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By Larry Holmes  
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## ***Pandemic has hastened capitalism's end stage; the rest is up to us! – an analysis***

Last week workers celebrated International Workers' Day 2020. There has been no other time in our lives when the message of May Day — global workers' solidarity in the struggle against capitalism — has been more urgent. We have entered a decisive period.



The scope of the world class struggle heading toward us will require more than solidarity from the working-class movement. It will require a level of coordination among organizations and movements around the world in the struggle against capitalism that didn't even exist in the early years of the Second International under the leadership of V.I. Lenin. Conditions and technology have made what was not possible, possible. But first,

those of us in the United States, the center of world imperialism, have our work cut out for us.

The world capitalist economy, led by the U.S., is tumbling very quickly into a depression. It is likely to be more severe than any previous depression in the history of capitalism, because what is occurring now is the implosion of a system at its end stage. As staggering as the COVID-19 pandemic is on its own, in truth it has catalyzed a colossal world capitalist crisis that has been in the making for a long time. After being revived 75 years ago by World War II, U.S capitalism has for the last half century been sliding into its end stage. Globalization and the development of generations of technology, combined with a relentless assault on the living standards of the working class, have failed to stop the system's decline.

Capitalism has never recovered from the 2008 crash of the financial markets. Since then, financial markets have been on life support because central banks have pumped trillions of dollars into them. When U.S stocks nearly collapsed two months ago, the Federal Reserve did something extraordinary. Within a matter of days, it funneled about \$5 trillion into U.S. financial markets — about one-quarter of the U.S. annual gross domestic product. Wall Street is now on what amounts to a financial respirator. Before the pandemic, the global economy had been stagnant in the U.S. and contracting elsewhere. Now, everywhere the economy is contracting at a rate faster than during the Great Depression.

Those of us who have been anxiously awaiting the collapse of capitalism should restrain any inclination to rejoice. The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the capitalist economy have unleashed a living hell on the workers and oppressed everywhere. Workers are dying from the pandemic, and they are losing their jobs at the same time. The rate of suicides is growing — and will continue to grow in direct correlation to the rising rate of joblessness, evictions, hunger, in addition to more sickness and death.

The real number of workers who have just lost their jobs in the U.S. is not 30 million, but closer to 50 million, when all the workers who do not qualify for unemployment benefits are added in — like many migrant workers, gig workers and the large number of laid-off workers who could not access their state unemployment websites because they were either too busy or had crashed. That means that almost one-third of the U.S. workforce has just become jobless.

The capitalists' need to force workers — those who still have a job — back to work could make it impossible to contain the pandemic because opening the economy is what is helping the stock market recover.

When the pandemic is no longer the main problem, most of the jobs that have been lost will not come back. One of the things that fuels a capitalist depression is that the system depends on workers to purchase goods and services. Depression-level unemployment means that workers will not be able to buy the things that capitalist overproduction must dump on the market to sell.

Naturally, it will be Black and Brown workers — those who struggle to survive under normal conditions — who will suffer the most. We should prepare ourselves for the unimaginable devastation that the pandemic and economic crisis are going to wreak on the peoples of the global South. But workers who live in the major imperialist countries, those who used to think of themselves as doing well, especially before the 2008 recession, will also be hit very hard by this storm.

### **Everyone, except the rich, will demand the end of capitalism**

This is the moment of reckoning. To any rational mind, it is utterly incomprehensible that in the richest country in the world, which has the benefit of the highest level of scientific and technological development in history — and virtually inexhaustible resources — is somehow incapable of protecting society from a deadly pandemic. It's not just Trump's incompetence. Presidents and politicians from both the Democratic and Republican parties faithfully supported the measures that eviscerated the quality of health care available to the workers and the poor.

It is for this reason that there were not enough hospital beds, protective equipment, respirators and health care workers to respond to the pandemic. The measures that rendered hospitals completely unprepared to protect the people were the consequence of an austerity campaign that capitalists embarked on in the hopes that it would rescue their floundering system. Whether or not capitalists are evil is beside the point.

