

On the Int'l Situation, Covid-19 pandemic & people's response

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APRIL 09, 2020

I am highly honored and delighted to be the first speaker in this series of webinars, billed as Teach-Ins or Interviews, online discussions on international events and people's struggles, under the auspices of ILPS Solidarity.

The format is simple. I make the presentation. And the audience can react with observations, questions and further discussions. My task today is to present the international situation, the Covid 19 pandemic and the peoples' response.

Let me state at the outset that the world capitalist system was already in trouble even before the Covid-19 pandemic arose. And the pandemic has unmasked and aggravated the crisis of global capitalism. It is of urgent importance to know how the people are affected and how they are responding.

1. Crisis of the World Capitalist System

Science has advanced so fast and so far and has provided the technology to raise the productivity of the forces and means of production to such a high degree as to have the capability of eliminating class exploitation, gross inequality and mass poverty and providing a comfortable and fruitful life for at least twice the population of the world today.

The social character of production has risen so high with the adoption of higher technology. But unfortunately, the monopoly bourgeoisie and its financial oligarchy own the means of production,

control the relations of production and dictate the terms of employment and the use of the human and material resources for the maximization of private profit and the inflation of the value of private assets.

Abusing bourgeois state power over the toiling masses of workers and peasants and middle social strata, the international bourgeoisie has adopted the neoliberal economic policy in order to accelerate the accumulation and concentration of productive and finance capital in the hands of the few, the mere 1 per cent of the population to exploit, deprive and oppress the 99 per cent.

The neoliberal economic policy has liberalized trade and investments, provided tax cuts, incentives and bailouts to the monopoly bourgeoisie, pressed down wages and other incomes of the lower classes, privatized public assets, reduced social services, imposed austerity measures, removed social and environmental regulations and denationalized the less developed economies of the world.

The crisis of overproduction has therefore become more frequent and worse every time. The working people have suffered disemployment at so rapid a rate and cannot buy what is produced by the economy. The so-called middle class has dwindled and joined the ranks of the precariat. Yet, the monopoly bourgeoisie has proceeded to make the people suffer and insist on its system of unbridled greed.

Before the financial crisis of 2008 can be solved, another more serious crisis has come on top of it to further prolong and deepen the stagnation and depression of the global economy. All imperialist countries suffer from the crisis of overproduction due to the dwindling incomes of the working people and the underdeveloped countries.

All major contradictions in the world are intensifying: those between capital and labor in the imperialist countries, those among the imperialist powers, those between the imperialist powers and the oppressed peoples and nations and those between the imperialist powers and a number of states assertive of their national independence and socialist aspirations.

I mention first the contradiction between capital and the imperialist countries to stress the point that even in their own national bulwarks of monopoly capitalism the imperialist powers have gone so far in exploiting their working class and diminishing the middle class as they have engaged in one round of austerity measures after another to cope with economic and financial crisis .

US imperialism has complemented the neoliberal policy to maximize profits from the production process and financial markets with the neoconservative policy to ensure government expenditures for the acquisition of weapons from the military-industrial complex for the maintenance of more than 800 overseas military bases and for endless wars of aggression, including proxy wars, and military intervention in support of local reactionary regimes.

After China became monopoly capitalist in 1976, it used to be touted as the main partner of the US in neoliberal globalization and as the exemplar of continuous capitalist growth. But since 2015, it has become conspicuously afflicted with unsustainable national, corporate and household debts and the same economic and financial crises that bedevil the traditional imperialist powers headed by the US.

The inter-imperialist contradictions are sharpening fast, with China having become the main rival of US imperialism. The US regrets and seeks to overcome the consequences of its previous concessions to China in terms of investments, trade and technology transfers. It is resentful that China has used state planning and state-owned enterprises in order to achieve strategic economic and military goals.

But of course China has its own vulnerabilities, like having to deal with the trade war already started by the US and with the mountains of debt it has accumulated, to cite only a few major problems. The US is trying hard to cut the large export surpluses that China gains in trade with the US and reduce the amount of surplus capital that China uses to expand its own fields of investments, markets and sources of raw materials in various countries.

The US and China try to strengthen their respective positions by alliances with other countries. The US still has the main influence in the UN and controls the multilateral agencies (IMF, World Bank and WTO) and the NATO and other military alliances. China has its all-round alliance with Russia and has

tried to broaden this alliance with BRICS, SCO, the BRICS Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Fund and the Belt and Road Initiative.

The imperialist countries continue to shift the burden of crisis to their reactionary client states in the underdeveloped countries and therefore exacerbate the imperialist contradictions with the oppressed peoples and nations. They are detested for aggravating the underdevelopment of entire countries and continents in contrast with the false promises of development.

Such states are always and increasingly in an untenable position. They suffer from widening deficits in trade and balance of payments because their exports consist of raw materials and semi-manufactures. They have mounting difficulties in servicing previous foreign debts and getting new foreign loans to be able to get by.

