

Free Bulletin of the
Communist Workers
Organisation

Affiliate of the
Internationalist
Communist Tendency
No 54 Spring 2021

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AURORA



There Isn't A Vaccine Against Capitalism!

*"Humanity thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation."
(Marx)*

There's one thing about the present situation. Every day a piece of news reminds us that we live in a global world where the consequences of human activity are not limited to national boundaries. Whether it's the Covid pandemic with its rapidly morphing virus, or the last minute attempts to reduce global warming and the wider ecological damage — mainly from the last 200 years — that is threatening life on earth, we all know that the remedies have to be global.

Such intractable problems cannot simply be put down to individual lifestyle choices. As if most of us have any significant choice about how we live. Like it or not, we live in a capitalist world where almost every aspect of our lives is shaped by the money economy underpinning capitalism and its whole reason for existence: profit making. Credit cards, pound notes, dollar bills, coins, or even bitcoins: we can't live without money. We have to pay for the very means to live: food, clothes, a roof over our heads, never mind holidays and 'leisure pursuits'. Pensioners aside, that means at least someone in every household or family has to be earning a wage ... otherwise you are condemned to trying to manage on inadequate government handouts such as Universal Credit (if you live in a 'First World' country) or to something a lot worse, surviving by means of what the ILO (International

Labour Organisation) calls the 'informal economy'. People in the 'informal economy' don't count.

Yet, of the 5.7 billion people of working age in the world today 2.2 billion are not even classed as part of the global workforce. (And the ILO does not expand on the nature of their "subsistence activities".) That leaves an official world total of around 3.5 billion wage workers. Before the Covid pandemic around 5% of them were officially unemployed. That's about 17 and a half million people. Countless more are now without paid work. Meanwhile a UN report last year found average wages had fallen in two-thirds of the countries it was able to track. (Not every country welcomed the UN trackers!) In the remaining third of countries — including Brazil, Canada, France, Italy and the US — an increase in average wages was the result not of pay rising, but of large numbers of low paid workers losing their jobs or 'leaving the labour market'. It's amazing what we can learn from statistics! Seriously, the ILO stats only confirm the bigger picture: unemployment is rising and wages are falling. It's getting harder and harder to earn a living.

The Logic of Capital

This, despite a world overflowing with consumer goods, where nobody needs to go hungry or be without the

necessities of life. It doesn't make sense. But there is a kind of capitalist logic to it all. The motive force of capitalism is not to promote the health and well-being of humanity, but to maximise profits. The constant push to increase productivity by reducing the cost of labour power and raw materials is the source of capitalism's dynamism. But it's also the cause of capitalism's fatal tendency to economic crisis and collapse. Given the ever-larger capital outlay needed to generate a further round of profit-taking there comes a point when the rate of profit is so low, that instead of investing in the 'real economy', more and more firms prefer to ... pay their chief executives huge bonuses; gamble on the stock exchange; borrow at low interest rates to re-finance existing debts whilst going through the motions of daily business activity (zombie companies); or simply declare themselves bankrupt and shut up shop. Meanwhile the drive to get more work out of fewer workers for less cost is stepped up. 'Flexible', i.e. insecure, precarious work with no guaranteed weekly wage continues to replace what is left of the monotonous old working week. These sort of attacks are not new. For decades now we have been tracking and tracing the constant attacks on workers' pay, on their working and living conditions, their declining 'share' in gross national product as the capitalists push the cost of their profits crisis onto the working class.

£20,000 per year or had less than £100 in savings, were three times less likely to self isolate than anyone else. Especially since the UK has the lowest sick pay in the OECD and for the almost 2m low-paid workers who earn less than £120 a week, it is zero. Let's face it. This is all-out class war. While the work-at-home middle class look to buy a bigger house in the countryside where they can listen to bird song, 'key' workers are having to resort to the soup kitchens which are now supplementing food banks.

