

the Communist Party

WHAT DISTINGUISHES OUR PARTY – The line running from Marx to Lenin to the foundation of the Third International and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy in Leghorn (Livorno) 1921, and from there to the struggle of the Italian Communist Left against the degeneration in Moscow and to the rejection of popular fronts and coalition of resistance groups – The tough work of restoring the revolutionary doctrine and the party organ, in contact with the working class, outside the realm of personal politics and electoral manoeuvring

newspaper of the
international communist party

April 2020
Number 19

COVID-19 Treatment For Capitalism Means No Relief For The Working Class

American capitalism in its self-assured manner has come face to face with a foe it was never prepared to fight: a quickly spreading viral outbreak. Despite much warning from the situation in China and repeated caution from the Centers for Disease Control, the ruling class did nothing for the countries it benefits from and claims to be custodian of. To the surprise of no one, the virus has spread across the planet. In the wake of this impending pandemic, the markets have wavered and crashed, and media-fueled panics have set in across the population. What has resulted is an economic crisis on top of the viral outbreak.

The ruling class government has only recognized the rupture in what was previously a booming financial up turn. In response the United States has acted with lightning efficiency to inject funding into the economy. Much of the financial relief, to the sum of \$1.5 trillion in short-term loans, will be used to smooth out market fluctuations. The working class will only hope for some of this to trickle down to them in the future, and long after the pandemic has passed. Where legislators have proposed paid sick leave in the House of Representatives, the bureaucratic sparring in the federal government for the bipartisanship required to pass the legislation in the senate further delays this relief. Further, the language of the bill provides businesses and corporations the opportunity to opt out of providing sick leave altogether. The government's immediate proposals for financial support to working class people and their families is all in the form of tax cuts. Any material support the working class can find will come from their continued subjection to the employment regime, even at the risk of becoming ill.

Along with quick mobilization to support finance capital, the American federal government has also begun extensive slashing of social services to make up for costs. Reforms to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), now provide for only 3 months of food stamps unless participants are working to receive more in the future. A holiday for student loan interest has also been proposed. However, graduates will still need to go to work to come up with the money to pay off their loans if they are to hope to be rid of as much debt as possible before the interest rate returns. Even the supposed support for the fuel of capitalist social institutions crumbles in the face of this viral outbreak – it truly becomes every person for themselves. The ruling class has shown where their priorities lie, and it's not with the working class, but with the continued economic high achieved from successful markets and profitability. To keep the economy going, the ruling class will continue to force working class people to keep working through the pandemic to ensure this happens.

These skewed priorities also bleed into the management of the health crisis. Despite the increased chance of infection that comes with continuing to work, the federal government has all but abandoned the need for viral testing. Similarly, the insinuation that another capitalist firm of the United States would be coordinated enough to recognize when the president declared their cooperation in a testing scheme and would already have viral testing facilities prepared is farcical at best. The medical system, being privatized, does not offer the ability for appropriate responses to a rapid viral outbreak. The past interests of capital have shaped the American health system, and that is now materializing as the inability to provide medical aid to the working class and the unemployed who run the risk of infection every day the pandemic continues.

This problem is not isolated to the United States: across the globe the interests of capitalism are colliding with the ensuing viral pandemic. Working class people everywhere are still expected to go to work, despite the fact that people are aware of their infection only after they have become contagious. In China, where work has continued since February, the rising price of food is creating intolerable living conditions. Despite the Chinese government having the power to redistribute food to where it's needed, the only thing the ruling party can request is that people return to work to drive down food prices later. Even with the increased pressure to work, all recreational events have been cancelled, and in Italy a ban on labor assemblies has been imposed. Capitalist society has thrown off its facade of peaceful

existence between classes to lay bare its attitude towards the working class, and it's to work towards a profitable economy despite the pandemic.

This has resulted in many working class organizations demanding that work be stopped in all nonessential industries until the pandemic has passed.