The broad masses of the people detest the imperialists and their puppets for the state terrorism that they suffer. The conditions are increasingly becoming favorable for the rise of various anti-imperialist and democratic struggles. There are a number of countries where the revolutionary parties of the proletariat and the people persevere in armed revolution for national and social liberation. These serve as example to all the oppressed peoples and nations in the world

There are states of underdeveloped countries that are assertive of national independence and socialist aspirations. These include the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Cuba and Venezuela. They are dramatically standing up against US imperialism which is using economic sanctions, military blockades and threats of aggression.

Certain countries in Southeast Asia are also standing up to both the US and China. Vietnam is outstanding in opposing the invalid claim of China over ninety per cent of the South China Sea. It is in this part of the world where China is exposing itself as an aggressive violator of the sovereign rights of other countries in violation of international law and the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea.

But US imperialism still has the worst standing as the aggressor and violator of sovereign rights in Asia, Africa and Latin America. But it is paying dearly for its wars of aggression and military intervention. It is on a course of accelerated strategic decline in an increasingly multipolar world in which the inter-imperialist contradictions which incite the proletariat and people of the world to rise up.

Since last year, there has been an outburst of mass protests all over the world, in both underdeveloped and developed countries. This is a clear manifestation of the people's resistance to all the evil workings of imperialism such as neoliberal exploitation, the rise of state terrorism, fascism, austerity measures, racism, gender discrimination and imperialist plunder and destruction of the environment.

We are now in the midst of the transition to the global resurgence of the anti-imperialist and democratic struggles for national liberation, democracy and socialism.

2. The Covid-19 Pandemic

Between the two main imperialist powers of today, the US and China, there are accusations and counter-accusations regarding the origin of Covid-19 and the malicious criminal motive behind it. There are speculations that one imperialist power is using the Covid-19 pandemic in order to weaken and defeat the other. These are manifestations of the growing contradictions between the US and China.

China accuses the US of having created Covid-19 in a bio-warfare laboratory in Fort Detrick in Maryland, USA, and having used the US athletic delegation to the World Military Games in Wuhan in October 2019 to bring into Wuhan the highly contagious virus. In turn, the US accuses China of having created the virus in its virological institute only to leak it to the Wuhan wet market through the sale of laboratory test animals.

There is the third view that the Chinese scientists themselves got the virus from a laboratory operated by the US military and somehow leaked the virus to the Wuhan meat market. Still there is the fourth

view that Covid-19 is of purely zoonotic origin and has mutated from a previous virus, generated by an environment extremely devastated and imbalanced by imperialist plunder.

We let the independent scientists do their investigation and let the experts on international criminal law use the scientific findings and conclusions to prosecute the culprit if possible. But in the meantime, we can discuss the impact and consequences of Covid-19 to the world capitalist system and to the people.

Covid-19 has exposed and aggravated the antisocial character of the world capitalist system, the unpreparedness of the monopoly bourgeoisie and the harsh consequences to the people who have long suffered class exploitation, gross inequality, mass poverty and deprivation of social services in the fields of public health, education and housing.

Under neoliberal economic policy, the broad masses of the people have become extensively and extremely vulnerable to the recurrent and worsening crisis of the world capitalist system, to the imperialist sanctions, threats of war, actual wars of counterrevolution and aggression, natural disasters and pandemics.

The vulnerability of the overwhelming majority of the people consists of having no income and property to tide them over in case of unemployment or being out of work even only for a week for whatever reason of emergency. This is absolutely clear in a lockdown situation in which the people cannot go to work and have no public transport to use in order to obtain medical treatment for Covid-19 or any other illness.

Worst of all, when so many people need testing and treatment in time of a pandemic, the public health system has been eroded by the neoliberal economic policy of privatizing and eroding what remains of the public health system so that there are not enough health personnel, facilities, equipment and medicines. The remaining tokens of the public health system are easily overloaded and break down. And the private hospitals can at will turn away patients because they are not intended to serve the public, they have inadequate facilities or the patients cannot pay for the medical treatment.

We have also seen the tragedy of doctors, nurses and other health workers themselves getting sick and dying from Covid-19 because of the lack of personal protection equipment. The neoliberal state and the hospitals have appreciated the role of private profit but have depreciated the role of the health workers and the social service that they must render to the people.

In quite a number of developed and underdeveloped countries, where neoliberalism has been imposed as a policy, there has been the pseudo-scientific notion that it is enough to do washing of the hands and social distancing and at worst lockdown down on communities or entire regions because after the contagion has run rampant and claimed plenty of victims then the herd immunity develops in the rest of the population.

Thus, quite a number of governments have not made timely and adequate preparations and action plans to fight the pandemic. There is no mass testing for a long while. Thus, the spread of the contagion has not been measured well. And there is a lack or shortage of health personnel and resources for the treatment of those afflicted by Covid-19. The lack or shortage of ventilators has caused the death of many patients suffering from pneumonia, whether they are elderly or younger.