The fundamental problem is that capitalists cannot do what's best for society because it's not in their interest to do so. Their interests are in accumulating all the wealth they can,

maximizing profits, exploiting labor and maintaining their power over society. If the interests of the people were primary, workers would be able to stay at home safely without any fear of losing their jobs, if that is what is necessary to stop a pandemic.

It is not the economy that needs to be shut down — it's capitalism. Capitalism cannot protect us from pandemics, or from climate change, or from all the dangers that we face. Because of this world-changing crisis, more people are going to realize that capitalism is incompatible with the immediate needs of society — and that its continuation is an existential threat to all life on the planet. Until we end capitalism, we will all be at the mercy of a small — and shrinking — class of super-rich parasites.

### **From now on, system change must be the goal of the working class**

We have reached the point where it is no longer helpful to merely expose capitalism, or not to have a goal beyond reforming it. It cannot be reformed. It has to go. Even if capitalism falls apart and is unable to recover for a long period of time, and if it is not ended, given enough time, capitalism will reconstitute itself. Supporting the struggle for the immediate needs of the workers is absolutely essential. There is no chance for a struggle for power without a struggle for the basic needs of the masses of people.

The fight for socialism must not be seen as separate from the struggle for everyone's right to a job or income, universal health care, an increase in the minimum wage, stopping evictions — and most importantly, the right and need for the working class to organize itself like never before.

Marx and Engels offered a revolutionary perspective regarding this in the “Communist Manifesto”: “Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lie not in the immediate results, but in the ever expanding union of workers.”

How to effectively combine the struggle to end capitalism and establish socialism with the day-to-day struggles of the workers will become the central challenge for all revolutionary forces. Rising to this challenge will require drawing lessons from history and determining how past lessons are applicable to today's conditions. This will not be easy. It will be a process involving mistakes and setbacks, as well as victories.

But we have no other choice than to embark on the road that leads ultimately to revolution. Capitalism will not just go away. It must be ended. We cannot predict with certainty the precise moment when a real revolutionary situation will be at hand in the U.S. That will depend on many things, including the readiness of the working class, the only class big and powerful enough to end capitalism. But we can say that today's events are opening roads to the revolution that did not exist just a short time ago.

### **Dialectical materialism and revolution**

Much of the discussions online regarding the best road to socialism in the wake of the new popularity of socialism, which has spurred the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America and the Bernie Sanders campaign, tend to have one important flaw. The discussions generally seem to assume that because conditions unfavorable to the radicalization of the working class have endured for a long time, they are static and forever unchangeable. As such, the conclusions are that the period of Leninism and revolution are long gone and that the working class in the U.S. will never see any route to change other than capitalist elections, as they are tied to the traditions, institutions and influence of the U.S. bourgeoisie.

The problem with this thinking is that it leaves out an essential element without which all change — especially revolution — would be unthinkable. That element is dialectical materialism. Material conditions, which are constantly changing, ultimately compel social change, regardless of how long that change takes or whether or not we see it coming. The working class can be politically dormant for many decades, and then drastic changes in material conditions can propel workers to a new level of political consciousness, even revolutionary consciousness, within a relatively short period of time.

At this very moment, material conditions are in the process of creating the political conditions for revolutionary change. We must not minimize what is at stake here! If the forces which believe that reform and only reform is possible are the only forces influencing the working class, it will be impossible for the working class to break free of the ruling class and its political parties. That, in turn, will undermine the independence and revolutionary potential of the working class and will help capitalism survive a near-death experience.

The last time the possibility of revolution was a real threat to the U.S. ruling class was at the height of the working class' rebellious strength in the 1930s. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt wisely pressured the U.S. bourgeoisie to acquiesce to New Deal concessions to the working class because he was worried about the prospects of a replay of the Russian Revolution at home. Those were important concessions. But they also helped U.S. imperialism survive the Great Depression, enabling it to become the undisputed leader of the capitalist world through the second world war.