In Italy strikes are spreading across the whole country and major rank and file unions – USB, SI Cobas, CUB – are supporting them calling for national strikes across all nonessential industries to the fight against the pandemic, asking for close the factories and full salaries payment. Regime unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) instead on 14th March have signed an agreement with bosses and government to don't stop the production. This is being done to push the Italian government to accommodate the safety and needs of the working class people of Italy.

Workers at vehicle assembly plants in Canada have similarly refused to work due to concerns over their well being. In the United Kingdom, where Parliament and the Prime Minister have all but decided to wait for the viral outbreak to pass "naturally", workers have begun staging strikes to force the British government and their employers to recognize the working class' needs and safety.

It is only through the union of the working class along this industrial front that capitalist governments will acknowledge the class' needs and demands. And all of these working class strikes have similar demands: universal access to relief and the stoppage of work during the outbreak.

In the United States, the bureaucratic structure of The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) has done nothing to force the hand of the American government. Despite being in a position to form a similar industrial front as the Italians, the AFL-CIO leadership has only proposed petitions. Petitioning capitalist governments to forsake economic progress in order to mitigate the harm caused by a pandemic is as farcical as the government hoping for capitalist firms to have a commitment to collective action. By appealing to the illusory "common interests" capitalist firms and the ruling class have with the working class, AFL-CIO union bosses demonstrate they only wish to maintain their positive relationships with the ruling class. They do this even at the expense of the American working class, both those they represent and those they don't.

Where the union leadership drags their feet, working class people across the country affected by the outbreak begin to move. Medical workers in New Orleans, who must work excessively in hazardous conditions during the health crisis, have begun to demand the needed material support that the unions have failed to call for. In New York City, where the mayor has kept the public schools open, teachers are calling for sick outs to push for school closures. And where the capitalist government refuses to alleviate material shortages caused by the panic, working class people support one another with what resources they have. The demands of the working class in the United States are the same as the demands of the class across the planet: total and immediate relief during the course of the pandemic.

The Pandemic is Not Beyond Classes

The different forms of life constitute a totality in the constant and infinite twists and turns of their evolution. The human species coexists with many other forms of life, some of them within the human body itself, sometimes useful, sometimes harmful. Humanity has learned how to counter the aggression of the larger animal species, but remains vulnerable to the smaller ones, including many insects, some single-celled organisms and viruses.

It would certainly be useful to write a history of the great epidemics which, over the centuries, have had significant effects on the development of humanity, from those that marked the end of the Middle Ages in Europe, to the rubella and smallpox that exterminated the Native American populations, to the so-called

"Spanish flu", which was brought on by the First World War and ended up doubling its victims.

Let's ask ourselves: is humankind better prepared to respond to the threat of epidemics than in the past? The answer is without doubt, "yes" with regard to the many scourges that, until a few decades ago, were prodigious dispensers of bereavement and disability, often inflicted on the young, bringing diseases such as trachoma, tuberculosis, poliomyelitis: the first two caused by a bacterium, the third by a virus. These are epidemics whose spread persists only in the poorest regions of the planet, among the lower social classes and where healthcare is less available.

Life expectancy is also increasing, but it sinks sharply in the chasm opened up by economic crises or caused by political disarray, as happened, for example, to a great extent during the breakup of the Russian Union from 1989 onwards.

Because what does not work to preserve the health of the species is capitalism, which creates an incurable conflict between the laws of reproduction of capital, and those of the reproduction and conservation of living species – and first and foremost, the human species.

It is no coincidence that the current epidemic originated in China, a country that in recent decades has seen extraordinarily rapid growth, which has taken it to the forefront of modern capitalist economic development.

It is clear that the dilemma we confront today is as follows: Should we defend humanity from this invisible aggression, which could cause (we do not know yet) the extermination of the species; or, should we defend the continuous functioning of the relations of production based on waged labour and the circulation of commodities? Should we defend the human species or, should we defend its historical-productive expression in the capitalist era, which goes by the name of "the nation"?

The dilemma is there for all to see, all around us: in the tense procrastination, "to close or not to close?" much time is lost in the effort to prevent infection. In Japan, for example, the great threat and the great concern for the bourgeoisie class is the loss of big business presented by the Olympics.

