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By a guest author

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Toward a Popular Salvation Front in Spain

Red Network, a communist, anti-imperialist organization that sees socialism as the only way out of the capitalist crisis, published this first draft of a program aimed, after discussion, at uniting other such organizations in the Spanish state in a common front. The program's goal is to defend the lives and interests of the working class from the virus and from the assault of the capitalists, a goal we in Workers World share. Translation by John Catalinotto. (redroja.net, April 1)

The collapse of the health care system, which nobody denies anymore, has put the demands of the groups in the struggle to defend Public Healthcare on the agenda. These demands include budgeting greater resources, beginning with reversing the brutal cuts of the previous decade; and annulling the privatizations that have tried to make health care a business that, moreover, discriminates between patients according to their social class.

We see how public health care is overflowing with patients while privately run hospitals, which receive public funding, look the other way. Meanwhile private insurers, in the midst of the tragedy, are trying to make a killing on people's anguish.

For all these reasons, today it is essential to definitively nationalize private health care, repealing Law 15/97. But this is insufficient in the current health and social emergency. The supply of hospital and protective material must be guaranteed to the maximum by intervening in the business sphere, including in the pharmaceutical industry.

On the labor side, this must do away with the painful image of workers forced to do their work without safety provisions. At the same time, social planning for isolation is necessary to stop many people from being abandoned after the already scarce social services have been cut off. And intervention is required in the area of housing, in view of the uncertainty weighing on thousands of families as to how they will ensure payment of their rents and mortgages.

But this health emergency has accelerated and aggravated the deep socioeconomic crisis that could be foreseen already. Up to now, more than 1.7 million workers have been affected by government-funded ERTes [ERTE mechanisms give companies permission to temporarily lay off workers; the bosses pay social security but no wages, and the workers can apply for unemployment insurance]. We are witnessing a veritable avalanche of more than 200,000 ERTE layoffs, the largest being from El Corte Inglés [department stores], Securitas Direct [home alarms], Seat, Burger King, Iberia, Renault ... and are awaiting the ERTE of Inditex [textiles, clothing], which will affect another 25,000 workers.

It is clear that, given the recession that threatens us and the endemic dependence on tourism, many of these workers will end up losing their jobs for good. In addition, countless companies are not resorting to the ERTE but choosing individual and definitive dismissal.

Government protects the banks

The government has approved a series of measures which, although announced as a “social shield,” could be better described as a shield for the banks and large enterprises. The State will guarantee 117 billion euros (\$127 billion) so that the banks can administer more loans at their will and with total security.

Obviously, the financial groups will decide which companies to lend to. More than likely, financial logic will lead them to give this money to the large corporations with which the banks are intertwined. And, moreover, without any risk: Indeed, when a default occurs, the State will guarantee payment.

What will happen to the 150,000 small businesses and the 3 million self-employed who are threatened with permanent closure? For its part, the European Union has approved the

purchase of 750 billion euros (\$815 billion) in assets by the European Central Bank, and there is no doubt that the part of these assets destined for Spain will be used to buy bonds from these same banks and large corporations.

All these measures benefitting big capital anticipate a new bailout. If it is not completed on the same terms as the previous one, it will be because the system itself has less room for maneuver and the squabbling within the EU itself is being exacerbated. It is precisely the dominant countries of the European Union that want to use the crisis as a weapon to conquer entire economic sectors of the weakest countries, as was the case with Greece, among others, a few years ago.

We must put everyone on alert that the coronavirus will be used for propaganda purposes, in order to cover up the rottenness and barbarity inherent in a system dominated by parasitic financial capitalism. This system is no longer even capable of stabilizing “its own” real productive economy. Consequently, we must also immunize ourselves as soon as possible against the perverse use of the state of alarm — which imposes confinement — to muzzle us even more and stifle the capacity for redoubled struggle that we will require.

We must learn from the accumulated experiences of the systemic crisis of 2007-08, from which we are still suffering the social and labor cuts that were the other side of the first great rescue of big “patriotic” capital.

And we must also retain the lessons of the tidal waves of mobilization that began in 2011, which have been largely stamped out on the altar of increasingly impossible reformism and the illusion of electoral politics.

In that cycle of massive and widespread mobilizations by sectors of the working class, what was left suspended was the task of merging them into a single torrent that would embrace a common program. This program would not be limited to particular demands, nor to a critique of one or another government — all of which serve big capital — but would aim at raising a challenge for real political power. Today it is time to complete this task.

Workers need a common front

To forge a response to the economic crisis and to reverse the cruel social and labor consequences that the crisis will have, we propose that workers' organizations and social activism promote a common front dedicated to saving the people and not big capital.

We urge the unification of all the sectors in struggle and that they adopt a minimum set of measures. Without representing any particular sector, these measures apply to all: a common political alternative that clearly points to the contest for real power, without which none of the measures proposed by any sector will have any guarantee of being obtained and maintained.

1) Expropriate private banks, which are parasites on the rest of society. Through arbitrary credit, these banks suffocate the real productive economy itself. This parasitism is increasingly present in strong international competition, with the bank rescue as a weapon of struggle among foreign powers. As a counterpoint, create a solid public bank that relaunches production.

2) Refuse to pay the so-called "public debt," a tool artificially created by international and national financial capital to keep us indefinitely subject to its extortion. The payment of interest on the debt alone has already amounted to 31.4 billion euros per year, 86 million euros per day. These resources could be used to rescue the people.

3) Break with the dictates of the EU, whose chief executives have adopted the "everyone for themselves" approach, even in the face of the drama experienced in the Italian and Spanish states, and consigned us to our status as the backyard of the central powers of that imperialist bloc.

4) Intervene in the large enterprises that produce and distribute, preventing the flight of capital that is already taking place and that contributes greatly to millions of workers being left chronically unemployed, and even literally dispossessed of their jobs and left in the streets.

Only this way can we achieve what is most necessary:

5) Implement the rational and democratic planning of the economy according to the real needs of the population and not at the service of speculation and the profit of the oligarchs.

Today, the already observed bankruptcy of sectors such as construction and tourism helps us to rethink our development model.

In the spirit of breaking with the system

This political program can be modified and made more explicit, always in the spirit of breaking with the existing economic (dis)order. In any case, it is necessary to turn these ideas into solid political action. The enemy will put their experience to use — and we must do the same. If in the last period of crisis this was not possible, there is no time to lose now. We call on the people and on trade union, social and political activism. It is time to put aside our differences, our legitimate differences, and get down to work to form a Popular Salvation Front so that it is not the people who pay the costs of this crisis, but the financial and economic oligarchy — those who caused the crisis in the first place.

We also salute the networks of popular self-support that have been created and that, not by chance, have emerged where activism has maintained its strength. In order to make this proposal a reality, it will be vital to have grassroots popular power to build popular power from every corner, but with a united program of breaking with the old system. This is the strategy we need so that the popular sectors and their various detachments can confront this avalanche and move on to counterattack.

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