



A Spectre of Rebellion Haunts Capital's Response to COVID-19

By John G. (23 March 2020)

The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 had enormous impact economically and ideologically, especially overseas.

Mass layoffs, home foreclosures, evictions, homelessness, poverty, hunger and soup kitchens, and even the collapse of whole communities led to mass political action in the Occupy (2011), Arab Spring (2009) and Spanish Indignados (2011) movements over the following years. Those movements led to concerted and persistent mass action and organisation, governments were overthrown in the Third World, and reflections within various levels of government in North America and Europe.

Echoes of it persist in the Green New Deal and various mass movements and parliamentary formations in Europe today.

The mass anger, action and organisation that the Global Financial Crisis generated needs to be examined in detail in the midst of the present crisis. It provides insight into the needs of the people and how they took action then.

Lessons from the Global Financial Crisis

It is notable that Australia had much less impact from that crisis.



Radical graffiti seen in London, UK

This is reflected in the thinking and organisation of the working and other oppressed classes. It is also reflected in the thinking and action of the capitalist government here.

Capital has learnt from overseas experience. Moves to ban foreclosures and evictions, subsidies of wages, financial support of small business are all quite novel compared to the responses to the global financial crisis. In 2008-9 the government provided payouts and undertook several programs, school buildings, insulation etc, providing support to sectors of small business and boost employment, as well as guarantees to banks and the finance sector.

Capital is responding to the spectre haunting its failure in the face of the virus. It is investing in averting mass rebellion.

Capital has a blind spot in relation to the workforce. It is building the bridge of corporate sustenance and

subsidies to small business. Its workforce support measures relate to the workforce's role in sustaining businesses. Their "bridge to recovery" is positioned on the shoulders of the workforce.

A bridge to economic recovery built on the workers' backs

The government, echoing capital sees the working class as merely an adjunct to capital, an economic input to be protected to slave in the future. That's a key point of difference from the people, for whom business is an adjunct to being able to live. Capital before people. It is reflected in the Prime Minister's repeated reference to the implementation of health experts' advice being aligned to needs to sustain the economy.

Labor Party leaders raise concern about the support of workers alongside the Business Council, but retain the outlook of the bridge to

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recovery being constructed on workers' backs.

The welfare state is being instituted to support business. Neoliberalism is on life support.

This applies in part to the debate about school closures. Sacrifice some to shorten the period of crisis, rather than support all as far as possible to minimise the deaths and look out for the people. The bridge is in part constructed on the health risk to teachers, school staff, and students and their families.

Capitalism before people is at their core. This haunts them as they face not just a health crisis but a crisis of confidence in capitalism, the spectre of rebellion. V.

Listen to the Cleaners in Fight Against Coronavirus

By Ned K. (16 March 2020)

Over a decade ago, cleaners and their union (now United Workers Union) campaigned not just for better wages and working conditions for themselves, but about the implications for the whole society if cleaners were not given the materials, training and the time to clean thoroughly to prevent the spread of disease, germs and viruses through buildings ranging from schools and universities to office towers in big cities to big shopping centers that dominate the retail industry, airports and the inside of passenger planes.

In the cleaners' campaign, union delegates, media press releases, and speakers at public rallies outside buildings across the country repeatedly criticised major property owners, governments and their immediate cleaning contractor bosses for not giving them enough time to clean properly.

They cited research from scientists that showed a direct correlation between the spread of disease, germs, bacteria and viruses initiated by human touch of surfaces by hand. For example, in shopping center food courts, cleaners said they had no time to properly clean table surfaces. Researchers investigated the cleaners' claims by taking samples of minute particles left on food court tables and toilet seats and analysed them.

Similar studies were conducted by researchers of particles on office desk surfaces, door knobs, computer key boards and the like.

The research results were made public and reports of their findings given to property owners and governments.

The results confirmed the direct relationship between inadequate cleaning of surfaces and the transfer of germs, bacteria and viruses by human touch.

The cleaners in their campaign after struggling for two or three years won significant pay rises. Unselfishly they did not settle for this. They demanded more time to provide high quality cleaning and fair workloads. They won small concessions on a higher minimum number of hours per shift from two to four, which the property owners and contractors tried to subsequently undermine by employing less cleaners.

These demands went to the heart of the matter as to whether property owners really cared about the level of hygiene cleaning in their buildings.