The ruling bourgeoisie and the entire ruling system have deprived the overwhelming majority of the people of the means of fending for themselves in time of lockdowns. And their political agents can only promise food rations and some compensation for the wages lost. But the promise is not kept in a timely and sufficient manner. The most victimized are those who are the millions of jobless and homeless as well those imprisoned in congested jails.

But ahead of any reasonable concession to the people, the monopoly bourgeoisie is assured of financial bailouts and stimulus packages in order to make up for their business losses. We are well aware of the policies and actions being undertaken by the rulers of imperialist countries to override the breakdown of the production chain and the drastic falls in the stock market.

In the underdeveloped countries, especially where the barefaced repressive regimes exist, the tyrannical and corrupt bureaucrats invoke the Covid-10 to divert public funds to their own pockets instead of

providing for the urgent needs of the people. Whatever good or service is provided is ascribed to those in power in order to raise their political stock.

Worst of all, the fascist-minded rulers use the lock downs to tighten their command over the military and police forces of the state to promote further the notion through the exercise of repressive measures that they are the saviors of the people. In the meantime they use state power to aggrandize the private interests of their families, political cohorts and business cronies.

3. The People's Response to the Covid-19 pandemic

It is correct for the people to use disinfectants, do social distancing and respect the rules of quarantine and lockdown whenever these are needed in the face of Covid-19. The people must stay safe from the highly contagious virus and avoid prejudicing the health of other people.

But they retain their democratic rights to make demands from the state and health authorities mass testing of the people at the community level and treatment for the sick and the means of survival while they are locked down and deprived of their means of livelihood. They can ventilate their grievances in order to obtain positive results for the common good.

To any positive extent that public officials recognize the urgent needs of the people and try to satisfy them, it is absolutely clear that social needs are being met by policies and actions for the common good and for whoever is dire need. But it is clear from the beginning that capitalism fails in the face of pandemic. What is needed is the spirit of service to the people and the desire for socialism.

In view of the utter bankruptcy and antisocial character of capitalism in a time of pandemic, the people and their anti-imperialist and democratic forces are justly demanding system change from capitalism to socialism and that everyone must be assured of a basic income in order to subsist and the social services like public health, public education and public housing.

Higher economic and social demands can be made in the developed countries, especially the imperialist countries. The level of economic development allows substantial social reforms and even socialism. But of course, the obstacle is the violence-prone rapacity of the monopoly bourgeoisie which would rather repress the people or aggress other countries than agree readily to the just economic and social demands of the people.

Consider the trillions of dollars wasted by the US on its high-tech armaments, overseas military bases and endless wars of aggression. The US military forces have been far worse than Covid-19 in killing people. They have killed 25 to 30 million people since the end of World War II.

The huge US military expenditures can be redirected towards the expansion and improvement of social services. Best of all, if the American people succeed at system change. They can build a socialist society of plenty, creativity, justice and peace, if the monopoly bourgeoisie ceased to engage in domestic oppression and exploitation and in wars of aggression and mass destruction abroad.

In the case of underdeveloped, especially pre-industrial countries, the tax levied on the exploiting classes can be increased instead of decreased in order to promote economic development through national industrialization and land reform and provide social services in the spheres of education, health, housing and so on.

But substantial reforms can be achieved only if the people have strong patriotic and progressive forces in order to remove from power those who harm the people; and promote those leaders that work for the benefit of the people. Best of all, the people and their revolutionary forces can strive for system change and achieve national and social liberation towards the goal of socialism.

In any kind of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the best of the people and their organized forces stand out and shine. The people's social activists make the demands in favor of the people and do what they can to arouse, organize and mobilize them for the common good. They gain the experience and strength for carrying out anti-imperialist and democratic struggle toward the goal of socialism.

At the community level, they create ways for the people to have food, shelter and medical care and to engage in mutual aid. They call for donations from those who can give these. And they do not get paid for the volunteer work that they render. The actions that they can carry out for the common good under the circumstances of fighting the pandemic are a means of gaining public support and strengthening the organized forces.

In certain countries, where the people have revolutionary movements against the ruling system, the leading revolutionary parties have responded to the UN secretary general's call for a global ceasefire in order to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. In these countries, the revolutionary movement have their organizations attending to the economic and health needs of the people.

As a result of the pandemic, the vile character and failings of the world capitalist system are exposed. Even after the pandemic, the systemic crisis will continue and worsen in both imperialist and in nonimperialist countries. And the anti-people regimes and leaders in many countries will be held accountable and hated as enemies of the people not only for mishandling and aggravating the pandemic but for continuing an unjust system.

But wherever they exist, the revolutionary movements of the people will grow further in strength and will make advances. Where they do not exist, they will rise and wage revolutionary struggles. The world capitalist system will continue to be crisis-stricken economically and politically and its crimes will generate more favorable conditions for the rise of the revolutionary movement for national liberation, democracy and socialism.###

From: <https://cpp.ph/2020/04/09/on-the-intl-situation-covid-19-pandemic-peoples-response/>
(downloaded May 5, 2020).