

Labour Internationalist

Monthly publication of the British supporters of the Organising Committee
for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI)

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Who we are, What we stand for

We believe that the working class needs to rely on its own efforts, both at home and around the world, to defend its interests against a capitalist system that is determined to extract maximum profit regardless of the human and environmental cost.

We believe that the capitalist system, based on private ownership of the means of production, cannot be reformed and has to be abolished by means of a proletarian revolution that will introduce socialism.

We stand on the founding programme of the Fourth International, the *Transitional Programme*, which says in particular: "It is necessary to help the masses, in the process of their daily struggles, to find the bridge between their current demands and the programme of the socialist revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands which stem from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class, and invariably lead to the same conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

The working class's struggle against the capitalist system – on its own account as well as on behalf of all of the oppressed – needs to be united and based on class independence from capital and its national and international institutions.

This means defending the organisations which the workers have built, and helping the workers themselves to build new forms of organisation to carry out their struggle in ways which they decide on freely and which they control.

Often, this also means opposing those in the labour movement who ignore the mandate of their membership and co-operate with capitalism's plans, at the workplace, institutional or State level.

Labour Internationalist aims to be part of the fight against that process of integrating the working-class organisations into capitalism's plans.

Labour Internationalist therefore focuses on helping to advance the struggle by the working class in its own interests – locally, nationally and internationally.

Consistent with this view, *Labour Internationalist* defines itself as a forum of class struggle that is open to all individuals, groups and currents in the labour movement that are committed to political independence of the working class and to internationalism.

Alarm Manifesto adopted by the Third International Conference of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI)

Introduction

The OCRFI held its Third International Conference on 8-10 November. Because of the conditions imposed by governments all over the world in the name of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, the Conference had to be held online. Despite these difficult technical conditions and the constraints produced by them, more than 100 participants took part in the Conference and a genuine discussion and exchange, which led to a unanimous vote in favour of the Alarm Manifesto we reproduce in this special issue of Labour Internationalist. A draft of the Manifesto had been sent to all the participants before the opening of the Conference. During the discussion of the draft, 39 amendments were presented, debated and finally integrated into the final version.

As expressed in the Alarm Manifesto, the Conference took a firm stand against any forms of co-operation by the labour movement with the ruling class and the governments in its pay – in other words, against any form of “partnership” subordinating the workers’ interests to the needs of their exploiters.

The Conference also discussed ways to make the OCRFI an effective centre helping to build revolutionary organisations around the world, and the means to improve the publication of its theoretical and political magazine *The Internationale*, which is already published in six languages.

The document was given the title: “Alarm Manifesto of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the fourth International (OCRFI). To the workers, youth, labour activists around the world and to all those who want to put an end to capitalist exploitation”.

This title is a concentrated expression of the aim of the Alarm Manifesto. It is addressed to all those who want to put an end to capitalist exploitation.

Therefore, it starts with the need to destroy the capitalist system of exploitation and oppression in order to save humankind and civilisation. It does not reach this conclusion on the basis of some article of faith, but on the basis of a thorough analysis of what is taking place at the international level. It shows how capitalism today has transformed factors such as mechanisation and money – through the building of the global debt economy which is also the driving force of the arms economy – into destructive forces. Today, as the Alarm Manifesto demonstrates, *“the most elementary human needs are subjected to profit-making logic. Thus, the fierce struggle over who will first develop vaccines is not a struggle over who will save the human race from the pandemic: it is a struggle whether or not to establish the hegemony of the main imperialist powers. It is a struggle between states, between multinationals whose only drivers are not the rescue of humanity by the monopolisation of new paths of profit.”*

It is called the “Alarm Manifesto” because it is indeed time to sound the alarm: maintaining the capitalist system of exploitation today means the destruction of the very basis of civilisation, and in particular terrible blows against the working class, the main productive force of our society, starting with the destruction of millions of jobs through the attempt to eradicate all of the limits on exploitation that were gained previously by the struggles of the working class. It is entitled “Alarm Manifesto” also as a reference to the political tradition and history of the Fourth International. In the opening section of the Alarm Manifesto, it is recalled that in August 1940, when the Second World War was unleashing the worst forces of destruction, there was a meeting of the cadres of the Fourth International to state that, at the same time, these events were heralding deep revolutionary upheavals. The Alarm Manifesto deals with the most immediate features of the struggle of the working class internationally and in each country, in relation to the history of the labour movement, the problems it faced, and therefore the historical meaning of the struggle of the Fourth International.

The main axis of the Alarm Manifesto is the need to break with the capitalist system: private ownership of the means of production, the acts of destruction it is bringing about, the threat of wars, and so on.

Therefore, it calls on the workers worldwide and their organisations to fight that system as such. Through a thorough examination of reality, it exposes the impossibility of reforming or improving that system today and, therefore, the need to fight for its extinction, since the most elementary needs of the great mass of the population cannot be met within the framework of that system.

That is, of course, brutally exposed by the response to the present pandemic in Britain, just as is the case in all countries. At a time when humankind has the most developed technologies at its disposal, the governments have displayed a total incapability to face the situation. Moreover, they have used it to attack working people, to limit and weaken their organisations, to get rid of legal limitations to the greed of exploitation, by destroying millions of jobs and by letting the pandemic kill hundreds of thousands of human beings, because of the lack of hospital infrastructures – all this because of the need for profit.

What is on the agenda now in Britain?

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has just announced that very stringent measures will have to be taken by the government in the coming period. It has been forecast that GDP will fall 11.3 per cent. Of course, this would mean millions of unemployed and a massive closure of small businesses and retail shops. At the same time, it is clear that there will be huge rise in taxes. A pay-freeze has been announced for all employees in the

public sector except for nurses, doctors and other NHS workers, but at the same time, defence spending will keep increasing.

It is in this situation that what is happening now in Britain is an attempt to forge “national unity” between the organisations of the working class and the bosses together with their government.

This was demonstrated clearly when the TUC General Secretary agreed to be photographed with Sunak and the head of the CBI, after calling for a joint National Recovery Council linking the government, the bosses and the trade unions in a common struggle against the pandemic. This, at a time when people were dying in their thousands because of the blatant inefficiency of the government, which was very efficient in destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs!

The Labour Party leadership followed suit by repeating that it was ready to co-operate with the Government, and by offering no perspective whatsoever to the willingness of working people to oppose the murderous policies of the government.

If this were taken to its logical end, it would mean the destruction of the labour movement as an independent force. The struggles of the British working class (the actions by nurses across the UK for a pay rise, the fight for a living wage by the Sage Nursing Home care workers in North London, the decision by the UCU branch at Northumbria University to strike over health and safety, the vote by Unite members – including firefighters, engineers, security, baggage operations, operational and airside workers – at Heathrow Airport to strike in December against the “fire and re-hire” plan, and many workers in other sectors) stand against those moves. The action to defend the organisations which the working class built in its previous struggles is directly linked to the open class struggles being waged today. Those who fight on the basis of the programme of the Fourth International, who today are regrouped in the OCRFI, do not separate the struggle for putting an end to the capitalist system of exploitation from the struggle to defend the existence of the labour movement and the organisations which were built by the workers, beginning with defending the existence of their trade unions.

It is in relation to this whole situation that we can understand the full meaning of the expulsion of Jeremy Corbyn from the Parliamentary Labour Party, following an attempt by the leadership to purely and simply expel him from the party. This was done on the ludicrous and false accusation of “anti-Semitism” – in fact, condemning Corbyn for having supported the Palestinian people!

Of course, Corbyn’s demise is very much of his own making. In the name of Labour Party unity, he refused to take the lead in a struggle to fulfil the mandate given by the Brexit referendum, and agreed to all of the conditions imposed by the right-wing within the

leadership. This does not prevent all those who want to defend freedom of political expression within the labour movement from fighting back against this denial of democracy. It reinforces the need for an independent class policy in defence of the interests of the working class. If there is one lesson to draw from Corbyn’s experience, it is that the ruling class and its agents show no gratitude to those who seek an accommodation with its needs.

