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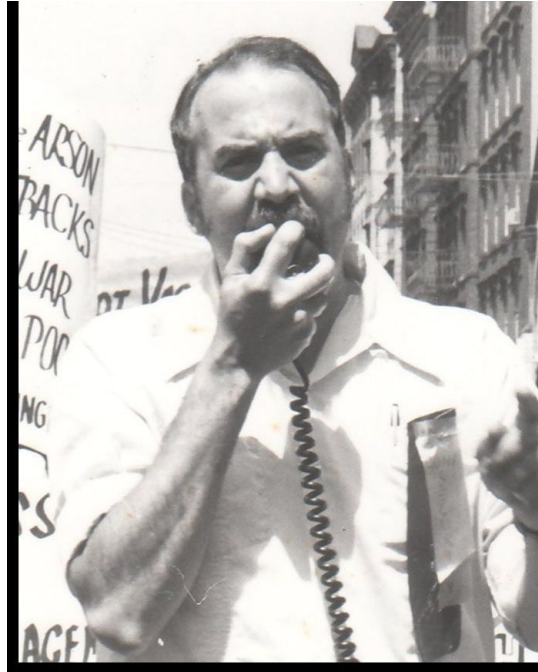
زبانهای اروپایی

By Tom Soto

05.06.2020

The COVID-19 pandemic: a historic event that will intensify global working-class struggle

Below is an article first posted online on April 24 by Tom Soto, who died on May 31. Comrade Soto had been a leading member of Workers World Party for two decades, beginning in the late 1960s. He distinguished himself in the struggles for open enrollment at the City University of New York, in fighting for benefits for military veterans, in the struggle for the rights of prisoners — most notably during the Attica Rebellion in 1971 — and in the struggle for national liberation in Puerto Rico and all over the world, including the oppressed nations inside the United States. Since his article was first posted, the worldwide and U.S. numbers for COVID-19 cases and deaths have climbed.



Tom Soto speaking at NYC street meeting.

April 24 — A friend and comrade, Mikol, recently explained that the COVID-19 virus pandemic is of such proportions on a world scale that it will surely intensify the struggle of the workers and poor for social and racial justice and against capitalism itself. Globally 2,761,121 cases of the COVID-19 virus have been confirmed, of which 193,671 have died, but the real figures are even higher. The overwhelming majority of the victims are from the working class and poor of the world, who are always the most vulnerable.

While the COVID-19 virus was not man-made in a laboratory as the right-wing, anti-China media has charged, the lack of medicines and personnel; the lack of hospitals, of beds, of ventilators, of masks and gloves; the lack of planning to confront the virus crisis — this was a conscious decision made by the ruling classes of the United States and Europe.

For the super-wealthy, defending the lives of the workers and poor, who would die in a pandemic, was not a “profitable” investment to make.

According to Google News, the number of confirmed cases and deaths as of April 24 are:

United States: 905,492 cases confirmed, 51,209 dead.

Spain: 219,764 cases confirmed, 22,524 dead.

Italy: 192,994 cases confirmed, 25,969 dead.

Germany: 154,159 cases confirmed, 5,653 dead.

Britain: 143,464 cases confirmed, 19,506 dead.

France: 122,577 cases confirmed, 22,245 dead.

Turkey: 104,912 cases confirmed, 2,600 dead.

The world death toll figures of 193,671 are horrible and staggering, but the reason so many have died is not only because the COVID-19 virus is deadly. It is also because capitalism, the system of production of goods for profit, did not consider it profitable to produce medical supplies to be stockpiled for a future pandemic.

Politicians and rich knew a pandemic was approaching

One has only to see the video clips of President Bush in 2005, of President Obama in 2014 and of billionaire Bill Gates in 2015 — to name a few of the spokesmen for capitalism — all of them hypocritically warning of a pending pandemic outbreak. Netflix even produced a documentary series titled: “Pandemia.” Additionally, the intelligence agencies reported to President Trump in November and December of 2019 that a virus pandemic had started in China.

But even with the warnings, the big business owners of industry and finance of the U.S. and Europe, driven by their blind urge to obtain greater and greater profits, consciously choose to ignore the warnings; after all, other areas of the capitalist world economy were generating huge fortunes in profits, and there isn’t much profit in producing medical supplies for storage, to protect working people and the poor.

Obama and Trump giveaways to the corporations and rich

Economically speaking, the big corporations of the U.S. were doing quite well under Presidents Obama and Trump. Under Obama, to prevent the 2008 recession from further collapsing the capitalist economy, the big corporations received a \$787 billion bailout

package (the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009). The value of the stock market under Obama after three years registered a 53 percent gain in shareholder value as compared to when he took office.

Under Trump, the rich and super rich received a \$1.5 trillion tax cuts package in 2017, and up until Feb. 19, 2020, the stock market under Trump had grown by 42 percent in shareholder value as compared to when he took office three years prior.

No money for universal medical care, but plenty of money for war and intervention

The U.S. and NATO imperialist governments, whose workers have suffered the brunt of COVID-19 deaths thus far, have spent trillions of dollars intervening militarily against Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iran; against the Palestinians and arming Israel; against People's Korea, Venezuela and Cuba, etc. Trump just this week, attempting to shift the blame for his mishandling of the COVID-19 crisis, said the U.S. had spent \$8 trillion on wars in the Middle East.

Universal medical care: key demand for working class worldwide

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how the capitalist system has failed the health care needs of the workers and poor in all capitalist countries. The pandemic has demonstrated that one cannot successfully fight a viral epidemic that spreads from person to person if part of the population has no medical coverage and is not treated. Thus the demand for universal medical coverage is crucial at this juncture of social political development.

Mass unemployment on the rise in the U.S. and Europe

According to the latest announcements from the federal government in the U.S., in the last month 22 million workers have filed for unemployment insurance coverage. The Financial Times estimates that 59 million workers in Europe will suffer cuts in working hours and pay, and others will suffer temporary and permanent layoffs. The International Monetary Fund forecasts a contraction of economic growth of 7.5 percent in the Eurozone this year, with unemployment hitting 10.4 per cent or higher.

It's unnecessary to keep citing figures showing the economic plunge in the works in the capitalist countries on a world scale.

Collective grieving may turn to anger

The workers on a mass scale are in shock. Some are in disbelief. Many are grieving the loss of family and friends. Their emotional understanding of COVID-19 virus pandemic is mixed. Some may see it as an act of God or an act of the Devil; others may see it as Mother Earth punishing humans for the exploitation that capitalism has thrust upon the Earth.

But as the grieving process passes and unemployment sets in and is felt, the workers will look for a political understanding and for leadership to help guide the struggle for social justice in this new phase of social-political development under capitalism.

The COVID-19 virus is not going to disappear. Social distancing and shutting down sections of the economy were geared to buying time and limiting the number of deaths. Remember that there is no known cure for the pneumonia caused by COVID-19, and there is no vaccine to stimulate resistance to the coronavirus, as of yet.

Ordering workers to return to their jobs without having a cure for the pneumonia that the virus causes and without having a vaccine is equivalent to sentencing tens of thousands of workers to their deaths. The grief of many may well turn into anger. Changes in mass consciousness are preceded by changes in the material conditions of social political life. As Mikol said to me: "Tom, the COVID-19 virus pandemic is a game changer on a world scale."

Revolutionaries dedicate their entire lives to building working-class parties and popular organizations to be able to intervene in the class struggle of the workers and poor against the capitalist system. Well, make no mistake about it, the struggle of the working class is about to burst asunder. Let us unite and achieve great victories for the workers and oppressed of the world.

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