Faced with a maturity of knowledge and of human labour that tends to make the whole planet a single intelligent and collaborative machine, each bourgeoisie, perched in its own State and surrounded by its own "scientists", delays sounding the alarm for as long as possible, closing the borders to those who want to enter, but not to those who want to leave. And they set quotas for tests with nasal swabs to reduce the number of infected! Meanwhile, they also take advantage of the disease to exploit any kind of fraud and speculation.

In the current senile crisis of world capital, the profit system is hovering on the edge of a recession and overproduction. But let's not allow a pandemic to keep workers safely away from the factories and construction sites! let's not block the containers stacked up on the docks, 95% of them full of goods that are of no use to us! Let's not keep planes on the tarmac, as that could do serious damage to "tourism", the cure for the boredom of the petty bourgeoisie.

Closing schools and cinemas is cheap. But closing the factories until the danger has passed? Unthinkable! Madness! Heresy! Indeed, even trade unions like Unite in the UK call for "financial assistance" to industries such as aviation to "deal with the calamitous collapse in bookings". Because workers must go to work, no substantive rules on hygiene must be allowed to disrupt industry or the workers' means of getting to work. We are better off dead!

The mere setting up of a health prophylaxis, with the temporary modification of the rhythms and means of production, knowledge and consumption, implemented according to an international plan, a necessary break in the cycle of collective human life on the planet, is incompatible with the rhythms and the cycle of capital, for which production and consumption must not, and can never stop.

The working class must not accept this, it must enforce the payment of wages to all workers dismissed from work because of the virus, not least temporary workers and workers in the "gig economy" whose lives are already precarious enough as it is. The pandemic is not above social classes and the proletariat must not entrust its management to the predatory class of the bosses and their State.

WOBBLES: NOTES FROM THE FRONT LINES OF THE CLASS WAR

Sofia, Bulgaria: Nurses and other medical professionals barricaded themselves in the Health Commission offices. Demands include decent salaries, improvement of working conditions and reform to save public healthcare as well as opposition to the commercialization of healthcare. [March 6]

Pomigliano, Naples, Italy: A wildcat strike of hundreds of workers shut down Fiat/Chrysler's best selling Panda assembly line for most of the day. [March 10]

Italy: Strikes have spread all over the country, mainly in the North, the most industrialized area. Regime Unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) refuse to call for a general strike despite many of their most active members have organized strikes. One of the largest "rank and file" unions, USB, called for a 32 hour national strike in all non-essential workplaces and for a 15 day strike in manufacturing in the Emilia Romagna region (where the USB is strongest in manufacturing.) The strike began March 12th.

Detroit, Michigan: A series of wildcats and threats of strikes have caused the "Big Three" auto producers - General Motors, Ford and Fiat/Chrysler to halt production for 2 weeks in order to provide COVID-19 protection for production workers.

Wildcat work stoppages at Fiat-Chrysler's **Detroit** Sterling Heights Assembly Plant began after workers learned that two co-workers had been quarantined with the COVID-19. "The second shift normally ends at 3:00 a.m., but the company ended up closing the plant at 10:30 p.m. Morning shift workers came into the plant but stood by and refused to work. Management gave up after three hours and sent them home...Local Leadership stood with us the entire time..."

Workers at Chrysler's Windsor Assembly Plant in **Ontario** walked off the job after a co-worker was quarantined at home.

On March 17, workers shut down the paint shop at Chrysler's Warren Truck Assembly Plant in **Detroit**. [March 17 via Labor Notes]

Minnesota: The State of Minnesota Democratic governor has classified Grocery Clerks as Emergency Workers and is limiting strike freedoms. Says the sniveling cowards at the regime union AFSME "We won't stand in the way of the state's powerful response to this crisis, but we won't idly sit by if that power is abused... Our job as a union is to make sure that during this worldwide crisis, Minnesota workers are still protected and safe at work." [March 18]

Detroit, Michigan, USA: Detroit area bus drivers self organized and proclaimed that they wanted safety precautions and stopped work. City managers spun the truth by calling the strike a "the driver shortage." The Amalgamated Transit Union supported the action, in less than 24 hours, the drivers won their demands. Fare collection was also suspended. [March 18]

Fort Worth, Texas: Iron Workers walk off site for health and safety reasons.