Of course, this goes beyond the person of Corbyn and even the problems of the Labour Party and its leadership. Let us repeat what is central to the OCRFI’s Alarm Manifesto: the struggle for the most limited demands by working people can only be fulfilled by starting with a clear break with the ruling class, its governments and its reactionary institutions.

This means that the struggles of the working class – even for its most immediate demands – lead to the need to put an end to the capitalist system of exploitation; in other words, they lead to the struggle for socialism.

The Fourth International was founded in 1938 because the traditional international groupings, the reformist Second International and – because of Stalinism – the Third International, had both abandoned the fight for socialism, provoking the worst defeats of the labour movement internationally. From the very beginning therefore, the Fourth International was organically linked with the fight for class independence. And from the very beginning, all of the political forces that wanted to subordinate the movement of the working class to the limits fixed by the capitalist system, attempted to destroy the Fourth International. In this sense, the whole history of the Fourth International – both its steps forward and its crises – are linked to the vital struggles of the working class; and this is why the Alarm Manifesto refers to the lessons learned from the history of the Fourth International.

This remains true today, at a time when internationally, the working class and the mass of oppressed people on every continent are rising up against the barbarism produced by the capitalist system. As demonstrated in the Alarm Manifesto, the revolutionary wave which swept across the world at the end of the Second World War was not enough to put an end to imperialism’s rule, because what was lacking were genuine revolutionary parties of the working class, an international revolutionary leadership.

Today, in total contradiction with facts, many claim that the class struggle is no longer the driving force of revolutionary change.

By adopting this Alarm Manifesto, the delegates present at the OCRFI’s Third International Conference address themselves “*to all those who want to put an end to capitalist exploitation, to organise for that fight*”.

Alarm Manifesto of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI) To the workers, youth, labour activists around the world and to all those who want to put an end to capitalist exploitation (8-10 November 2020)

Our Third Conference of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI) is being held in a very particular context. In the name of the struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic, governments around the world have taken exceptional measures making free movement of people impossible and calling into question, in most countries, the freedoms of organisation and expression, which are the only weapon of the workers in their struggle against capitalist exploitation. Faced with these exceptional circumstances, and determined despite everything to gather the forces of those who are fighting to reconstitute the Fourth International on the basis of its programme and principles, we have convened this Third OCRFI International Conference using new communication technologies. This conference has been prepared by a broad international discussion, with the publication of five internal international bulletins, with contributions by comrades from sixteen national organisations. At the end of three sessions of five hours each, fifteen hours during which the freest of discussion took place, we decided to name this Third OCRFI International Conference the "Alarm Conference". We adopted this manifesto.

1. The Fourth International was founded in 1938 on a programme whose basis was the following: the objective conditions for proletarian revolution "have not only "ripened", but have begun to rot somewhat"; but "*without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, the whole culture of humankind faces disaster.*" The Fourth International stated in this programme that its founding was the result of great events: "*the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history*", caused by the betrayal of the Social Democratic and Stalinist leaders: "*The Third International, following the Second, is dead for purposes of revolution. Long live the Fourth International!*"

This is because, the founding programme continued, "*The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.*" Hence the conclusion: "*It all falls to the proletariat, i.e. first and foremost to its revolutionary vanguard.*"

In the period immediately following its formation, the Fourth International had to face the onslaught of the Second World War. While its activists were everywhere struck by repression, while conditions of free movement of workers and activists around the world were made impossible, the Fourth International held a conference that adopted an "Alarm Manifesto". In it, the Manifesto proclaimed

that while the imperialist war would bring about terrible destruction, it would also bring about the greatest revolutionary upheavals. These would call into question the existence of the exploitative capitalist regime in the imperialist countries themselves, destabilised by the war, as well as in the colonial empires, where the oppressed and exploited masses would rise up against imperialist domination.

Unlike the 1940 Emergency Conference, our 2020 Alarm Conference is being held in a context where, throughout the world, despite the obstacles and restrictions on freedoms, workers and peoples are rising up against imperialist governments and governments that are relaying their policies. Since the summer of 2019, in Algeria, Belarus, Chile, China, Guinea, India (where the youth movement, joined by key sectors of the labour movement, rose up against the attempt to divide the working class and the exploited masses by discriminating against Indians of the Muslim faith), Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Thailand and United States, workers and youth are standing up for their economic demands and for political and democratic demands.

There is no doubt that there is calculation in the measures taken by governments – that is, how best to take advantage of the circumstances in order to stifle freedoms of organisation, expression and demonstration. Nevertheless, the continuous development of workers' mobilisations is a clear indication of the resistance struggles. For imperialism, the time has come to unleash barbarism, the legitimate child of a failed system that can only lead humankind from crisis to crisis. But for the working class, the perspective is quite different: the reconstruction of society on other foundations, those of the appropriation of the means of production by the working-class majority.

The time has come to put an end to the failed capitalist system. The time has come to fight for workers' emancipation, which demands the socialisation of the means of production and the transfer of political power to the working class taking control of the economy.

2. In this context, the holding of our Alarm Conference takes on a special significance. Coming from Afghanistan, Algeria, Azania/South Africa, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, India, Italy, Ivory Coast, Korea, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States

and Zimbabwe, i.e. 35 countries (comrades from Turkey, admitted to the hospital, were unable to attend) – we, delegates representing the organisations, currents, groups and stakeholders in the workers' struggle in our respective countries, have come together on 8-10 November in this Alarm Conference for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International.

Many of us are members of organisations which for decades have fought for the programme of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938; others among us are working-class activists from other currents. Together we affirm that, more than ever, it is necessary to work for the reconstitution of the Fourth International. Reconstitution based on the relevance today of the historical programme adopted at the founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938 and on the continuity of the struggle for the reconstruction of the Fourth International that culminated in the Reclamation Conference in 1993.

Overcoming the obstacles, we have given ourselves the means to conduct this discussion in this three-day Alarm Conference because we share the conviction that no way out, no future for humankind, is possible within the framework of maintaining this capitalist system based on private ownership of the means of production. Whatever the forms or illusions about a possible improvement or "humanisation" of the system, these have always been shattered by the reality of a capitalist system which knows only one law: profit based on the exploitation of the wage-labour force, and which, in order to preserve its profit margins, does not hesitate to destroy *en masse* the existing productive forces, starting with what is the first of those: the productive force of the worker.

Our experience in the class struggle in our respective countries leads us to consider that millions and millions of workers engaged in the struggle of resistance are not motivated solely by the will to win satisfaction of their most immediate demands. Through this struggle, the working class forcefully poses the need for a reorientation of the course of humankind, and therefore a break with the capitalist system. On this agenda is the fight for socialism.

This reorientation requires the construction of genuine workers' parties in forms appropriate to each country, workers' parties which will only be able to assume the task of the seizure of power by the working class on the condition that they adopt the proletarian revolutionary programme of the Fourth International.

To affirm this is not to put forward an ultimatic course. We know and understand that the processes of the recomposition of the workers' movement on a new axis are complex and will involve the necessary organisation of workers and militants with roots in all the currents that historically have shaped the workers' movement. But it is our duty, on the basis of the historical experience of the working-class movement for almost two centuries – and armed with

the experience of the First, Second and Third Internationals and the long and crisis-ridden history of the Fourth International itself – to affirm the need to endow the revolutionary workers' parties – whose construction is indispensable – with the theoretical and practical tool, the tool of intervention, which constitutes the concentrated programme of the entire experience of the workers' movement: i.e. the Fourth International. This is so because the objective is not simply the indispensable economic resistance on this or that demand, but the struggle for socialism.