More Attacks Already Underway

Far from the 'vaccine roll-out' bringing relief, bosses are seizing

*An extra 3hrs on the working week with no pay,
Losing holiday entitlement
of 2 to 4 days,
His contracted hours from 8 to 4 moved
to 6am to 11pm
No overtime as paid at basic
7 days a week.
They will then do redundancies
If people can't agree to these terms and the people
left will have to accept them.
He's been told that as they are offering a contract
allbeit massively inferior there will be no redundancy
option if they don't want to sign for it.
It's really confusing.. I don't understand how it's legal
to force inferior working conditions onto an employee.
he's worked for the company's 15 years.
(Woman seeking advice on a Money Help forum.)*

The Covid Double Whammy

Then, along comes Coronavirus. The economy — in and out of lockdown — is put on hold with Rishi Sunak's furlough scheme granting laid off workers 80% of pay and the bureaucratic obstacles to claiming Jobseeker's Allowance reduced for the newly unemployed. But, like the suspension of eviction orders for tenants who can't pay their rents, it's not going to last. In any case these measures are nowhere near enough to compensate for the lost earnings of a growing portion of working class households. While the comfortable middle class the BBC likes to present as the 'norm' are saving more of their 'disposable income', many more (as often as not 'key' workers) are finding that they haven't enough income to buy the necessities of life. It shouldn't take a social survey to find that Covid-positive people who earned less than

the opportunity to go on the attack. They've been honing their skills at firing and re-hiring. Their target is not only the precarious low paid. With unemployment on the rise they assume they have workers over a barrel. According to the TUC nearly 1 in 10 have been told to re-apply for their jobs on worse terms and conditions or face the sack. It would be a surprise if workers were not fighting back. But they need to forget about union boundaries, sporadic days of pre-announced 'strike action' and harmonise their resistance to do whatever it takes to get the bosses to stand down. (We've written about some of these ongoing struggles and the role of the unions in them, notably British Gas, British Airways Cargo workers and workers at Heathrow on our website. Worth a read.)

In other words, Covid or no Covid, we still face a desperate,

crisis-driven capitalism as before. It's no good pretending there are blue skies around the corner. Unless and until the global working class realises its common interests and embarks on the journey to overthrow capitalism in order to create a new world of freely associated producers, the prospect is grim. Yet, out of this grim situation, shafts of light exist.

New political groups are appearing who are eager to learn from the whole gamut of workers' previous victories and defeats and who recognise the need for a political compass to guide the international working class struggle. The Internationalist Communist Tendency to which the CWO belongs is growing. From its original political impulse in the shape of Battaglia Comunista in Italy (amongst other things, currently conducting a political battle against rival base unions who are vying for workforce support), the ICT groups in the USA and Canada have worked jointly to produce their online political journal, 1919. At the same time the hard work of learning how to best contribute to the class struggle 'on the ground' is going ahead. How to respond to a scandalous housing

and eviction crisis in Canada where homeless shelters have been shut down in Montreal and in Ontario the Landlord and Tenant Board has held more than 13,000 eviction hearings over the past three months? What to say to workers at Hunts Point Produce Market in New York looking for a \$1 pay rise after 10 have died from the virus and 400 have been infected? How to begin building a workable political group in Australia from a handful of interested sympathisers during lockdown? Challenges like these are increasingly being taken up by a new generation who can see that the material base for a world community of producers already exists in the putrefying carcass of capitalism. What the world needs now is for the working class to take up its own revolutionary fight.



What The CWO Stands For



We stand for a global society in which production is for need and not profit, where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. It is a society which can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. Only such a society can rid us of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: We call it communism but it has nothing in common with the Stalinist state capitalism of the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a 'party' for want of a better word. This organisation is not a government in waiting. It does not rule but it does lead and guide the struggle for a new world. We by no means claims to be that party but only one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation.

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The Kronstadt Revolt: One Hundred Years of Counter-Revolution

Little noticed at the time, few events in working class history have provoked so much emotional response, or have led to so many myths down the years as the revolt at the Kronstadt naval base in Russia. At a distance of a century we can appreciate just how tragic and significant it was.