Izmir, Turkey: Metropolitan Municipality workers at the Directorate of Parks and Gardens, Directorate of Water and Sewers and other units have stopped work because masks, gloves and other protective material in response to the corona outbreak weren't distributed among them. The workers are members of Genel-Is (Public Services Employees Union) Izmir Branch No 2, which is a part of the leftist DISK (Progressive Workers Unions Confederation). The number of strikers is currently unknown. [March 19]

Sacramento, California: Electricians walked off an expansion of the Kaiser Hospital construction project this morning. [March 19]

Oakland, California: Dockworkers are threatening to refuse work at a terminal that they say isn't properly sanitizing equipment and facilities for employees. "They're trying to have us come in and clean the equipment. That's not our job, that's their job." Demands include sanitizing equipment, work areas, terminal bathrooms, mechanic shops, tools, machines, turnstiles and gates. [March 20]

Istanbul, Turkey: 40 Galataport construction workers went on strike in Istanbul due to lack of precautions regarding the COVID-19. [March 20]

Istanbul, Turkey: Upon the post office's decision to allow the permanent staff not to work on Saturday, while requiring subcontracted workers to continue working, subcontracted workers went on strike and won. [March 21]

Istanbul, Turkey: 800 meter reading workers working for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality went on strike against the lack of precautions against the COVID-19. Management has the workers the day off the strike off. Enerji

Sen (Energy Workers Union belonging to DISK) had earlier made a call for immediate precautions in the sector.

[Update] Meter readers and Enerji - Sent (DISK) went to the Istanbul Water Directorate tied to Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to discuss their demands regarding protection from the virus, yet no one talked to them because of... the virus. The workers staged a protest in front of the building. Enerji - Sen chairman called for the citizens to react to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and say they don't want to see bills at their door [March 21]

Portland, Oregon, USA: the Industrial Workers of the World are conducting 3 industrial actions in the face of the pandemic.

12 employees laid off from "Crush", a queer restaurant/bar occupied the bar after being laid off. They were demanding legally required payment for accrued sick days. The business owner met all demands. Evidently there is no intersection between the employing and working class.

The workers at the nationally famous Voodoo Doughnut store chain have walked out demanding better physical security at work, wage increases. And with a growing concern of the COVID-19 virus, employees are now also demanding the company provide an additional \$2 an hour for hazard pay for their continued work with customers and the general public. The IWW is also demanding severance pay and access to all accrued Paid Time Off for all employees laid off due to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as for all employees who will be laid off due to the COVID-19 crisis."

The IWW workers at the Burgerville restaurant chain are out on strike demanding \$2 hazard pay, 2 weeks severance for laid off workers, 2 weeks sick pay, and a cash out of all benefits (vacation and sick pay) upon COVID-19 lay off. [March 22]

Kathleen, Georgia, USA: 50 employees walked out of the Perdue Chicken processing plant for health and safety reasons around COVID-19. "We're not getting nothing - no type of compensation, no nothing, not even no cleanliness, no extra pay-no nothing. We're up here risking our life for chicken," said employee Kendalynn Granville. [March 23]

Alberta, Canada: A dozen Edmonton nurses have defied an order by Alberta Health Services to resume testing for COVID-19 without N95 masks. [March 24]

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA: Dozens of sanitation workers are refusing to work without health protections. [March 25]

The workers in a filter factory in **Hatay, Southern Turkey** Sent on strike and won paid leave until April 30th. The number of workers or whether they belong to the union is unknown. [March 26]

Morgantown, West Virginia, USA: Sabraton Kroger Pharmacy workers today walked off the job due to an unsafe working environment. [March 27]

40 Workers at Linden Foods in **Dungannon, Northern Ireland** have walked out over a "total absence of social distancing measures". [March 27]

Memphis, Tennessee, USA: 400 Kroger Grocery warehouse workers walked out because of lax health standards and long hours. The workers left their jobs after a co-worker tested positive for COVID-19 and management refused to identify which shift had been exposed. [March 27]

Work 'cannot go on like this'

The workers conducted a sit-down strike at the Mercedes-Benz assembly line in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain being required to work despite the COVID-19 outbreak. After talks with management over factory conditions and precautions against the spread of COVID-19 broke down, employees stopped working and staged a sit-in at the end of the assembly line, refusing to allow the production process to continue.

