convinced that the coming period will confirm our strategy even more.

Faced with such challenges revolutionaries have to advocate a bold program which starts with a series of demands in defense of public health, living standard and democratic rights. In order to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the RCIT advocates a serious program of mass testing, free health care, free provision of protective gear and hygiene articles at workplaces and public places, and the expansion of the public health sector under workers and popular control. Such an expansion must include substantial wage increases for health and care workers and a massive campaign to recruit and train additional personal. It should also include the nationalization of all private corporations in the care industry without compensation and the building of additional care homes.<sup>69</sup>

In order to defend our living standards the workers must not only defend their wages and jobs but also mobilize for a public employment program as well as for the nationalization of the corporations and banks under workers control. Such a program must also include a massive program of building new houses for the poor with proper infrastructure in order to reduce crowdedness in slums.

In order to defend our democratic rights, we must oppose any expansion of the power of the bonapartist state machinery. Realizing such demands is impossible without

### Table 3. Decline of Global Output Per Capita in 1914, 1930-32, 2009 and 2020<sup>62</sup>

1914:	-6.7%
1930-32:	-17.6% (*)
2009:	-2.9%
2020:	-6.2% (*)

\* The figure for 1930-32 shows the cumulative contraction, i.e. of all three years combined; Data for 2020 are forecasts of the World Bank.

mass struggles. Hence, opposition against all restrictions of democratic rights is mandatory for any force which seriously wants to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Likewise, any mass struggle requires democratic assemblies as well as the creation of organs of self-defense against brutal police thugs.

### **The Lockdown Left: a never-ending embarrassment**

Revolutionaries must not forget that the struggle in the current period faces not only an aggressive ruling class as the enemy. Within the workers and popular organizations they also face the obstacle of the Lockdown Left, i.e. those reformist and centrist forces which advocate support for the state bonapartist attacks. Marxists characterize these forces as social-bonapartists as they disguise their support for the bourgeois bonapartist measures with “socialist” phrases. In our works in the past months we have repeatedly denounced the open or disguised support of most reformist and centrist organizations for the COVID-19 counterrevolution as a historic capitulation comparable with the social-patriotic betrayal of the majority of the Second International at the beginning of the imperialist World War I in 1914.

At this point we will not analyze again the policy of various trends of the Lockdown Left and their excuses for supporting state bonapartism. We have done so in detail in our book as well as several special articles.<sup>70</sup> At this point, we will rather limit ourselves to a few comments. In general, we currently see a certain tendency among various centrist groups to reduce their openly demonstrated enthusiasm for the lockdown policy. While they do not renounce their social-bonapartist stance, they tend to cast a veil of silence over this issue. We see such a phenomenon particularly among centrists based in Europe and U.S. This is hardly surprising since the public pressure of the imperialist bourgeoisie for a total lockdown has been reduced lately and, in parallel, the outrage among the popular masses about the state of siege has massively increased. As we pointed out in our documents on the popular uprising in the U.S. and other countries, it has been a devastating blow for the opportunist reformists and centrists that the masses tore down the state of siege while the silly Lockdown Left still called the people “to stay at home”! It became evident for everyone that the militant sectors of the masses are much more advanced and have a higher consciousness than the social-bonapartist left.

To give a historical analogy: To a certain degree, this tacit silence of various centrist organizations in Europe and the U.S. on the issue of lockdown in the current conjuncture bears resemblances with the emergence of opportunist social-pacifism among the social democrats during World War I. At the beginning in 1914 all reformists and centrists of the Second International were all united in supporting the war efforts of their respective imperialist bourgeoisie. However, when the war lasted longer and longer with all its devastating consequences, when a pro-peace sector among the ruling class emerged and when the anti-war sentiment among the popular masses became stronger, certain divisions and splits among the opportunist social-patriots developed. In Germany, for example, social democratic leaders like Karl Kautsky, Hugo Haase and Eduard

Bernstein stopped voting for the war credits in parliament from summer 1915 onwards. While they opposed war “in principle” and advocated “peace”, they refused waging any consistent struggle both against the imperialist war efforts as well as against the open social-patriots. In fact, such “*covert opportunists*” were not better than the open social-patriots; they were rather, in the words of Lenin, “*the most dangerous defenders of this bourgeois current*”<sup>71</sup>. This is why the Bolsheviks denounced these centrist social-pacifists for “*replacing revolutionary Marxism with eclecticism in theory, and servility to or impotence towards opportunism, in practice.*”<sup>72</sup>

However, one should not overestimate the temporary turn to silence of such opportunists on the Lockdown issue. As soon as the ruling class will energetically wage another campaign of public hysteria about the pandemic and call for a new wave of lockdown policy, most “left” social-bonapartists will again join the bandwagon of bourgeois public opinion. These are people without backbone who just follow the shifts in public opinion – in particular among the liberal middle class and the labor bureaucracy (the leaderships of the trade unions, social democracy, Stalinists, left-populists, etc.). The opportunists slavishly follow these layers’ shifts to the right as well as to the left.