3. On 24 March, while the Covid-19 epidemic was turning into a catastrophic pandemic affecting all continents, the member organisations of the OCRFI adopted a statement entitled: "*The failed capitalist system and the governments that serve its interests: they are guilty and responsible for the spread of the coronavirus pandemic!*"

In that statement, we affirmed:

"At the time of writing, no-one can predict the inevitably disastrous outcome of the coronavirus pandemic that is threatening the lives of millions of men, women and children around the world. On the other hand, the conditions that have allowed and are allowing the pandemic to take on catastrophic proportions, the conditions that are allowing it to spread rapidly across the whole planet, these are known by the workers and peoples of the whole world. They are known because they are the result of all the political decisions taken and implemented for decades by the governments of the big capitalist powers, but also by the governments of the dominated countries on every continent, all of them guided only by championing the interests of the big multinationals, the big banks and speculation. These are political decisions that flow from subordinating the whole of human civilisation to the law of capitalist profit. The political decisions by capitalist governments – whether they call themselves 'left-wing', 'progressive' or right-wing – are dismantling social welfare systems that the workers had won through their class struggle. The political decisions by capitalist governments are dismantling and privatising public healthcare systems, cutting hundreds of thousands of medical and hospital staff jobs, as well as hundreds of thousands of hospital beds, thousands of hospitals, medical units and local health centres. The political decisions by capitalist governments are financially strangling public basic research, rendering scientists powerless in their research into emerging viruses. The political decisions by capitalist governments are allowing pharmaceutical corporations to accumulate enormous profits through production at the lowest possible 'labour cost', resulting in the current shortage of products as simple as masks, testing kits and disinfectant products. The political decisions by capitalist governments, like those of the United States, Britain, Germany, France and Canada, are organising the pillage of the nations of Africa, Latin America and Asia – pillage which, according to UNICEF, has resulted in 3 billion human beings (40 per cent of the world's population) not having access to soap or

running water, and so cannot wash their hands several times a day to limit transmission of the virus. Not to mention the billions of human beings who can only feed themselves once a day. To the dramatic consequences of those decisions can now be added the social consequences of the new financial crash, which for months was clearly imminent as a continuation of the 2008-9 crisis and the onset of which has been speeded by the pandemic. Already, this is being expressed in the announcement of plans for massive lay-offs and job cuts in the automotive, aviation, banking, retail, garment, private power-loom and service sectors, to mention just a few.”

4. Almost eight months since 24 March, this declaration is still fully relevant. Nearly eight months have passed. Humankind is faced with the second wave of the pandemic, which is likely to be even more devastating. Already, some capitalist governments (among those that have failed the most in the face of the crisis) are forecasting that a third wave could emerge after the second wave.

Experts from US finance capital have already christened the period as “*the Other Great Depression*” – an explicit reference to the 1929-33 crisis. The world’s most powerful financial experts base this assessment primarily on the labour market situation in the United States itself. Labour-power has undergone an unprecedented shock. In April 2020, 50 per cent of the total workforce – 80 million out of 160 million US workers – were unemployed for at least two months. In October 2020, this unemployment rate was still above 25 per cent. This collapse of the labour market is not cyclical. Most branches of industry have announced plans for tens of thousands of permanent layoffs, in addition to the federal government’s job cuts (more than 1 million) and the millions of bankruptcies of small and medium-sized enterprises. Former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers declared that the current pandemic is “*the greatest threat to prosperity that the United States has faced since the Great Depression.*” On the basis of studies, this political leader of US imperialism estimates the losses to the US capitalist economy from this first wave of Covid-19 at US\$16 trillion so far, almost equivalent to the annual GDP of the world’s leading capitalist power. And we are still only at the beginning of this pandemic.

This is the reality in the United States and across the globe – not of the economic consequences of the epidemic as such, but of the collapse of the capitalist system based on private ownership of the means of production. It is a collapse which, having matured in the phase preceding the epidemic, has accelerated in this situation. The mass destruction of industrial jobs – and more generally of the productive forces – in the world’s leading imperialist power obviously has its corollary in every country and on every continent. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in the second quarter of 2020 alone, the equivalent of 400 million full-time jobs were lost. Workers and companies in the “informal economy”

are the most affected. The ILO estimates the number of workers in the informal economy who have been significantly impacted by the closure measures at 1.6 billion (76 per cent of informal work worldwide), with young people being at the forefront. Wage losses for these particularly vulnerable workers are considerable and are causing a dramatic increase in the poverty rate.

5. Throughout the world, the situation is marked by this mass destruction of the productive forces, and especially of the productive force of the proletariat. Hundreds of millions of jobs have been destroyed within a few months. The most vulnerable sectors of the working class are the first to be affected. Precarious jobs, jobs in the so-called informal sector, fixed-term contracts, dead-end jobs helping students to survive, are generally being eliminated without notice, without guarantees, without compensation. Hundreds of millions of workers and their families have thus been thrust into absolute destitution. Women and young people often constitute the majority of workers suddenly deprived of employment, just like the Dalits in India, the Black and Latinx workers in the United States and discriminated minorities everywhere. Beyond its most vulnerable, super-exploited social layers, it is the entire working class – including the most qualified layer, workers with permanent contracts and job status – which is today being pushed towards insecure employment.

6. The profound crisis that is manifested in the very heart of the United States, the greatest imperialist power, the keystone of the world capitalist system, is rooted in the growing resistance of workers and young people in the United States, in the vanguard of which is Black Lives Matter. This movement expresses the intervention on the political scene of the most exploited and oppressed layers of the working class: the Black working class. It brings to the forefront the democratic question of effective equal rights for all citizens. In so doing, it attacks the very foundations of the political system through which the capitalist class exercises its rule in the United States.

The Black population, initially enslaved as a means of capitalist accumulation in the United States, has since been kept within an institutional framework which denies them their most basic rights. The revolt that is rising and asserting itself in demonstrations in all the major cities, protesting against the murders and police brutality, is directed against the very institutions of the State which provide the conditions for capitalist exploitation.

The determination of Black workers and youth to organise to struggle, to forge their own organisations, is a call to all workers, to all the oppressed, to break the stranglehold of the two imperialist parties, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, and to pave the way for the party of all workers, a Labor Party, to which the struggle for a Black workers’ party is linked.

7. This mass destruction of the proletariat (destruction which also takes the form of undermining the guarantees – won through class struggle over two centuries – which have limited and thwarted exploitation) is accompanied at the other end of society by a considerable accumulation of wealth, a veritable explosion in capitalist profit. A report published last September indicates that the 643 wealthiest billionaires in the US had already earned US\$845 billion in six months. The world's stock markets are agitated by convulsions whose origin is the flow of liquidity being poured out by central banks. Intended to “revive” the economy and employment, these sums are in fact helping the multinationals to restructure, in other words to axe tens of millions of jobs which they consider to be “unproductive” or insufficiently productive. But – and this is the contradiction – these mountains of liquidity must at all costs find the means to increase their value, and this despite the lack of recovery in consumption.

The fundamental contradiction of the capitalist system in its phase of imperialist decay is expressed in this: on the one hand, the tendency towards an unlimited development of the productive forces capable of producing more than what humankind needs in order to live in decent conditions; and on the other hand, the drive for profit, which constantly involves the destruction of the productive forces, further reducing the capacity of the market to absorb everything it would be possible to produce.

The crisis will undoubtedly remain in the entire history of capitalism as the most gigantic destruction of the productive forces on a global scale (apart from the two World Wars of the 20th century). But at the same time, because profit must be made at all costs, burgeoning parasitic economic activity is experiencing a new upsurge, whether it is speculation, the debt economy, the destructive automation of workplaces or the arms economy.

8. In the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, the five multinationals of the digital economy (Google, Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft) have posted record profits. Their market capitalisation is estimated today at US\$7 trillion (which is equivalent to the GDP of Germany and France combined). As they all have virtual monopolies in their markets, they have benefited greatly from the pandemic through the growth in remote working and the digitisation of production processes. They are reassured by the affirmation of all governments that they are determined to continue on this path. They have seen their revenues increase by 40 per cent since the period before the pandemic. As for the fortunes of the CEOs of these groups, they are reaching new heights, exceeding US\$500 billion.

These monstrous records are all the more significant because at the same time the older oil, aeronautics and automotive sectors are collapsing. Also collapsing are the so-called service sectors, which a few years ago were assured that they would save jobs, and which today are cutting jobs by the millions.