Marxists have been accused of prematurely predicting the end of capitalism since the first edition of the "Communist Manifesto" was published in 1848 in London. Suffice it to say, no prediction is valid until it is affirmed by events. However, eventually crying wolf will not be just another false alarm. We must take the possibilities seriously. For one thing, the U.S. ruling class does not look as invincible as it used to.

If one looks behind the curtain of the all powerful Oz, one finds a ruling class that has never been more unsure of itself. Most members of the ruling class love Trump because he's been willing to do everything possible to make them richer, not later, but right now.

Still, the mere fact that an embarrassingly unstable and incompetent demagogue and charlatan is the leader of U.S. imperialism speaks volumes about the state of the U.S. ruling class. In reality, the most powerful imperialist ruling class in history is now very weak and demoralized and has little political credibility. Moreover, its response to the COVID-19 pandemic is going to weaken it even further. At the moment of the greatest world crisis ever, the choice for the next president is between Trump and Joe Biden, a profoundly unconvincing politician, who, like Trump, is also a sexual assailant.

Of course, U.S. imperialism is still very dangerous, maybe even more dangerous now because it is fighting for its life. U.S. imperialism still has the largest economy among the imperialist countries, the most nuclear weapons, and the largest, most technologically lethal military. With an economic depression dragging down his reelection prospects, Trump might try something radical and violent to divert the crisis elsewhere.

**What will the ruling class do? What will the working class do?**

No one can say for certain how the economic and political crises that are gaining momentum will unfold. The ruling class has been forced, at least for the moment, to put aside the austerity playbook which has governed its decisions for several decades. The government has acted more drastically and much faster than in any previous crisis and has pumped trillions of dollars into the economy. It's true that most of those funds have gone to the big corporations.

Most of the people who need the little relief money that is supposed to go to workers have either not received it yet or are not eligible for it. Still, the government has never even pretended to provide emergency relief funds on this scale before. And they've never done anything like this in such a short time without a big mass struggle forcing them to do it.

That the capitalists have done this is a sign of how drastic and unusual this crisis is. Some of the big capitalists are complaining that the government is undermining capitalism and is adding trillions of dollars to the debt that will break their system. What will the ruling class do when the stunning scope of joblessness becomes undeniable and irreversible? If the forces in the ruling class can manage to reach agreement among themselves to continue providing historically massive amounts of emergency support to the economy indefinitely, perhaps they will be able to forestall a social rebellion, as they try to find some way out of the crisis. That scenario seems unlikely.

It is more likely that the capitalists and their politicians will not agree to keep spending. The capitalist economy could slide into a free fall. The political apparatus of the system at the national level and at every level below that could become paralyzed and start to fall apart. The police, upon whom the system relies as its first line of defense against the workers, may become demoralized and ineffective. Members of the military could split on a class basis.

Imagine under these circumstances if the working-class movement was growing and emboldened, highly organized and prepared for a struggle for power. This scenario sounds too good to be true. What actually unfolds will be much more complex and protracted than this. However, we will never make a revolution unless we are able to imagine the possibility of one.

**A new fascist danger?**

Nothing illustrates the dangers for the working-class movement more than the threats of war and fascism. The imperialist powers utilized both of these weapons to divert the capitalist crisis of the 1930s. A catastrophic economic collapse, a weakened ruling class and a large section of the petty bourgeoisie losing their businesses are the classical conditions that could push a section of the ruling class to turn to fascism in order to save their system. Trump has helped pave the way for such a contingency.