The revolt began on 2 March 1921 on board the battleship Petropavlovsk moored in the naval base of Kotlin Island in the Gulf of Finland. Kronstadt sailors, soldiers and workers had never supported just one party, and the soviet there had remained a lively centre of debate, even as other soviets were reduced to mere administrators. Kronstadters had always been in the vanguard of the class revolt (such as in the July Days of 1917). However, when they learned of strikes in Petersburg against food shortages and for new soviet elections they decided to support them in the 15-point Petropavlovsk Resolution. This became the programme of the revolt when it was adopted by a mass meeting of 16,000 sailors and workers in Anchor Square. 900 of the 1,400 Communist Party (Bolshevik) members supported it. 300 who didn't were imprisoned. The Kronstadters wanted no bloodshed but all attempts at negotiation failed, partly because the Kronstadters counted on support in the rest of Russia, and partly because the government faced the biggest crisis of its existence.

Kronstadt was not an isolated event. Cheka sources tell us that there were 118 separate risings already going on, including the Tambov rebellion of a force of 20,000 led by Antonov. The government was still recovering from a bloody civil war. It feared that when the ice of the Gulf of Finland melted and Kronstadt was out of its reach, the base could be used by a revived imperialist intervention.

There were sound material and political reasons for all the grass roots opposition. Famine was staring Russia

in the face. In Petersburg in the winter of 1920-1921 those workers who still remained, already freezing due to terrible fuel shortages, faced a one third cut in the already inadequate bread ration. Victor Serge described it thus:

Winter was a torture (there is no other word for it) for the townspeople: no heating, no lighting, and the ravages of famine. Children and feeble old folk died in their thousands. Typhus was carried everywhere by lice and took its frightful toll. People dined on a pittance of oatmeal or half-rotten horsemeat, a lump of sugar would be divided into tiny fragments among a family.

Average life expectancy had fallen to around 20 years. The American anarchist historian Paul Avrich adds:

Driven by cold and hunger, men abandoned their machines for days on end to gather wood and forage for food in the surrounding countryside. Travelling on foot or in overcrowded railway cars, they brought their personal possessions, and materials which they had filched from the factories, to exchange for whatever food they could get.

But even here they came up against the government attempt to monopolise trade.

Armed roadblock detachments were deployed to guard the approaches to the cities and to confiscate the precious sacks of food which the "speculators" were carrying back to their families. The brutality of the roadblock detachments was a byword throughout the country, and complaints about their arbitrary methods flooded the commissariats in Moscow.

Demands for fresh elections to the Soviets were due to their decline in the civil war. Immediately after the October Revolution more soviets had sprung up in Russia than ever before. In early 1918 they had been the scenes of lively debate – a testimony to the vitality of working class political

life. Soviet Congresses met every three months in the "honeymoon" of the revolution before July 1918. Afterwards, however, they became annual. Furthermore, as more and more of their members were drafted into the Red Army and the bureaucracy, they often became arms of a growing Party-state. Maybe this was inevitable in a war economy but it was fatal for a revolution based on the working class. Soviet rule was gradually replaced by "a militarist proletarian dictatorship" (*The ABC of Communism*) under an increasingly dominant Party. By the middle of 1919 Lenin was confessing that "the Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by the working people are in fact organs of government for the working people by an advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the working people as a whole."

The Petropavlovsk Resolution did not call for "soviets without communists" as Trotskyist apologists like Harman and Cliff maintain in *Russia – from Workers State to State Capitalism*. What it did call for were immediate new elections to the Soviets, freedom of speech for the anarchists and for the Left Socialist Parties and equalisation of rations. It also proposed granting the peasants "freedom of action provided they do not employ hired labour".