The property owners failed miserably. They refused to enter into any agreements with the cleaners and their union on minimum staffing levels and funding of materials for adequate hygiene cleaning.

Fast forward to 2020 and the crisis of the Coronavirus. We see multinational property owners like Investa quoted in the *Australian Financial Review* on Friday 13 March to be responding positively to tenant demands for "one off" infection control cleans!

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We see on the TV pictures of infection control cleaning teams cleaning the offices in Sydney where Cabinet Ministers meet and where Peter Dutton who had become infected with the virus had meetings.

Spread of the Virus from human contact with infected surfaces is recognised by the WHO.

So, if you want to contribute to containment of the Coronavirus, keeping a safe distance from other people is important for sure, but equally important is demanding that owners of buildings you work in or frequent, give cleaners the on-going time and cleaning materials to maintain hygienic buildings. V.



Cleaning workers campaign for better conditions at Chadstone Shopping Center, Melbourne

Has Coronavirus got Neo-liberals Throwing Out their Playbook?

By John G. (25 March 2020)

Implementing social distancing in response to coronavirus has created a cascade of troubles for the working class and capital.

Social distancing measures seek to avoid complete social collapse if the coronavirus pandemic was to disrupt essential services. It's led to the closure of huge numbers of workplaces.

While our hearts go out to the sick and those affected, there is no great outrage at the implementation of protection measures – despite frustration at the delays and implementation.

With the collapse of the tourism, hospitality, aviation, parts of the education sectors, and now more widely, it has become apparent the casual workforce and small business have been sacrificial lambs to big business hoarding its billions by abandoning workers, dumping them, and crashing the economy generally.

The collapse of commerce has terrible impacts on those thrown out of work. Governments and the Reserve Bank are spending hundreds of billions propping up banks and small business, and throwing bundles of cash at those who are suffering reduced incomes from unemployment, sickness, lack of custom to their small business, and reduced hours.

Collapse and Rebellion

It's a bit of a shock to see neo-liberal ideologues hurling money at those thrown out of work or with reduced incomes. \$550 a week for over a million, plus rent assistance confronts conventional expectations. Neoliberals seem to have thrown out their playbook.

However, this is far from the reality. They have learnt from the Global Financial Crisis.

They are terrified of a collapse of finance capitalism and mass rebellion on the back of households being broke, having no means of subsistence.

Over 60% of GDP results from wage earners spending. Where a large slice of that spending is stopped many small businesses see their custom fall off a cliff. With tens of thousands being laid off and others with slashed shifts, small business is at a precipice

With mass layoffs, people are unable to sustain themselves and likely to default on their basic financial commitments. Finance capital is facing another global financial crisis.

Debt, Debt and More Debt

Capitalist governments are propping up households to prop up bankers, insurance companies and global finance.

In the modern economy, households and individuals commit to a variety of scheduled payments for their basic living expenses, their subsistence budgeting. These payments include expenses such as mortgages, rent, car loans, deferred furniture and appliance payments, direct deductions from accounts for utilities, internet access, mobile

EDITORIAL

Don't despair! Organise!

This edition of *Vanguard* brings together a selection of recent articles on the COVID-19 pandemic.

We should not lose sight of other important areas of the peoples' struggles, but due recognition and importance needs to be given to the enormous effect of the current economic and health crises on our daily lives, and the decisions being made by health authorities and governments.

Social distancing has forced the cancellation of many important events this year: May Day, political rallies and meetings, and other manifestations of the democratic rights of the organised people.

After the pandemic, those rights must be vigorously exercised to fight for the vital interests of working people and to put in place the measures required to prepare for, and more effectively deal with, emergencies of all kinds.

They will also need to be vigorously exercised as capitalism descends further into economic and political crisis. That crisis was emerging before the outbreak of COVID-19.

The measures taken by governments to buy social stability whilst they try to deal with the pandemic will add to the crisis. The capitalists will try force the burden of the crisis on to the backs of the working class.

Big challenges loom but even bigger opportunities arise.

Stay healthy. Take measures to beat the pandemic.

But get ready to engage in the political battles that will come in its wake. We must get organised! We have a world to win!

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communications, Netflix, credit cards, etc.