### **The shameful example of the PSTU/LIT-CI**

In addition, it is worth noting that some centrist tendencies still brandish their open support for the reactionary lockdown without any shame or embarrassment. Let us take the example of the Latin America-based *International Workers League* (LIT-CI) with the Brazilian PSTU as its most important section. This is a centrist organization claiming to stand in the tradition of Nahuel Moreno. As we explained in a recently published article, this organization even refused to support spontaneous mass demonstrations against the arch-reactionary Bolsonaro government because of “*the danger of the pandemic*”!<sup>73</sup>

A few days ago, the leadership of the LIT-CI published a comprehensive action program against the COVID-19 pandemic. While this program contains a number of correct basic economic, democratic and health demands, it demonstrates in its essence once more the social-bonapartist capitulation of this organization when it comes to the decisive questions.<sup>74</sup>

The whole thrust of the program is characterized by the narrative of the bourgeois media and the middle class liberals. A sub-title of the program – “*The worst pandemic in a century*” – repeats the bourgeois hypocrisy which ignores all the other pandemic which have cost annually hundreds of thousands or millions of lives during the past decades. According to the LIT leadership, doomsday is close and “*humanity is helpless*”. “*There will be no vaccine in the short term, there is no safe treatment. After months of the most serious pandemic in recent history, humanity remains helpless.*”

Like various other social-bonapartist organizations in the past few months, the LIT program denounced the ruling class not for imposing a lockdown but ... for not imposing a longer and harsher lockdown! “*Contrary to what governments say, the pandemic is not under control. On the contrary, it is getting worse worldwide. There are many more infected and killed by COVID than official figures admit. Governments want to hide their absolute inability to preserve workers’ lives. They*

want to justify the end of partial quarantines worldwide. (...) Now, European governments have ended partial quarantines to save companies, as in Italy, Spain, and France. This directly exposes workers to a new wave of contamination by the virus. (...) Under pressure from companies, the governments in the world have even abandoned partial quarantines. They are exposing workers to a new round of the pandemic. (...) According to scientists, in no country, even in the most affected, has the stage of "herd immunity" been reached, which ensures the control of the pandemic. All countries are threatened by the continuation of the current wave or a new wave before an effective vaccine or treatment is achieved. (...) We demand a safe quarantine, with housing and full wages for all workers, whether employed or not."

So, the solution for the LIT leadership is that all workers should stay at home – of course "with housing and full wages" – until a vaccine is found. As we have explained in other works, this program is both utopian as well as reactionary. It is utopian, first, because no society can exist without labor. Second, the working class and the oppressed can not achieve any demand by sitting at home instead of organizing and fighting against the capitalist class in the workplaces and on the streets. The LIT program is also reactionary because it advocates the disarming of the working class. Staying at home and banning meetings and demonstrations make it impossible for the workers and oppressed to resist against the ongoing counter-revolutionary offensive of the ruling class! In short, the LIT leadership is objectively promoting a social-bonapartist policy of atomization of the working class, i.e. the liquidation of the class struggle. Surely, many members of this organization are not aware of this. But this is the objective meaning of their leadership's strategy.

We have taken the example of the LIT not because it is worse than other social-bonapartist organizations. We have done so because for two reasons:

- a) It is a sizeable centrist organization in Latin America and, hence, representative for the spectrum of degenerated "Trotskyism";
- b) It has produced an actual comprehensive program which summarizes all the key failures of the whole Lockdown Left.

### The imperialist aristocratism of the Lockdown Left

We conclude our discussion of the Lockdown Left with the following note. As we have outlined above, we expect a massive intensification of the bourgeois campaign against the "anti-social plebs", calling them responsible for the ongoing pandemic because they might not keep "social distancing", wearing masks, or because they keep having party with music and dancing etc. Hence, the ruling class will denounce these lower strata of the workers and poor as responsible for the "necessary" and "unavoidable" repressive lockdown measures. It is very likely that large sectors of the liberal middle class and the labor bureaucracy will join this campaign.

The RCIT has explained since years in its works that large sectors of the reformist and centrist left verbally proclaim defending the interests of the working class but in fact they increasingly orientate to the middle class, the liberal intelligentsia and the labor aristocracy. The social-bonapartist

collapse of the left in the past few months demonstrated this once more with total clarity. Hence, when the bourgeoisie – with the liberal middle layers and the labor bureaucracy in tow – will intensify its slanderous campaign against the "irresponsible plebs", we can expect that many social-bonapartist leftists will openly or covertly support such a campaign.