9. Marx's analysis that “there comes a stage when productive forces are no longer productive but destructive forces” has been verified on an unprecedented scale – destructive forces at the forefront of which Marx placed “*mechanisation and money*”.

Mechanisation, which itself replaced living labour (human labour, producing surplus-value) with dead labour (the machine that transfers part of its value without itself creating new value), has given way to a “super-mechanisation” that fulfils the same function, on a scale a million times greater.

As with all technical and scientific progress, one could imagine that, freed from the diktat of production with the sole aim of profit and put at the service of a harmonious development of productive forces, the new technologies would put an end to the physical and moral debasement of the worker, and would allow a reduction in necessary working time for everyone and free up time for self-fulfilment and leisure. But in this capitalist society, the illusion that the use of new technologies improves the lot of the working class is fatal. The reality is the opposite: The digital economy acts mainly as a mass destructive force of human labour. Hundreds of millions of jobs are being destroyed or threatened and the collective guarantees won through struggle by the working class are being destroyed on the altar of remote working, individualisation, outsourcing, contract-work and self-employment.

All of the most basic human needs are subjected to this profit-making logic. Thus, the fierce struggle over who will first develop vaccines is not a struggle over who will save the human race from the pandemic; it is a struggle over whether or not to establish the hegemony of the main imperialist powers. It is a struggle between states, between multinationals whose only drivers are not the rescue of humankind but the monopolisation of new paths of profit.

The same is true of the debt. According to a projection by the Standard & Poor's rating agency, global debt on a world scale (public debt, personal debt, corporate debt) increased by 10 per cent in 2020 alone. It has now reached the astronomical total of US\$200 trillion, or more than two and a half years of the world's GDP from the production of goods. The capitalist leaders are manufacturing this debt of a magnitude unprecedented in history by flooding the markets with trillions of fictitious dollars. In the immediate period, it is intended to inflate speculation. But beyond that, if the capitalist regime is not brought down first, it will be used for decades to crush the working classes, to dismantle all of their collective rights and to increase pressures on dominated nations.

The fabric of the world debt can only last on the basis of the hegemonic military might of US imperialism. The debt is also a driving force of the arms economy, another destructive force. In October 2020, a NATO press release reported on the increase in military spending by the 30 countries that make up this

alliance, led by the United States. In the midst of the recession, military spending has increased by an average of 4.3 per cent in NATO countries. Together they now spend more than US\$1 trillion. The goal (which once seemed difficult to reach) of 2 per cent of GDP committed to military expenditures by each NATO country is now exceeded in the United States, Greece, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and France. This is not only because of the contraction of GDP, but also because of the absolute increase in arms spending.

This widespread growth of the arms budgets is also related to the role of the parasitic flywheel of a bankrupt capitalist economy. The arms industry, the destructive force par excellence, must also be understood in relation to the increasing number of wars that are dislocating and dismembering nation-states.

The nation-state was constituted by the bourgeoisie in its ascendant phase, as a framework for the development of productive forces and the conquest of the world market. Decayed imperialism challenges the existence of nations, pushing for a policy of dislocation and dismemberment. This takes on various forms as, for example, in the Sahel region, the coalescence of terrorist groups and imperialist military interventions (France in particular). As for the Palestinian people, they are still denied the right to nationhood.

The banner of the struggle for the sovereignty of nations has definitively passed into the hands of the proletariat.

The multiplication of armed conflicts prepares the possibility of wars at another level. The workers do not forget that in 1945, US imperialism did not hesitate to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki with nuclear bombs, in order to assert its preponderant position globally. Today, regardless of the risks to the stability of capitalist domination, recourse to widespread war may at some point be put forward as the only way to attempt to impose a solution to the crisis that is strangling the capitalist system.

10. Another sign of capitalist barbarism can be seen almost daily, with the tens of millions of men, women and children thrown onto the roads to exile, their nations destroyed by the ravages of imperialist-fomented wars, or IMF-World Bank “structural adjustment plans” and corporate “free trade” policies. The images are blood-curdling: tens of thousands of people from across Africa drowned in the Mediterranean; Rohingyas massacred and driven from their land; youth and workers jailed at the border between Mexico and the United States, with hundreds of their children held in cages, separated from their families; countless refugees from Syria and the Middle East held behind barbed-wire fences in Europe. The United Nations reports close to 80 million people around the world forced to flee from their homes, while the global refugee population has more than doubled in the past decade.

11. On another level, similar threats are piling up with regard to the relationship between humankind and its environment. We, gathered in the Alarm Conference, fully support the founding document of the International Youth Alliance for Socialism (September 2019), when it states that *“socialism is not a utopia, it is quite simply the only possible way to protect humankind and its environment, and to once again open up the path to progress.”* The survival of the capitalist system has unleashed destructive consequences in countless domains. The very existence of humankind is threatened, and therefore, inevitably, humankind’s environment is threatened. These two questions are inextricably linked.

We reject any attempt to regard the threat to the environment as something unto itself, something separate from the forces that are destroying humankind, beginning with the destruction of human labour-power. Such separation leads inevitably to such phenomena as the “degrowth” movement, which blames “industrial society” and “over-consumption” – not capitalism – for the destruction of humankind’s environment.

This position leads, in the name of the fight against global warming, to the Sacred Union with the capitalist class, the very force responsible for the proliferation of the forces that are destroying humankind and nature.

The system based on private ownership of the means of production is organised on one fundamental inviolable principle: the inalienable right to realise profit by exploiting both the workers’ labour-power and nature. This logic is only concerned with short-term interest. The totally anarchic unleashing of capitalist production has produced heinous consequences at the environmental level. From neighbourhoods in big cities of Latin America, where people are living among piles of toxic refuse; to the disaster at the Bhopal chemical factory in India; to the contamination of the water supply in Flint, Michigan in the United States; to the destruction of the Amazon and other essential rainforests, which are key to preserving the ozone layer – all this expresses the fact that the only thing that matters is short-term profit.

Yet it is possible to imagine a society capable of taking into account not only humankind’s short-term needs, but also its historical, long-term needs. Such a society cannot be based on the drive for profit for the few; it must be based on the quest to meet human needs and develop humankind in a totally different, harmonious, relationship with its environment. This requires putting an end to the system of private ownership of the means of production. It requires putting the socialisation of the means of production, their collective ownership, on the agenda – and this poses the need for a government by the working class, by workers’ councils. It poses the need for a working-class revolution overturning the system based on exploitation.

12. While they are undergoing dreadful attacks on their living conditions, threatened in their bodies and their very lives, workers are coming up against the anti-democratic measures against freedom of speech and the freedom to organise that are being taken by governments using the pandemic as an excuse. Their mobilisations have been repressed most brutally, whether in Algeria, Belarus, Russia, Mali, China and Hong Kong or in Catalonia in the Spanish State. And also, in a dramatic way, in the United States with the near-civil war situation encouraged by finance capital against the uprising of workers and youth protesting the murder of Black people targeted by institutional racism. This use of police and judiciary repression has also been spreading in a large number of imperialist countries said to be democratic. In a very large number of political regimes submitted to imperialism, the general trend is increasingly veering towards anti-democratic, semi-dictatorial (falling little short of totally dictatorial) measures. Everywhere these measures are linked to laws undermining the restrictions to unfettered exploitation which workers have imposed through many decades-long struggles. Everywhere, the laws that protect workers are being threatened or cancelled or made void through generalised deregulation. Thus, to give just a single example: in India, the Modi government has taken advantage of the situation created by the epidemic to make the laws and rules opposing lay-offs obsolete.

13. On a different level, the recent months have been marked by the attempts by US imperialism and the State of Israel to finish off the Palestinian Revolution once and for all in the name of the Trump-Netanyahu "Deal of the Century", with the now-open complicity of the reactionary Arab regimes. Paradoxically, this determination to expel the Palestinian people from their lands, down to the last man and woman, has dissolved the smokescreen of the so-called "two-state solution", which actually makes the prospect of a single secular and democratic state the only possible solution.