The same goes for many small business costs, rent and mortgages, equipment loans or deferred payments, utilities, etc. National household and small business debt has skyrocketed over recent decades. Household debt stood at 200% of household income in September 2019, up from 67% in 1988. The total household debt reached \$2,472 billion in September 2019.

On top of that around 90% of household assets are houses, cars, and household items. These are not easily converted to cash to tide people over, to live and pay their debts.

Like Drunken Sailors

The expansion of household debt has occurred at the same time as the security of employment has plummeted.

In 1980 casual workers numbered just 13% of employees. And that was before ABN and other contracted labour became a significant feature of the workplace. Today while part-time and casual employees number around 24% of employees, the Centre for Future Work estimates those without job security and leave amount to half the total workforce.

Once they are out of work, they have no or little leave, no redundancy payment, and many have few savings to sustain them. They can't readily sell their assets quickly and – with mass layoffs – they face a collapsing market.

Now we are all reaping the whirlwind.

Huge indebtedness collides with mass layoffs of casual and contract workers with little or no right to payments at their sacking. Bundled payments that float financial markets are under severe threat.

The neo-liberals are spending like drunken sailors to save the banks and finance companies. They have not changed their spots.

What are these bundled securities?

In the last 50 years household debts and scheduled repayment contracts have become increasingly bundled up into “derivatives” traded on financial markets.

People will be familiar with the ads for household appliances and furniture, where payments are deferred for two or three years. The retailer effectively sells the debt obligation of the buyer to the finance company, which provides more immediate payment to the retailer, and then “owns” the repayments from the buyer. The retailer has transferred the risk of loan default to the finance company.

The finance company sources its own finance using the loan agreements as security or may sell bundles of the loans to a hedge fund, super fund, bank and so on.

In the Global Financial Crisis, when huge numbers were unable to meet their mortgage payments in the US, bundled mortgage contracts called “Mortgage Backed Securities” traded between banks and finance companies lost enormous amounts of value, and the market in them collapsed. Banks and finance companies holding the “securities” faced bankruptcy and some collapsed.

Governments are terrified that this crisis will do the same. And it yet might.



Reaping the Whirlwind

The Australian government's costings for corporate bailouts is posited on a 6-month shutdown. In China, the lockdown in Wuhan lasted from mid-January to a partial ramp up implemented in late-March with limitations expected to continue across China for a few months yet. A six months crash in Australia instituting a depression looms likely, with years to completely recover. In the 1930s depression, recovery in Australia was not realised until the War against Fascism and Militarism was well underway.

The current economic crash has left millions across the globe destitute, some with rationed partial incomes and temporary leave payments. The UK Conservative Party took decisions for the government to subsidise 80% of wages to a level slightly over the median wage. (Note the use of the median not the higher average wage when setting limits on supporting workers).

Government is forced to cushion the impact on banks and finance companies by providing unprecedented support to casuals, permanent workers and small business.

We are yet to see what this whirlwind reaps in the end. V.

Close all US Bases! Accept no more Marines!

By Nick G. (31 March 2020)

The federal government has temporarily cancelled plans for this year's rotation of US marines through Darwin.

The cancellation was announced on March 30 and follows earlier advice on March 18 that the 2500 US marines would have to self-isolate for 14 days after arrival in Darwin.

The stronger response follows concerns that the US armed forces are proving very susceptible to Covid-19 through failure to properly respond to the crisis.

COVID-19 and the US Armed Forces

On March 25, the online *US Military Times* reported that there were 175 Covid-19 cases per million US troops compared to 135 per million US civilian population. On March 30, it reported that numbers had grown to 438 per million compared to the general 375 per-million among the U.S. population.

The new coronavirus is starting to impact operations in the Indo-Pacific Command, as a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, was sent to dock in Guam after more than 20 sailors aboard tested positive.

On March 21 there were three confirmed cases on board the carrier; two days later, there were 25 when it docked in Guam. By March 28, there were 36. The following day, it was announced that the USS Ronald Reagan, a second carrier based at Yokosuka

Naval base in Japan, was also hosting a Covid-19 outbreak.

US Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett, in a video to Airmen released March 26, said the outbreak is "a challenge we have not faced before."

According to *Task & Purpose*, an online magazine for US service personnel, troops were reporting that the US military was not taking the Covid-19 outbreak seriously. "This is a telling indicator of leadership failure," one Army officer told *Task & Purpose* on condition of anonymity.