They did not demand, as Trotsky said later, "special privileges for themselves". They did demand "free trade" in grain and an end to the roadblock detachments to meet the approaching famine. Trotsky himself had proposed something similar a year earlier. It is also not true, as various Trotskyists maintain, that the class composition of the Kronstadters had changed between 1917 and 1921. Most of the sailors had been of peasant origin in 1917, and were so in 1921. However, it was contact with their families in the village over the Christmas period that brought home to them the seriousness of the food

crisis. This lay behind their demand for an end to requisitioning. What they did not know was that Lenin had been mulling over the issue since the previous November and was about to announce exactly that as part of his "New Economic Policy" (NEP) at the Tenth Party Congress, then opening in Petersburg.

Suppression

The first assault on the base on 8 March, across the ice of the Gulf of Finland, was a failure. Many troops deserted to the Kronstadters. A new force was hurriedly assembled made up of Cheka units, Red Army officer cadets (*kursanti*) and even 300 or more delegates from the Tenth Party Congress. On 16 March Tukhachevsky launched the second attack, and by 18 March the entire town had been re-occupied. At least 700 of the attackers died under the Kronstadt guns (including 15 Bolshevik Congress delegates) whilst 1,500 of the defenders were killed and a further 2,500 were captured. Many were later shot by the Cheka.

Within a few days of the fall of Kronstadt, Lenin announced the NEP. Its central plank was the restoration of the free market in grain, as the Kronstadters had demanded. Peasants could now legally sell their produce without harassment and would now pay "a tax in kind". It came too late for the 1921 harvest so famine killed millions that year. In time it did lead to a restoration of grain production and the stabilisation of the regime. "A step backwards", as Lenin admitted, but what else could an isolated country where 80% were peasants do in the absence of the world revolution? The defeat of the March Action in Germany led Lenin to talk of a decade in which the Communist government would have to hold on. NEP had nothing to do with socialism. Lenin hoped that this "retreat to state capitalism" would be just a holding operation.

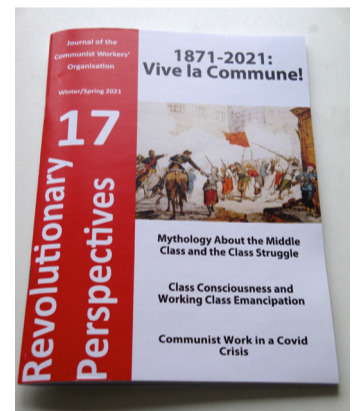
The Kronstadt Revolt represented a failed attempt to "renew the

revolution" (Serge). It could not have done so. Even if the Kronstadters had won, some form of capitalism in isolated Russia would have had to be adopted.

The Lesson is Clear

No isolated working class outpost can complete the task of building socialism, especially in a country with a relatively small working class. The revolution has to be international. On the plus side, even the devastating experience of Kronstadt confirms that soviets are the historically discovered form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They alone are capable of drawing the mass of the class into shaping a different society. This cannot simply be done by a party. An international political organisation is essential to unite the class in overthrowing capitalism. Its members will be the most ardent at spreading world revolution. But the International itself is not a government in waiting. As the Internationalist Communist Party wrote in its 1952 Platform: *At no time and for no reason does the proletariat ... delegate to others its historical mission, and it does not give power away to anyone, not even its own political party.*

A deeper analysis will be found in our forthcoming book on *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Russia 1917-23*.



**Available from CWO
address and radical
bookshops**

The Nationalist Poison Behind Brexit

Far from "getting Brexit done", the pantomime goes on. There are so many issues that both EU and UK want to extend the period of grace before the full treaty is implemented. For the UK problems are mounting by the day. Freight volumes are down by 68% in the first month of Brexit. And as for "freeing the UK from bureaucracy" it has increased in both complexity and size. To export a fish to the EU requires six forms to be completed. Lorries are deliberately returning to the UK empty to avoid the paperwork. Irish hauliers are avoiding the UK and go directly to France. Some EU manufacturers will no longer supply the UK due to the bureaucracy and Northern Ireland is experiencing food shortages. Despite Johnson's bluster there is a customs border down the Irish Sea. This has only inflamed the Ulster Unionists who took "Ulster says NO" to the extreme of opposing every deal on offer! They then set their paramilitary thugs to intimidate customs workers, threatening a collapse of the uneasy peace on the island of Ireland. More economic woe for the UK is on the cards, as the much valued City of London is already losing trillions in financial trade to Amsterdam, Paris,

and New York.