14. But the fact is that the frightful acts of destruction and ravages which governments have imposed using the excuse of the pandemic are merely fanning the fires of revolt against existing governments. In recent months, such fires have erupted around the planet – from the protests against the murder of George Floyd and institutional racism in the United States, to the mass demonstrations in Belarus, to the marches in the Russian far-East, to the workers' strikes in Brazil, to the *Hirak* in Algeria, to the strikes in the United States and in France, to the uprising in Lebanon, etc. The inability of capitalist governments to completely achieve their Sacred Union policies is, for a large part, the result of this rejection by the working class and the peoples of this destructive agenda and their instinctive – sometimes chaotic – drive to find the ways of independent organisation and action.

On the one hand, the failure of capitalism is plain for all to see. On the other hand, millions of workers and youth are every day becoming aware that what is at stake is the capitalist system itself. So, millions and millions feel encouraged, driven by the circumstances, to push ever-wider the resistance struggle against the blows they receive. It is this contradiction that undermines the governments' situation. They have to both deal the most destructive of blows and avoid the major political destabilisation through which the masses will seek to overthrow them. The slogans "*Government out!*", "*Down with the system!*", "*They must go, all of them!*" which were chanted in August in Beirut are finally making their way across the whole planet. They are becoming especially part of the deep-seated crisis that challenges the most powerful imperialism, the United States. They are visible in the increased fragmentation of Europe; all European imperialist regimes, in a critical situation, are confronted with new contradictions between one another and in their relation to US imperialism.

Across the globe, the capitalist system is wobbling on its foundations, caught between the anvil of its own decaying crisis and the hammer blows of the movement of the masses. This is why everything must be done, both from the point of view of imperialist governments and their direct supporters, as well as from the point of view of the apparatuses rooted in the old working-class organisations, to conceal that what is going on is a class war. They have to try to give substance to the idea that the pandemic is a sort of natural disaster which one and all, bosses and workers, rich and poor have to face on an equal footing and that, consequently, we have to join hands to support the emergency programmes that are showering thousands of billions on the capitalists to find the solution. This is the justification put forward by the majority of the leading apparatuses of working-class organisations to justify their rallying to a Sacred Union. And this also includes the renegades of the Fourth International who broke with it during the 2015 crisis and who, within the space of a few months, openly gave their support to the corrupt, Bonapartist regimes lambasted by the masses (Bouteflika in Algeria as well as the Francoist monarchy against the Catalanian Republic), and who in practice gave their support to candidate Biden and to the Democratic Party in the United States, or who, in France, backed the joint implementation between the government and some union apparatuses of destructive attacks against the workers.

15. Helping the working class find the path toward its emancipation requires fighting the Sacred Union. In the 24 March statement, we wrote: "*So, despite their resounding declarations and their current promises, all of the capitalist governments are guilty and responsible for the barbarism that is being revealed by the pandemic. In these conditions, is it not shameful to see the leaders of the political organisations that speak in the workers' name rally round in a Sacred Union with the capitalist*

governments in several countries around the world? Is it not shameful to see parties that speak in the workers' name support the existing capitalist governments, precisely at a time when the latter are passing 'state of emergency' measures in the various parliaments, measures that are extending the capitalist governments' offensive against social gains and democratic rights? Although they know that health measures for slowing down the pandemic are necessary, nevertheless the workers do not conclude from this that they must fall into the trap that is being set for them in the form of a Sacred Union with the exploiters and their governments. The workers are entitled to demand of every organisation that speaks in their name that it immediately breaks with the Sacred Union which their leaders have established with the capitalist governments".

Nothing that is going on today would be possible outside of this Sacred Union, which in practice has been sealed internationally and in each country. The 2020 Sacred Union does not always take the same forms as the one struck in 1914-18 (though it sometimes does). It does not necessarily imply participating in imperialist governments (though this is the case in many countries). The Sacred Union, agreed to in practice today by the leaders of the official working-class movement in the majority of countries, is based on their submitting to the system of private ownership of the means of production. But, the root-cause of the major crisis affecting humankind is precisely this system. The fact that the leaders of the working-class movement accept to recognise its power creates the framework in which devastating policies can be implemented.

Are we exaggerating? In every part of the globe, the leaders of the major parties claiming to speak, more or less, on behalf of the workers have supported the programmes for bailing out capital and the banks. On 19 March in France, the Socialist Party and Communist Party members of the National Assembly voted unanimously in favour the programme proposed by Macron that awards 343 billion euros (since increased to 560 billion!) to the banks and the capitalists. In Britain, the Labour Party Members of Parliament – including the party's left-wing – actively participated in the consensus for approving a similar "recovery plan" without even a vote in Parliament. In addition, the leadership of the Trade Unions Congress (TUC) – with the blessing of the Labour leadership – proposed to the Conservative government to set up a "National Recovery Council" that has only one purpose: to put the trade unions under the yoke of the employers and the government. In Germany, the SPD leadership has long been mired in the "Grand Coalition" with the bourgeois parties. In the Spanish State, it is the government of the "Socialist Party" PSOE, together with Podemos and what is left of the Communist Party, who are at the helm of the state, from where they are rescuing the capitalists at the expense of workers. This is true as well in Portugal, under the leadership of an SP government which has declared a state of emergency and banned strikes in

the name of fighting the pandemic. And what can be said, in Brazil, of the vote of the Workers Party (PT), the Communist Party of Brazil and the PSOL, which supported the Bolsonaro-Mourao government measures freezing the wages of public-sector workers, lowering the wages of private-sector workers and offering 1,200 billion reais to the banks and capitalists? Quite a number of other such examples could be given.

16. It is up to those wishing to remain faithful to the historic fight of the working class to put forth, in each and every circumstance, the perspective of socialism, therefore of the workers' government which will achieve the socialisation of the means of production. Such a perspective, if it is to ensure the future of humankind, must incorporate an immediate emergency plan to safeguard the working masses. The proletarian revolutionaries are the only ones capable of raising this issue in its entire dimension. For instance, such a plan based on the needs of humankind and not on profit, necessarily raises the question of banning layoffs and job-cuts, underscoring the principle that the economy must be based on safeguarding each and every job. This is the time to put forward the slogan of the *Transitional Programme*, "Available work should be distributed among all available workers, and the working week determined in line with this. The average wage of every worker remains the same as it was under the old working week", and to do this, if necessary, to confiscate capitalist profits or even the trillions that are being handed out by current governments; it is time to raise the question of "nationalisation without repurchase or compensation" – i.e. expropriation.

The period that we have entered makes it a necessity for those who want to reconstitute the Fourth International to implement the method of the *Transitional Programme*, starting from the need to reorganise the whole of production and society on the basis of the right of working people to live. The plan of proletarian reconstruction prioritises the advance of scientific research, freed from the demands for profitability and profits, and the setting-up of a nationalised industry to produce vaccines (as soon as they have come into being), to produce face masks and tests, to create hospital beds, and to ensure the training of nurses, healthcare personnel and doctors as a national priority. Let us build hospitals and re-open those that have closed. Let us kick-start production and ensure that all absolutely necessary means of transport are made available. Let us hire teachers and build schools, which would make it possible to have small groups of pupils and respect social distancing. Now is the time to manufacture more and more trains where they have been eliminated, and manufacture computers so that each child forced by the government to learn online can have a computer available to them, etc.

From Lebanon to the United States, from Belarus to France, each mass mobilisation hears the word "revolution" ringing from the marches. In this way,

millions are expressing their pressing need to overthrow the current regimes and break with the existing institutions. Many of these processes underline the full relevance today of the Marxist theory of permanent revolution: the smallest democratic demand, the slightest demand for the national sovereignty of oppressed peoples collides head-on with decaying imperialism and makes the working class the only social force that can take the lead in the fight for democracy and sovereignty, linking those tasks with the tasks of the struggle for socialism.

There is a chasm between the objectively proletarian nature of many current revolutionary processes and the awareness of those who are the actors in those processes. This chasm expresses the extent to which the solution to the crisis of humankind requires the solving of the crisis of leadership of the working class. As is affirmed in the *Transitional Programme*: “overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation)”. This is what is at stake in the fight for the reconstitution of the Fourth International.