The Department of Defense has given wide discretion to commanders in the advice they give their subordinates.

"I can't put out a blanket policy, if you will, that we would then apply to everybody because every situation is different," Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Monday in response to questioning about "inconsistencies" in DoD guidance on social distancing and travel restrictions being carried out at lower levels. "Tell me how I do six feet distancing in an attack submarine. Or how do I do that in a bomber with two pilots sitting side by side?"

Australia and the US Imperialist Armed Forces

Given that the US military is something of a coronavirus hot-spot, the decision to temporarily halt the latest rotation of 2,500 marines through Darwin is absolutely necessary. It must also apply to any US personnel, civilian or military, at US bases like Pine Gap near Alice Springs, or involved in planned extensions at the Tindal Air Force Base and the new port facility proposed for Glyde Point near Darwin.

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The US also “shares” with Australia Kojarena, the Joint Military Communications Ground Station (JMCGS) located approximately 20 kilometres east north east of Geraldton, Western Australia.

There are several Australian military infrastructures that Canberra makes available to the US including a naval base on the Cocos Islands and a certain number of training sites and shooting ranges scattered throughout the country (Bradshaw Field, Delamere, Mount Bunday, Shoalwater Bay, Townsville Field, Cowley Beach).

Other countries in our region could be forgiven for seeing the

Australian continent as yet another US aircraft carrier.

Every one of these bases is making Australia complicit in the desire of the US empire to maintain its domination over the Indo-Pacific. They reflect our subordination to the wishes of our US overlords. They demonstrate Australia’s domination by and dependency on US imperialism.

If Covid-19 has done us any good, it is the temporary halt to US marine rotations through Darwin. However, those rotations will be resumed once the pandemic is brought under control.

For our part, we must not be kept under control. We must continue to

agitate and organise to oppose imperialism in Australia, and to demand an independent and peaceful foreign policy.

Close all US Bases in Australia!

No More Marine Rotations in Australia! V.



One Pay Day from Poverty - “The disappearing dreams of yesterday”

By John G. (2 April 2020)

Kristoffersen’s lyric from *Sunday Morning Coming Down* embodies the rupture in many people’s thinking and lives over the last few weeks.

The sharpest rupture has been a million thrown out of work, on short shifts, without an income, some penniless, mortgages in peril, threats from the landlord, debts on the car, nothing to keep food on the table, a roof overhead, petrol in the car and the phone running.

After 232 years of capitalism in Australia, the last two weeks exposed the damning reality that huge numbers of workers here are one single pay day from poverty, hunger and losing the roof over their family’s head. However much the illusion of some level of financial security had made it into

most people’s heads, half the workforce had the reality of their insecurity in this system forced upon them. The rest were stunned by what they were seeing and hearing.

It was former British rebel MP George Galloway whose phrase characterised how precarious many workers over the world found their lives, with destitution, devastation “just one pay day away”.

It’s such a damning reality that capitalism’s defenders here were forced to release \$180 billion in welfare to stave off hunger and homelessness from around half the workforce and nearly half the population.

**Billions on a down payment
to stave off revolt**

The lines at Centrelink offices broke down ideas of Australia as a society in which the working class

is doing fine, making their way with secure futures. For many, under the pressures of housing costs, debt, insecure work, relentless employers ramping up workloads while holding back wages, this may not be news. But even for them the pace and ferocity of this crisis has driven home the precariously subservient position they occupy in their relations with their employers.

This has thrust to the fore the necessity of struggle to change that situation, to relegate casual and insecure employment, erosion of workers’ collective rights, to the dustbin of history. The JobSeeker and JobKeeper schemes are mere stopgaps, easing the immediate pain of the condition. They do nothing to change the precarious position of workers in their employment.

**Solutions, not band-aids,
are needed**

The collusion of the ACTU leaders in backrooms, claiming and endorsing responsibility for the



Laid off workers queued at Centrelink offices around the country

JobKeeper program without a peep about a solution, exposed their weakness and failure to lead workers. The band-aid is welcome but it should never have come to this.

Comfortable dreams of the future in capitalist Australia are disappearing. The Covid-19 crisis is revealing flaws and sharpening the contradictions within Australia's capitalist system.

One pay cheque away from poverty – no more! Finding the way to achieve this can only be found in an ongoing analysis, and in resolute and persistent struggle. V.