This would be hardly surprising since it fits to the narrative of various bourgeois ideologists which strongly influences the outlook of sectors of the middle class. This narrative – which we have called *imperialist aristocratism* in past works – centers on the supposedly necessity "to defend civilization" against all forms of threats. The idea of representing the centre of civilization and of having a civilizing mission to the barbarians has always been a central conception of ruling classes of empires. It was relevant to the Roman Empire ("to give civilisation to mankind", as Pliny the Elder said <sup>75</sup>), to the Chinese Empire (see the old concept of *Tianxia* <sup>76</sup>), to British and French colonialism (the *mission civilisatrice*) and of course to modern-day imperialism. More recently, this conception has been revitalized by Samuel P. Huntington and his book "*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*".

However, reflecting the epoch of decay of imperialism, the narrative is focused today not so much on the "civilizing mission" but more on the "defense of civilization" against the "onslaught of the Barbarians". Today, the imperialist societies fear the Corona Virus, the raw migrants, the Islamists, etc. In fact, the opportunist left has borrowed this imperialist narrative and made the "religion of capitalist progress" – as Trotsky puts it <sup>77</sup> – its own ideology. To take this sentiment from the heights of ideology to the depths of material interests, one has to assess it soberly as nothing but an intellectual cover for the desire of the middle class left – in the imperialist world and the better-off segments within the advance semi-colonies – to defend their privileged lifestyle.

Naturally, such a "defense of civilization" outlook will only deepen the isolation of the petty-bourgeois left from the lower and middle strata of the working class and, at the same time, increase their lineage to the privileged strata. Hence, we expect a further degeneration and "petty-bourgeoisification" of the opportunist left.

### Building a Revolutionary World Party

All these developments underline once more that revolutionaries must – now more than ever – orientate towards the lower and middle strata of the working class and the oppressed. In our book on the COVID-19 counterrevolution we explained some months ago: "It is these layers which are most dramatically affected by the current triple crisis of capitalism. And it is these layers which will rebel first against the counter-revolutionary attacks. It is these layers which are least affected by all the Stalinist and reformist prejudices. In summary, the slogans of revolutionaries in building a new World Party of Socialist Revolution must be to break with the so-called "Left" and to orientate towards the working class and oppressed masses." <sup>78</sup>

The most recent events in the U.S. – as well as other countries – with the *Black Lives Matter* movement spearheading a popular uprising, fully confirm our analysis. It is no accident that most of the social-bonapartist left were

surprised by these mass protests and remained at the sidelines. However, the task of revolutionaries is to organize among and fight together with the most oppressed layers of the working class and the poor! The current efforts of the RCIT comrades in Kenya in organizing mass protests against the police violence are a small example of what has to be done under the current circumstances.<sup>79</sup>

We conclude this essay by restating that the historic betrayal of the official leaderships of the workers and popular mass organizations as well as of many self-proclaimed “Marxist” groups demonstrates once more the deep crisis of revolutionary leadership. This underlines the urgency for authentic revolutionaries to join forces on the basis of a program of intransigent and independent class struggle.

We repeat that 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. 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! Against U.S. imperialism as well as Chinese or any other imperialism! 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!

## Footnotes

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# Books of the RCIT

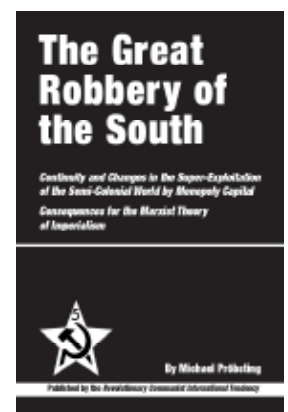
## Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *THE GREAT ROBBERY OF THE SOUTH*. The book's subtitle is: *Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*. The book is in English-language. It has 15 chapters, 448 pages and includes 139 Tables and Figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who is the International Secretary of the RCIT.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting analyses the super-exploitation and oppression of the semi-colonial world (often referred to as the "Third World") by the imperialist powers and monopolies. He shows that the relationship between the small minority of rich capitalist countries and the huge majority of mankind living in the semi-colonial world forms one of the most important elements of the imperialist world system we are living in. The Great Robbery of the South shows that the past decades have been a complete confirmation of the validity of Lenin's theory of imperialism and its programmatic conclusions. *The Great Robbery of the South* demonstrates the important changes in the relationship between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries. Using comprehensive material (including 139 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that never before

has such a big share of the world capitalist value been produced in the South. Never before have the imperialist monopolies been so dependent on the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world. Never before has migrant labor from the semi-colonial world played such a significant role for the capitalist value production in the imperialist countries. Never before has the huge majority of the world working class lived in the South – outside of the old imperialist metropolises.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting argues that a correct understanding of the nature of imperialism as well as of the program of permanent revolution which includes the tactics of consistent anti-imperialism is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future. Order your copy NOW! \$20 / £13 / €15 plus p+p (21\$ for US and international, £9 for UK, €10 for Europe)



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76 We have briefly discussed this conception in a sub-chapter ("*Tianxia – China's Ideological Challenge*") in our above-mentioned book *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry*, pp. 73-76.

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