Due to the pandemic, the predicted lorry queues at Dover did not happen as trade had fallen anyway. Other problems can always be put down to Covid-19, but there is no hiding the fact that for UK capital as a whole, Brexit is an unfolding disaster. How has the British capitalist class come to inflict this on itself? How have a minority in the Tory Party, been able to inflict such damage on the interests of UK capitalism.

The answer lies in the long-running capitalist crisis. Since 1973 the global capitalist economy has been at the back end of a cycle of accumulation caused by reduced avenues for profitable investment. All sorts of policies have been tried to stimulate real growth, from nationalisation and printing money, to privatisation and deregulation, leading to the dominance of finance and globalisation. It all ended in tears when the speculative bubble created by deregulation burst in 2008. Since then the attack on working conditions via austerity policies, and the increasing insecurity of jobs, has only added to the misery experienced by workers for decades. According to McKinsey "The

labor share of income in 35 advanced economies fell from around 54 percent in 1980 to 50.5 percent in 2014".

It was easy to blame EU regulations and EU migrant workers for the austerity and hardship. "British Jobs for British Workers" was not launched by Brexiters but by the then pro-EU Labour Prime Minister. The nationalist genie, as in so much of the world, came out of the bottle because the capitalist establishment had no solution to the economic crisis. This gave the chance for nostalgic little Englanders to force the 2016 referendum. They have never faced up to the fact that Britain (with a little help from the USA and USSR) might have finished on the winning side in 1945, but lost its Empire and overseas investments. Now our delusional rulers tell us that "we are better than every one of those countries" (Gavin Williamson, Education Minister) and that Brexit means our young people can "be out there buccaneering, trading, dominating the world again" (Iain Duncan-Smith). The UK, they say, is now "world beating" in everything. This is true in one respect. The UK has the highest percentage of its population to die from Covid-19 in the

OECD.

Britannia will not only not rule the waves again, she may soon cease to exist altogether. The pandemic of nationalism is not confined to England. Brexit has changed the equation in Scotland, and the case for independence has grown stronger. By any rational calculation an independent Scotland would still be economically worse off, but as the UK government has set an example in nationalist idiocy why should the Scots not follow?

That said, the specific institutional arrangements of the capitalist class are of little interest to workers. Whatever the state of treaties and institutions, workers will always be ultimate victims of a crisis-ridden system which relies on our exploitation. In the upturns, capitalism throws us a few crumbs, and in the downturn, it intensifies exploitation to get as much out of us as it can. The attacks which were being prepared at the end of 2019, until Covid intervened, are already resuming (see article in this issue).

It will not be enough for workers to fight on the "bread and butter" issues. We also have to fight the nationalist ideological bilge that "we are all in

this together". Plainly we are not, as the disgusting exhibition of vaccine imperialism has already revealed. It is a class issue. Those who had wealth have increased it during the last 15 months. Those who have not have been landed with rent arrears, unpaid fuel bills and food bank visits. When politicians talk of the "good of the country" they are talking of defending the propertied class. The world working class owns nothing by comparison but it has a common condition of exploitation. Workers thus "have no country" (Marx). Our ultimate goal is to eradicate national boundaries, states, tariffs and every aspect of imperialist rivalry which threatens humanity with proxy wars now, and more generalised wars in the long term. Nationalist bombast like Brexit is part of the ideological preparation for this. The only alternative is for workers across the world to unite in a new international political body, to lead the fight for a new world where hunger, homelessness, environmental and health disasters which engulf at least 1 in 5 of the world's population. It is an enormous challenge but if humanity is to have a future it has to be met.