Emergency preparations must not be hostage to austerity measures or failure to observe warnings

By Nick G. (1 April 2020)

By any measure, federal and state governments in Australia have failed to properly prepare for either the massive bushfire catastrophes of 2019-20 or the current Covid-19 pandemic.

In both cases there have been plenty of warnings, ranging from popular media to peer-reviewed academic and scientific papers.

The federal government established a National Medical Stockpile (NMS) about 15 years ago. It is “for use in the national response to a public health emergency which could arise from natural causes or terrorist activities. Items are stockpiled to increase Australia's level of self-sufficiency during a time of potential high global and domestic demand and service delivery pressures.”

Warehouses are located at various sites around the country, but their

location is a state secret “for reasons of national security”.

There is little transparency about the NMS. There are some references to it in the Auditor-General's reports, but the NMS itself appears not to have to report to Parliament. We do know that in 2014 funding was provided to “improve the cost effectiveness of national stockpiling arrangements”, including “the outsourcing of the day-to-day management of the Stockpile”.

How have the principles of “cost effectiveness” and outsourced management positioned the NMS in relation to the current pandemic?

Shortage of medical supplies

On January 29, the ABC reported that “about \$100 million worth of medical supplies — including 20 million masks, antibiotics, vaccines and equipment such as basic hand sanitisers — is sitting on huge

pallets wrapped in plastic, ready to be deployed.”

On the basis of those figures, Health Minister Greg Hunt claimed that Australia was “well stocked” and that the priority was “protecting front line clinicians”. However, the same report quoted UNSW global biosecurity professor Raina MacIntyre who said Australia “will see an impact” in supplies of some medical equipment and drugs.

“We have just-in-time economies where we don't have huge stockpiles that'll keep us going for months and months,” she said.

Medical staff told to reuse masks

Hunt was wrong and MacIntyre right. On the same day that Hunt spoke, the president of the Royal Australian College of GPs, Harry Nespolon, said GPs urgently needed more protective equipment — including goggles and protective suits.

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This was also the same day that AMA WA President Dr Andrew Miller criticised the WA government for not supplying WA GPs with personal protective equipment (PPE). There was no sense of urgency, and instead a “business as usual” approach by chief medical officers.

An Australian Department of Health spokesperson refused to say how many surgical masks were in the government stockpile but did concede that none were manufactured in Australia.

The spokesperson admitted that no PPE was manufactured locally. All suppliers were dependent on overseas manufacturers.

By March 16, Queensland hospitals were running “very low” on personal protective equipment, with doctors and nurses being told to reuse some gear to protect dwindling stocks. By the end of the month, NSW doctors treating suspected coronavirus cases were also claiming they were told to reuse face masks. At the same time, to preserve the state’s supply of personal protective equipment, including surgical masks, the only surgical treatment that can now be performed in South Australia is emergency surgery and procedures that are required to prevent the loss of life, loss of limb or permanent disability.

Government suddenly sees the necessity for local manufacturing

Because the NMS cannot keep up with demand for PPE, and because global demand has meant that overseas manufacturers (the “global supply chain”) are proving unreliable, the same Liberal and Labor parties that have presided over the neo-liberal destruction of Australian manufacturing have now had to send out emergency appeals for what remains of our



manufacturing sector to “tool up” and start producing face masks, ventilators and surgical gowns.

In its desperation to make up the shortfall in masks, the federal government assigned Australian soldiers to help boost production at Med-Con near Shepparton whose facilities could be used for masks. Med-Con revealed it had been tasked with making 30 million masks by November.

By the end of March, a South Australian company, the Detmold Group, had retooled for mask-making, and was contracted to produce 145 million masks, with 100 million to go to the National Medical Stockpile and 45 million to SA.

Government stops export of medical supplies

On April 1, the government placed a ban on the export from Australia of emergency medical supplies. This follows earlier reports of huge quantities of surgical masks and other PPE being bought locally by Chinese companies and sent to Wuhan.

If Australia has an excess capacity of medical equipment, it has an internationalist duty to make that excess available, whether it is to Wuhan, New York or New Guinea.