17. During the first weeks of the Second Imperialist War, Trotsky formulated the following prognosis in a document entitled “The USSR in War” (September 25, 1939): *“If this war provokes, as we firmly believe, a proletarian revolution, it must inevitably lead to the overthrow of the bureaucracy in the USSR and regeneration of Soviet democracy on a far higher economic and cultural basis than in 1918. (...) If, on the contrary, it is conceded that the present war will provoke not revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative: the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the State and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime. The inability of the proletariat to take into its hands the leadership of society could actually lead under these conditions to the growth of a new exploiting class from the Bonapartist fascist bureaucracy. This would be, according to all indications, a regime of decline, signalling the eclipse of civilisation. An analogous result might occur in the event that the proletariat of advanced capitalist countries, having conquered power, should prove incapable of holding it and surrender it, as in the USSR, to a privileged bureaucracy. Then we would be compelled to acknowledge that the reason for the bureaucratic relapse is rooted not in the backwardness of the country and not in the imperialist environment but in the congenital incapacity of the proletariat to become a ruling class. Then it would be necessary in retrospect to establish that in its fundamental traits, the present USSR was the precursor of a new exploiting regime on an international scale.”*

Taking up this same alternative prognosis in a different form, Trotsky stated: *“If, contrary to all*

probabilities, the October Revolution fails during the course of the present war, or immediately thereafter, to find its continuation in any of the advanced countries; and if, on the contrary, the proletariat is thrown back everywhere and on all fronts—then we should doubtlessly have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving forces. In that case it would be a question not of slapping a copy-book label on the USSR or the Stalinist gang but of re-evaluating the world historical perspective for the next decades if not centuries: Have we entered the epoch of social revolution and socialist society, or on the contrary the epoch of the declining society of totalitarian bureaucracy?”

This alternative prognosis obviously did not come true in the form in which Trotsky had formulated it. This question remained more or less pending as long as the fate of the USSR had not been settled. It reappeared with some force after 1989-91, when it became clear that despite unquestionable workers’ uprisings, the working class of the former Soviet Union had not achieved a political revolution, overthrowing the bureaucracy and restoring democracy to the soviets. Trotsky’s prognosis was not realised in the form he had indicated – since proletarian revolution did not emerge victoriously from the Second World War, nor did political revolution in the former USSR – so then, should one conclude that the perspective of proletarian revolution was no longer on the agenda? Was it necessary to conclude that the Fourth International no longer had a reason to exist?

Trotsky’s alternative prognosis deserves to be revisited. But first of all, let us remind those who would ironically point out Trotsky’s error of prognosis what Trotsky wrote precisely about prognoses: *“Every historical prognosis is always conditional, and the more concrete the prognosis, the more conditional it is. A prognosis is not a promissory note that can be cashed on a given date. Prognosis outlines only the definite trends of the development. But along with these trends a different order of forces and tendencies operate, which at a certain moment begin to predominate. All those who seek exact predictions of concrete events should consult the astrologists. Marxist prognosis aids only in orientation.”* (“Balance Sheet of the Finnish Events”, 25 April 1940)

True, the first term of the alternative (the victory of the proletarian revolution right after the Second World War) was not realised. But one has to acknowledge that the second term was not realised either: monopolistic capital has not merged with the State and democracy has not disappeared, replaced by totalitarian regimes, either – though, at the international level, the elements of political democracy are getting increasingly thinner and elements of totalitarian regime are growing in strength in developed capitalist countries. In the present phase, a privileged bureaucracy has not emerged either, nor has it asserted its hegemony. The bureaucracy as such has become disjointed after 1989-91 and has become a galaxy of mafia-style gangs

more or less closely linked together and, above all, subordinated to world imperialism. It is not true either that after the Second World War the proletariat was set back on every front. On the basis of the facts of the historic process as it developed, we have to analyse why Trotsky's prognosis failed to be realised and, on the other hand, establish a detailed development of the facts and their present consequences.

A revolutionary proletarian process indeed took place on the world scale at the end of the Second World War: revolutionary outbursts, the formation of working-class organisations and structures over practically the entire European continent, the independence of India opening a cycle of decolonisation, the victory of the revolutionary process in China (true, with a political power immediately confiscated by the bureaucracy resulting from the Stalinist apparatus, but which nevertheless resulted from the expropriation of the capitalist property relations in the world's most densely peopled country). The expropriation of capital through bureaucratic and military means was equally the norm in the Eastern half of Europe and, in other forms, processes similar to China took place in North Korea and Vietnam.

In the capitalist countries themselves, a powerful revolutionary proletarian wave rose up, threatening capital's rule in France and in Italy. Full counter-revolutionary co-operation between imperialism and the Stalinist bureaucracy was needed to impose counter-revolutionary order through the division of Europe and the world into "zones of influence". In the developed capitalist countries, the apparatuses – and especially the Stalinist apparatus, bestowed with the prestige of the victory against Nazism (in which the peoples of the Soviet Union had played a major part) – played an essential role in reinstating the bourgeois order. But to accomplish this, the bourgeoisie had to pay a price; it had to concede sizeable gains to the working class. That was the price to be paid for re-establishing the system of capitalist exploitation. But, contradictorily and dialectically, this considerably boosted the proletariat's social and political clout in all developed capitalist countries, which made it possible for them to win important gains which, seventy years later, have not been dismantled, far from it (though they have sustained major blows since their inception). The effect of this process was to build, thanks to workers' gains in wages and other fields, a consumers' market in developed countries, which for a certain period fostered an expansion of production.

At the international level, during the 1940s and '50s nearly half of the world's population lived in countries where the relations of capitalist ownership had been expropriated. This provided support to the working-class movement. Contradictorily, this process also resulted in strengthening Stalinist counter-revolutionary apparatuses, and more generally, the counter-revolutionary apparatuses within the working-class movement, which gave them increased

strength to contain and push back the revolutionary tides.

Up until the end of the 1980s, imperialism jumped on each opportunity to reinstate capitalism in every country where it had been expropriated, while maintaining a counter-revolutionary alliance with the Stalinist bureaucracy (because this was the price to pay to maintain the world order against the working class).

And yet, it is well known that the Stalinist bureaucracy, whose fate depended on maintaining state ownership in the former USSR, proved incapable of defending it (here, in line with Trotsky's prognosis). Faced with the processes of political revolution in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, and with the development of an increasingly proletarian movement in the former USSR itself, it was given the final death-blow by the development of the revolutionary process in Germany which, in 1989, imposed the unity of the German working class against the unholy alliance reached between imperialism and the Stalinist bureaucracy.

At the same time, because of the absence of a revolutionary party of the Fourth International fighting for the socialist unity of Germany, the apparatuses managed to contain the revolutionary movement of the German proletariat. As the proletariat imposed unity, imperialism and the apparatuses took action to fit this unity into the extension of private ownership of the means of production to all of Germany (instead of the extension of state ownership). Consequently, the dismantling of state ownership and privatisation resulted in dreadful acts of destruction.

And yet, it must be stated that a bureaucratic caste did not emerge from this process spreading to the whole world, nor that capitalism was given a new boost. Quite the opposite (as was analysed during the Reclamation Conference of the Fourth International): it was the onset of an accelerated decomposition process of capitalism. The mafias resulting from the former bureaucracy heralded a generalised mafia-style approach within the world economy. A parasitic and plundering economy has become the norm.