We have to take this danger extremely seriously. However, it's not inevitable that a fascist movement will become strong enough to take over the government and the state apparatus. The decisive factor will not be any particular election or whether Democratic Party leaders hold more elected offices than the Republicans. The main goal of billionaires funding a fascist movement at a time of dire crisis is to crush the working-class movement. However, ultimately it will not only be the size and level of organization of the working-class movement, but the sense of its own strength and power, as well as its revolutionary orientation, that will determine which force crushes the other.

### **Mass organization of the working class: an absolute political necessity**

In spite of everything that the working class is being subjected to, it is rising up and fighting back. When conditions are once again safe for the workers to take to the streets en masse — and we cannot know when that will be — the mass anger and mass rebellion are likely to be something that we've never seen before. Even under extremely difficult conditions, workers at jobs where they don't have the benefit of belonging to a labor union, like Amazon, Whole Foods, Instacart, Target and elsewhere, organized walkouts and strikes on May Day to demand safe working conditions and paid sick leave.

From health care workers to migrant farmworkers, to grocery store workers and prisoners, workers everywhere are fighting for the very right to stay alive. Progressive and revolutionary forces need to support these workers. That support must be shown in more than words. It must be shown in concrete acts of solidarity. The millions of jobless workers are going to forge into a movement. We must help these workers with their organizational needs — and in every other way that's helpful and possible.

Many labor unions are losing members. That means they will be losing resources, which is going to make surviving more difficult. On the other hand, the biggest and most militant



period of worker organizing may be opening up now. And it will be rank-and-file organizing from the bottom up and not from the top down. The mass organization of the working class will include all workers, including incarcerated workers, migrant workers, the undocumented, the unemployed, gig workers, sex workers, street vendors, independent contractors, and every other worker the system wants to marginalize. This includes plant workers, office workers, low-wage workers and city, state and federal workers.

The organization of the working class is more than a strategy. It is an absolute political necessity — without which we cannot maximize class solidarity and prevail in the widening class struggle. The labor unions that are ready to be helpful in this task will make the biggest difference. But if such labor unions are not involved, we cannot allow that to hold worker organizing back.

It will be up to workers, with all the help and solidarity we can provide, to form workers' assemblies or workers' councils at every level, from the workplace to the city and region. The advantage of workers' assemblies is that they are open to all workers and unemployed people regardless of circumstances. They should be open to students and youth, retirees and anyone else who can help. If they are open, it will make the workers' movement potentially enormous, inclusive and not held back by ties to the Democratic Party or any narrow, limiting ideas and conceptions that are unfortunately all too common among the organized labor movement's current leadership.

Also, while workplace, industry and geography remain central to organizing workers, changes and new conditions make the necessity of organizing workers beyond their workplace, and despite other circumstances, both possible and necessary. As many struggles develop into bigger struggles — and then political struggles and later into struggles for power — minimizing everything that creates barriers and boundaries in the organization of the working class will be a strategic necessity.

**Let's get ready for what lies ahead!**

For those activists who are demoralized by the end of the Bernie Sanders campaign and are burned out after devoting so much energy to difficult struggles that did not turn out well — those who believed that a better world is possible, but have lately questioned that

belief, or who are traumatized and feeling powerless by what has happened in recent months or even before — take heed.

The difference between the world of a few months ago and the world today is incalculable. Everything has changed. All that many of us feel now is suffering, fear and uncertainty. But out of such birth pangs, revolutions are born.

Whether capitalism can be ended sooner rather than later does not depend on the will of revolutionaries alone. Other conditions beyond our control must also be present. However, our will and readiness could become decisive. If we are not willing and ready, are we then willing to push the task of ending capitalism onto another generation and allow the system to continue to torture and endanger the planet and all life on it?

Let's all work to restore ourselves and restore each other so that we might be able to make history. The workers and oppressed peoples of this planet need dedicated revolutionaries who are willing to sacrifice everything in order to pave the way for a new world free of all oppression. They do not need revolutionaries to substitute themselves for the masses. They need everyone to give to the struggle whatever they can give, and they need those who are able to make the struggle their life's work do so.

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