Clearly, we did not have excess capacity for an anticipated outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic back in early February when privately-owned Chinese residential property developer Risland sent 90 tonnes of

PPE to Wuhan. In late February, Chinese global property giant Greenland sent a further 82 tonnes. Both were before the federal government’s Emergency Response Plan for Covid-19, which was released on March 18. However, Greenland Australia is partially owned by the Chinese government and would have needed Treasurer Frydenberg’s permission to export the supplies.

Where did Risland and Greenland get these supplies though? They could not have bought masks, gloves and gowns in these quantities from the corner chemist shop. Were supplies made available by the outsourced management of the NMS? It is a question that needs to be answered.

On every level, the imperialist-controlled Australian government has failed the test of responding to the pandemic, just as it failed the test of responding to the bushfire crisis.

Hospitals and the entire health service, including pathologist and allied health workers, have been privatised or otherwise had austerity measures imposed on them. Doctors and nurses are in short supply and working under terrible conditions. From preschools to nursing homes and every age level in between, people are insecure and anxious.

This is just not good enough.

In the short-term we need a completely revamped approach to preparedness for pandemics, floods, bushfires and other consequences of global warming.

There should be a single National Emergency Storage (NESt) facility, completely owned and operated by the government and publicly accountable through an annual report to parliament; its directors should answer questions by

committees of the parliament. It should not only have emergency medical supplies to pandemic levels of requirement, but bushfire chemical fire retardants, firefighting PPE, oxygen bottles, flood pumps and other requirements for dealing with unprecedentedly critical natural climate catastrophes.

In the near to mid-term, we must accept the inevitability of a return of epidemics and pandemics. The 21st century opened with the SARS epidemic, the 2009 swine flu pandemic, the 2012 Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and now Covid-19. We must expect outbreaks, from time to time, of other zoonotic viruses (viruses originating in animals). Global warming will produce more extreme weather events, fires and floods.

In the longer term, we must obviously abandon the social system that neglects the people and allows a handful to get rich from the labour power and intelligence of the vast majority.

Those vultures who sit on the backs of the people, who advocate that even further austerity measures be imposed on the people, are the same ones who suddenly become “socialists” when they need to be saved by the public purse because they are “too big” or “too important” to fail.

Well, if it’s OK for them to be “socialists” in the midst of a crisis, let us move to socialism and avoid crises.

Let’s take back the direction of our economy and revive Australian manufacturing.

We renew our demand: Fight for anti-imperialist independence and socialism! **V.**

COVID Crisis Breathes New Life into State Monopoly Capitalism

By John G. (4 April 2020)

Government has taken control of, or overseen merging of management, of industry after industry as the Covid-19 crisis unfolds.

The first was to organise supermarket chains to form a government-managed cartel, an association regulating their supply chains, how much each supermarket will seek to have produced, divide the supply amongst themselves, and ensure limited price competition among them.

The competition regulator was converted into a manager of corporate syndicates, cartels.

The big banks have been brought together under state directions to systematically manage the provision of credit, parcelling out government-backed loans and allocating provision of credit among mercantile and industrial capital.

Government put \$105 billion in their hands to prop up the circulation of money through the economy.

Gradually the combination of government and corporations extended, but only late in the piece were private hospitals brought into the command state, despite them being crucial to dealing with the source of the health crisis. The priority accorded people’s health by the machinery of state proved lower than the health of banks.

Morrison’s reported riposte to a statement by private schools closing their doors, where he threatened their government

funding if they did not submit to government directions to stay open, was revealing. It summarised the new reality of State management of capitalism, state capitalism.

Capitalism’s new form completes old parasitism

Means of production, means of subsistence, availability of workers, all the elements of production and consumption were taken under government direction. Owners have been reduced to onlookers. Even majority shareholders in large corporations found themselves on the sidelines, while minority shareholders farewelled even their illusory engagement in company management. Salaried employees, managers, alongside state functionaries, conduct all the functions of the capitalist other than pocketing company profits.

Individual capitalist’s role is rendered completely superfluous to the operation of society. In this period of state capitalism, they have no role in corporate operations at all. In society’s cycle of production and consumption, individual capitalists have completed their transformation into parasites on the whole community.

Capitalists control of the Machinery of State

Capitalists in aggregate as a class, or at least the leading elements in that class, have taken command of the machinery of state more directly, more thoroughly, than before. The transformation has been rapid and thorough. They wield it freely with only passing reference to laws, quickly removing legal constraints to their tactics and strategies.