Over the last three decades, faced with this decomposition, class struggle has more than assumed the role of history's driving force. The current social system is still the exploitation of labour-power, the extraction of surplus-value in increasingly tough conditions for increasing the value of capital. And more than ever, this exploitative system is fuelling resistance to exploitation. The laws of capital are working in increasingly difficult conditions, which increasingly sheds cruder light on the impasse of a capitalist system without a future, a capitalist system leading to barbarism, confirming Trotsky's prognosis. But barbarism is not a done deal. More than ever, socialism based on the socialisation of the means of production appears to be the only alternative. Less than ever should the ground of the proletariat be

deserted. Those who caused the split in 2015 rallied to reformism in its worst form, the one that goes along with counter-reforms and destruction. They rallied around Bouteflika in Algeria, the Democratic Party in the United States, Lula in Brazil and against the working-class movement, they joined movements like the “yellow vests” in France. But the working-class movement continues to point to the only option that offers a solution in the situation. This means that it is crucially important to give the necessary help towards the reconstruction of the working-class movement on a new axis, that of class independence. It is the specific role of activists who are fighting for the Fourth International on the grounds of Marxism to contribute to it.

18. Relations between China and the United States have been marked by an increasing escalation in the period preceding the emergence of the pandemic. The roots of this escalation have to do with the very nature of the Chinese State. The People’s Republic of China was born out of a revolutionary process which in 1949 saw the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie’s rule. Its peculiarity is that from the moment the bourgeoisie was overthrown, political power was confiscated by a social layer removed from the control of working people: the bureaucracy that emerged from the apparatus of Stalinism.

It is indisputable that this bureaucracy, especially in recent decades, has worked systematically to open up the Chinese economy – which since 1949 has been based on a monopoly of state ownership – to penetration by imperialism, especially by the US multinationals.

The specific character of state ownership has been expressed in the very way the Chinese leadership has dealt with the pandemic. Forced to mobilise the immense resources of state ownership, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has in fact got people out of hospitals in a matter of days (which has not been the case in any of the capitalist powers of Europe and North America). But after mobilising these gigantic resources (which was made possible by the fact that the bureaucracy centralises state power, and the state itself still centralises ownership of large sectors of the productive forces), the Chinese bureaucracy hastened to make the working class pay for the consequences. The viewpoint of the Chinese bureaucracy is that above all the workers should not be allowed to see this as an encouragement to act independently on their own ground. In no way should the Chinese working class be allowed to seize the opportunity to intervene in its own name. Hence the particularly brutal measures taken by the bureaucracy against the workers and youth in Hong Kong, aimed at terrorising not only this component of the Chinese population, but through it, all sectors of the proletariat.

This is especially the case because, contrary to all the self-serving propaganda rhetoric which for years has presented China as a new El Dorado of capitalism, the

brutality of the crisis has caused the destruction of 200 million jobs in China. Hence the entirely contradictory aspect of this situation. The Chinese bureaucracy, which has provided cheap labour with no rights to multinational corporations around the world, has created the conditions for a rapid and massive concentration of productive forces (at the cost of destroying productive forces in other countries). As a result, it has increased its dependence on the world market and, more precisely, on US finance capital. When the crisis arrived, the mass destruction of productive forces was projected directly onto China, whose goods (unlike during the previous phase) were no longer welcome in the entire world and whose labour was no longer needed. China was impacted directly by the dislocation of the global economy.

This settles the question raised periodically by the capitalist press: Can US leadership in the world economy be jeopardised by “Chinese competition”? The answer is no, not in any way. Since capitalism reached its highest stage, imperialist powers have no longer tolerated the development of autonomous industrialisation in “emerging” countries, whose economies should henceforth be only a part of the world division of labour controlled by international imperialism. The violence of Trump and his administration against China for years testifies to the fact that it is not acceptable to US imperialism that any economic development should be able to take place in any country, especially in a country whose economy, resulting from the 1949 Revolution, rests on the social basis of the expropriation of capital.

The fact is that today China, with its 350 million to 400 million proletarians, is being directly affected by the world crisis. In the previous phase, China played an essential stabilising role for imperialism by providing it with a super-exploitable workforce controlled by the bureaucratic apparatus and its arsenal of repression. Nevertheless, this complex interdependence between China and the US has not, at this stage, destroyed the social base concentrated in state ownership.

China’s crisis stimulus packages are confronted with the fact that an increase in production would require a call-up from the world market. The Chinese economy is too dependent on the world market for a stimulus plan to be based primarily or even mainly on boosting domestic consumption. The export sector is an indispensable and major driving force for the functioning of the economy as a whole. In this context, imperialism has been making threats – and is led to increase their number – including military threats, against China, aimed at destroying obstacles to the free movement of goods and capital, which, for the moment, keep preventing the definitive collapse of state ownership. It is not tolerable for US imperialism that this economy of considerable dimensions should be controlled by anything other than the quest for profit, and therefore the needs of US imperialism itself.

For the Fourth International, it is clear that US imperialism's offensive is aimed at the complete dismantling of state ownership in China, as it did in the past in relation to the Soviet Union. If it succeeds, it will be a major blow not only to the Chinese proletariat, but also to the world proletariat. This is why the Fourth International stands for the unconditional defence of China against US imperialism. Unconditional means without any "conditions" addressed to the bureaucracy. In giving this support, there is no illusion that the bureaucracy will somehow be bestowed with a historically progressive mission.

The resistance of the Chinese working class puts the demand for democracy at its centre. This is why the Fourth International, which is unconditionally in favour of defending state ownership in China, does not entrust any historical mission to the bureaucracy and considers that the surest way to preserve the gains of the 1949 Revolution is the struggle through which the Chinese working class in all its components seeks to impose its right to self-organisation, to build its independent organisations. It is on the grounds of its independence (including from the bureaucratic state apparatus) that the Chinese working class will preserve its gains. For the Fourth International, the fate of the Chinese people cannot be dissociated from the international class struggle.

19. Our OCRFI Alarm Conference is being held the day after the US presidential election. Given the pre-eminent role of US imperialism globally, this election is in itself an international event.

Trump's "America First" motto has guided all US foreign policy. This policy was not aimed at setting up a "world order". It intended to affirm US capitalist hegemony by all means and in all forms. To this end, Trump turned his back on a whole series of multilateral international institutions: the UN, IMF, WHO, ILO, etc. Biden, Trump's successor, is not going to turn back the clock on the unflinching determination to expand the economic power of US finance capital. But it is a fact that during his election campaign, he said he would take action in this direction by restoring the presence of the United States in a number of multilateral institutions of the old "world order", with the aim of giving a semblance of legitimacy to this permanent effort to expand US imperialism. In the same way as Biden is going to attempt to reinstate "partnership" structures aimed on the domestic front at co-opting trade union leaders and cajoling them into accepting the destruction of jobs and social services in the United States, he said similarly that he would renew international alliances – this, so as to provide cover for the increasing onslaught of imperialism on the workers and oppressed peoples around the world.

Thus, he announced that he would re-join the Paris Climate Agreement, that he would restore the role of the United States in NATO and re-join the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He said this renewed display would be reactive, in order to restore the position of

US global leadership and also – he pointed out – to repel the growing threats "to our national security".

Is Biden really going to implement this programme? Or is he going more or less to keep moving on the path opened by Trump? The answer to that question will be given later in connection with the newly-elected President's need to defend the specific interests of US capitalism by all necessary means.

Palestine is one of the questions at stake. Trump rejected any so-called "two-state solution" and moved the US embassy to Jerusalem. He gave carte blanche to increasing attacks against the Palestinian people by the State of Israel. He incited Arab states to recognise the Zionist State, which is also Biden's policy. Is Biden going to revive the plan for the so-called "two-state solution" while sponsoring the strangulation of Gaza and the expansion of Israeli settlements that actually create increasingly smaller Bantustans and drive Palestinians off their land? Or is he going more or less to agree to consider what Trump had done as a fait accompli and, for example, abandon bringing his Jerusalem Embassy back to Tel Aviv? We shall soon know about all these issues.

In any event, and to put it briefly, Biden is going to try to impose US imperialist hegemony by all means necessary.

20. It is in these conditions that helping towards the reconstruction of the workers' movement on an independent axis can and must take place from the starting point of the international situation of the working class. The relevance of the demands of the *Transitional Programme* – starting from the immediate demands and leading inexorably to the necessity for the working class to take power in its own hands – is today more crucial than ever. What follows from this is the need to work for the reconstruction of the political representation of the working class.