The factory's works council, which represents employees, alleged that Mercedes management failed to comply with on-the-job safety requirements such as ensuring that workers have masks, adequate gloves, and other supplies.

From a Machinist in Wisconsin, Regarding Work Continuation

"If your manufacturing facility has allowed the office staff to go home and be safe then why not the workers? Do not wait for your boss or your elected officials to give a shit about your well-being, your life is literally on the line."

Rank and File Mechanics Actions at American Airlines

It comes as no surprise when word of airlines mistreating their employees appear in the news. Anyone from front line i.e. ticket agents, gate agents and ramp agents, pilots and flight attendants, even down to the very people who are given the greatest task of all in keeping the aircraft running safely - the mechanics. Until recently, in January 2020 when the mechanics union TWU-IAM Association were able to come to a tentative \$4.2 billion agreement. One that took countless fighting, millions of dollars in delayed and canceled flights and one man's freedom. Last May 2019, mechanics at American Airlines made a threat for what they called the "bloodiest, ugliest battle" in labor history. It would be another seven months before the agreement would be reached and, in that time, mechanics had a plan of their own. American Airlines accused the unions representing their mechanics of purposeful slowdowns in maintenance repairs as a way of beating the airline into submission.

The subsequent cost of these actions were more than 900 flight cancellations and countless delays in the course of only two months. In addition to working slowly, mechanics would write up issues that may otherwise be left unchecked until a major overhaul effectively grounding the aircraft until repairs could be made. This came at a time when the Boeing 737 MAX jets were grounded and airlines were already scrambling to re-accommodate flights with their remaining fleet. In American's court filing they claimed the unions had caused them "enormous financial losses and untold harm in lost customer good will".

Pandemics, Profits And Proles

Much has been written in the course of the COVID-19 crisis about the necessity of public health infrastructure. In the United States, the pandemic has amplified social-democratic calls for a public healthcare system.

Medical research and pharmaceutical development are often left out of these demands. The present situation demonstrates that state health insurance is not enough to protect human health. All aspects of medicine - education, research, industry, infrastructure, and clinical practice - must be centralized under the proletariat's control.

The example of Remdesivir, an antiviral drug developed by Gilead Sciences, illustrates the issues inherent in medical development for profit. Gilead, the thirteenth-largest pharmaceutical company in the world, has been reluctant to participate in drug trials in China for fear of losing control of its intellectual property. A Chinese research laboratory, for its part, has applied for a patent on the use of Remdesivir to treat COVID-19. As the number of infections and deaths grows by the day, international capitalism remains concerned with its property regime.

The search for a vaccine further demonstrates the failing of bourgeois medicine. At present there are at least 20 separate companies working on vaccine development. Each has its own profit motives, its own methods, and its own intellectual property concerns. The countries in which they operate have their own national interests to protect. Several academic institutions are also running their own searches. This epitomizes the anarchy of production. If ever there has been a time for the centralization of the medical industry, it is in response to the current pandemic.

The international proletariat should have exclusive and unified control over all aspects of medicine. Medical discoveries are the common possession of all of humanity, thus there must be a common project to put them into practical use.

The Communist Party is Printed and Produced by

Associazione La Sinistra Comunista - Casella Postale 1157 - 50121 Firenze - Italy
I.C.P. Editions - c/o 96 Bold Street - Liverpool L1 4HY - United Kingdom
C.L. Publishing - c/o 523 S.E. Morrison St. - Portland, OR 97214 - U.S.A

international-communist-party.org