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Parliamentary democracy is paid scant attention, being brought into action to rubber stamp directives drawn up outside its walls. Laws with huge scale and impact, expenditure of as much money as any budget, passed with less than half a day's parliamentary examination. Leaders of other parliamentary parties collude in it. Some MPs have been sidelined as stunned onlookers.

ACTU leaders not only go along with it, they participate fully in the planning and organisation of this new state outside parliament.

ACTU leaders with mouthpieces in the capitalist media and bourgeois cultural institutions are relied on to promulgate the directives to the people.

State monopoly capitalism is at the core of the response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Institutions of State Monopoly Capitalism outside Parliament

A range of state capitalist institutions have been established.

First was the National Cabinet of Prime Minister and state and territory leaders. It took command swiftly and decisively. It is advised directly by a body of health bureaucrats, and indirectly by respective government department heads. This form lasted as the first responders. It has been quickly supplemented by a new committee of capitalists and state functionaries to "co-ordinate" the economy.

The National Commission, to coordinate the management of the elements of production across the country, has been constituted by the Federal Government. It consists of business people, a former ACTU leader and state functionaries.



Police powers were being ramped up even before the current crisis. How will they be used in the face of mass resistance in the economic crisis to come?

The National COVID-19 Co-ordination Commission consists of a group of former powerbrokers led by Neville Power (Fortescue Metals boss), including David Thodey (Telstra boss), Greg Combet, (Labor Minister and ACTU leader), and Jane Halton (Federal Health Department head) and Paul Little (Toll Holdings). Also on the commission, is the current managing director of Energy Australia Catherine Tanna integrated with public sector chiefs, Philip Gaetjens, from Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary, and his counterpart at Home Affairs, Mike Pezzullo.

National COVID-19 Coordination Commission's (NCCC) role was stated to be to coordinate advice to the Australian Government on actions to anticipate and mitigate the economic and social effects of the crisis. Its method was advertised as being to connect government with private and public sector networks to unlock resources, break bottlenecks and fix problems. No time constraint was put on its existence though there was a vague reference to its role being exercised for "coming months".

Its actual role is not yet clear but its existence confirms the nature of the new form of economic relations

with the special position of representatives of capital in its organisation and the virtual suspension of parliamentary democracy as state monopoly capitalism.

Expanded powers given to agencies of state violence

At State and Territory level, the agencies enabled to use violent force have had their powers ramped up under the cachet of Covid Crisis, social distancing and isolation.

Emergency powers have been instituted with little engagement of parliament. In each jurisdiction, the Police Chief has been appointed the Emergency Coordinator, in charge of operations of all state agencies, including government departments, in relation to the health and economic crises.

Police patrol the streets moving people on, closing down businesses, invading homes to count heads, stopping people, blockading beaches, parks, playgrounds, regions and borders.

They have been given power to require and force people to provide private information just for being there, to move or be arrested, and some arrests have been made. They are holding people in detention in

hotels, guarding the exits and overlooking their compliance. Extraordinary fines and gaol terms for resistance have been set in place using the pandemic as justification.

While some level of enforcing social distancing appears justified, the line where justification is transformed into pretext concealing a sinister purpose is not clear yet. When the health crisis recedes, it seems we may well find out.

The shadow of outright monopoly capitalist rule free of democratic constraints stretches across the country. Force is being exercised over the people, with impact limited largely to restrictions called for under this health emergency. But the danger of wider fascism stalks society.

After the virus passes?

All this has been set in place for a limited period of three or six months for now. Dangers of extension of the powers exist, because the Covid crisis will likely have a long economic tail.

Consider the situation of a long-term recession or depression, with high levels of unemployment, removal of financial support to displaced workers and small business, and loan repayments due.

The scale and impact of the post-pandemic crisis in prospect is extensive; unemployment, house prices plummeting, homelessness, popular resistance, conflict between democratic urges and state capitalist ascendancy.

Rule of the monopoly capitalists, by the monopoly capitalists, for the monopoly capitalists stands in conflict with people's drive for control over their lives, for the benefit of the community, rule of the people, for the people, by the people.

State monopoly capitalism will engender resistance, particularly as a deep economic crisis takes hold. Then the powers state agencies have been given will not be used to save people from the virus, but to save capitalist power from revolt.

The country has entered a period of great dangers, but also great prospects. V.

ICOR Declaration on the Coronavirus Pandemic

CPA (M-L) is an affiliate of the International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organisations (ICOR) and has signed in support of this declaration.



INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION OF
REVOLUTIONARY PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

The Corona pandemic has developed into a global health crisis with drastic and threatening consequences for the world's population. It is clear that many such new diseases and viruses are emerging at an increasing pace.

SARS in 2003, MERS in 2012 and now the COVID-19. It's becoming more obvious each day that the capitalist countries and the imperialist countries, respectively, have created a world in which climate and environment are changing in such a way that there is

a real threat to human existence. In many imperialist countries the main problem right now is the exponential spread of the virus.

This coincides with a situation in the countries in which the public health systems, with their orientation to maximum profit, have been economized to the point that they are on the verge of collapse or are already in a state of collapse. In many countries there has been no functioning public health system for years.

The ICOR has in its thoughts all the victims so far, their family members, and those who are ill.

At the same time the Corona pandemic is being used to obscure the emergence of a new world economic and financial crisis and to shift the burdens of the crisis onto the shoulders of the broad masses in the wake of Corona. Capitalist governments are holding billions in readiness for corporations – but not for the masses and the health

system. On top of that, industrial production is supposed to be maintained at all costs under totally inadequate hygienic conditions, and exploitation even increased. In Italy and Spain, the US, China strikes against this have developed, which the ICOR appreciates, promotes and supports.

Armies are being deployed in the interior while democratic rights and freedoms are increasingly being restricted, e.g. by cancelling or banning demonstrations and protest activities, and the surveillance by tracking of mobile phone data is expanded.

Although the situation is urgent, often every state operates on its own against others as far as research, diagnosis and treatment are concerned. Today a big part of the world is in a lockdown. In this situation even the few attempts of governments to provide the masses with vital material prove to be completely inadequate.

ICOR Declaration on the Coronavirus Pandemic



(Continued from pg.11)

Food, medicine and sanitary materials are not being made available to the working masses. It is as if the only thing left for the exploited and oppressed, for the poorest of the world, to do is to die. Those in power and the rich take care of their own survival.

Imperialist blockades against dependent countries are a further crime that aggravates the dramatic

situation because of the pandemic.

This situation shows the whole degeneracy and incompetence of the imperialist world system! It shows that imperialism has entered a phase where it is no longer viable. Socialism is the only answer.

This is why the ICOR stands for the international coordination and cooperation of revolutionary parties and organizations in a

revolutionary and socialist perspective on the whole world.

Even though the virus knows no class boundaries, the health systems are two-class systems. It becomes patently clear today that the future of humanity lies in classless communist society and the building of a world community without exploitation of humans and nature.

The ICOR demands:

- Far-reaching measures to ensure health care on the costs of profits. Food, sanitary materials, and other essentials for the masses!
- Comprehensive creation of new jobs in the health system!
- Immediate comprehensive protection measures for all the workers in the health sector and other vital sectors!
- Immediate increase of salaries for those working in the health sector.
- In-depth health information and free health care for everyone!
- Stop national egoism and competition in research into the causes and in diagnosis and in treatment. For an open scientific discussion, but comprehensible to the masses!
- No shifting of the crisis burdens onto the backs of the broad masses and the working class!
- Resignation of irresponsibly acting politicians!
- Immediate stop of socially non-vital industrial production! Release of blue and white collar workers from duty, with full wage compensation!
- Disinfection of machines and tools for necessary production, observance of the minimum distance of 1.5 to 2 meters between workers!
- Immediate state aid and emergency care for children and the elderly and people in need of help. Immediate help for homeless people, refugees, undocumented migrants and people in precarious situations.
- Establishment of national emergency storages in all countries. In these, medical emergency provisions, chemical flame inhibitors for bush fires, flood pumps and other requisites for the handling of unprecedentedly critical pandemics and natural climate catastrophes shall be stored and be made available immediately when needed.
- Suspension of debt burden for oppressed countries!

Together with the popular masses worldwide the ICOR seizes the initiative for:

- Fight the shifting of the crisis burdens and the restriction of democratic rights and freedoms!
- International cooperation for research into the causes, diagnosis, and treatment – instead of nationalism, chauvinism, and racism!
- Fight for health, work, bread, peace – socialism!