Advancing towards the reconstitution of the Fourth International is inseparable from helping the processes through which different currents, militants, groups, and organisations from different countries and continents and from different backgrounds can be led to pose the problem of building independent workers' parties. The activists who come together on the programme of the Fourth International do not pretend to dictate their views. They aspire to be part of this process in a fraternal dialogue, in common action within the framework of the International Workers Committee for the Workers' International, while preserving their independence in expressing and propagating the positions of the Fourth International. The organisations of the OCRFI will contribute, together with activists of all tendencies, to carrying out the international survey initiated by the IWC in preparation for the Second International Conference Against War and Exploitation. Starting from the consequences of the pandemic for the working class and the peoples of the world, it will help to establish on the basis of facts the responsibility of the capitalist governments and those who do their bidding.

21. We have demonstrated this: The situation is marked by the fact that in all countries and on all continents, the leadership of the organisations which historically have been constituted by the working class, parties and trade unions, are committed to a Sacred Union with the bourgeois governments.

Affirming this does not mean that the workers have given up using these instruments historically derived from their class struggle to defend their interests. Situations differ from country to country according to the national traditions of the class struggle. But the fact is that although all of them are in one way or another part of the Sacred Union, political parties and trade unions do not have the same function. The trade unions generally maintain a different relationship with the working class – of which they constitute “*the elementary form of the united front*” (Trotsky) – than the political parties. Whether they remain organically linked to workers’ parties in a number of countries or not in others, the fact is that the power of the class struggle leads the workers to seek to reclaim “from the bottom up” their trade union organisations. The “bourgeois worker” apparatus of most traditional trade union organisations is increasingly bourgeois (i.e. subordinate to the state) as it rises to the top. But it remains more and more working class, i.e. linked to the demands of the working class and its movement, when you move “downward” toward the rank-and-file (which does not mean that even at the bottom, the workers are not subordinated to the bourgeois apparatus. Total independence in relation to the state and to the capitalist class is only possible when the unions are led by militant activists consciously committed to the path of proletarian revolution, therefore to the programme of the Fourth International).

In all countries, the movement of the working class seeks to reclaim the trade union organisations for strikes and mobilisations, including political struggles. In many cases, it forces the leading circles not to go all the way towards corporatist co-optation and integration. It is this movement of the working class that preserves the working-class character of the trade union organisations. This is why, more than ever, it is crucial to adhere to the recommendation of the *Transitional Programme* regarding the unions. “*This inviolable rule should be established: capitulationist self-isolation from the mass trade unions, which is tantamount to betraying the revolution, is incompatible with membership of the Fourth International.*” Let us recall what Trotsky wrote in his last text before he was assassinated: “*Every organisation, every party, every faction which permits itself an ultimistic position in relation to the trade union, i.e. in essence turns its back upon the working class, merely because of displeasure with its organisations.*” We remember how Trotsky dealt with this question: “*The trade unions of France, Great Britain, the United States and other countries support completely the counter-revolutionary politics of their bourgeoisie. This does not prevent us from labelling*

them trade unions, from supporting their progressive steps and from defending them against the bourgeoisie.” So a union can be both led by a counter-revolutionary apparatus that defends the bourgeoisie, and at the same time take progressive steps which lead us to defend it against the bourgeoisie. This is not contradictory. Trotsky went on: “*From the point of view of our programme, the trade union should be an organisation of class struggle. What then should be our attitude to the American Federation of Labor (the right-wing American union)? At its head stand manifest agents of the bourgeoisie, upon all essential questions, ... they carry out a political line directly opposed to the interests of the proletariat. (...) This apparatus has definitely become a reactionary factor. But the AFL does not because of this cease to be an organisation of the trade unions.*” And Trotsky explained: “*The class character of the state is determined by its relation to the forms of property in the means of production. The character of a workers’ organisation such as a trade union is determined by its relation to the distribution of national income.*”

In other words, the trade union which only defends – even if it merely defends – the share of the nation’s income that the working class wins is a factor in the defence of the working class, even if it adapts itself completely to the government for the rest. And Trotsky added: “*The AFL leadership, in order not to lose their base, must within certain limits (obviously, these last concentrate the problem) lead the struggle of the workers for an increase – or at least against a diminution – of their share of the national income. This objective symptom is sufficient in all important cases to permit us to draw a line of demarcation between the most reactionary trade union and an organisation of scabs thus we are duty-bound to carry to defend the AFL.*”

This is because the working class is nothing without organisation.

In the recent period, numerous political currents – the same ones that are abandoning the struggle to end the capitalist system – are calling for abandoning all forms of organisation of the workers’ movement (unions and parties), for dissolving into informal movements and dismissing any class character. The Fourth International unequivocally rejects all attempts to deny the need to build class-based organisations.

22. “Make room for the youth! Make room for the woman worker!”

This call, issued in the concluding pages of the founding programme of the Fourth International, finds its translation in the activity of the organisations of the OCRFI.

Defending the specific rights of women workers is particularly important in the present situation. They are the first victims of governmental policies. The situation over the last few months confirms this: they have been in the front lines during the Covid-19 crisis due to the jobs they hold (in the sectors of homecare, hospitals, large-scale distribution, home-care,

cleaning, etc.). Women workers also have had to face – due to the lockdown decrees established in many countries – the difficulties caused by distance learning due to the absence or under-supply of computers, cramped housing, etc.

In several countries in recent years, initiatives have been taken by OCRFI organisations to combat this specific double exploitation and double oppression, thus responding to the concerns of working women on the occasion of International Women's Day in Pakistan, France, the United States, Italy, etc. In Mexico, the campaign against the murder of working women is linked to the struggle against capitalist exploitation, which is at the root of this barbarism.

In light of these initiatives, the organisations of the OCRFI decided to give the utmost importance to this struggle and discussion of the initiatives to be taken, as well as to the implementation of a global campaign at the international level in favour of working women.

In the same way, the organisations of OCRFI pay the greatest attention to the younger generation. It is significant that they have been in the forefront of class struggles and popular uprisings in the recent period, as they are the hardest-hit by capitalist barbarism. From the revolt of Chilean high-school students against the increase in the price of subway tickets to the special role played by the youth in Mali in August when all the political forces called for a truce in the confrontation against the regime of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, from the uprisings in Iraq to the mass mobilisations in Hong Kong, in various forms, a new generation of fighters is forging its weapons and experience in the confrontation against the capitalist regime, alongside the working class and its organisations.

The OCRFI's Third International Conference welcomes the formation of the Youth Alliance for Socialism, which brought together in August 2019 in the Paris region young people from Algeria, Azania/South Africa, Belgium, Brazil, France, Morocco, Mexico, Palestine, Russia and the United States. It is particularly positive that its Liaison Committee meets every month, with the participation of young people who are not necessarily OCRFI activists, and which is a framework for discussion and action, the elaboration of public statements, brochures, articles and permanent international campaigns.

Thus, despite multiple attempts to divert it from the fight for socialism and confine it to specific issues separate from the working-class movement, the youth are resisting and fighting. They assert their right to a future. Young people all over the world, we summon you to join the ranks of the world party of socialist revolution.

23. Determined to reconstitute the Fourth International on the basis of its historic programme, we do not ignore the fact that the class struggle, while it is international in its content, remains national in its form. We believe, however,

that in all countries the question of the struggle for a government of the workers of the towns and countryside must be brought to the forefront in the face of the bankruptcy of all current governments unable to counter the pandemic, whether they are "classic" capitalist governments, or governments in which the old parties that emerged from the workers' movement participate, or even governments composed essentially of those parties.

With the *Transitional Programme*, we affirm: "*The central task of the Fourth International is to free the proletariat from the old leadership, whose conservatism is in total contradiction to the disastrous situation of disintegrating capitalism and constitutes the main obstacle to historical progress. The chief accusation which the Fourth International makes against the traditional organisations of the proletariat is that they do not want to break away from the political semi-corpse of the bourgeoisie.*"

With the *Transitional Programme* we say: "*Of all the parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically with the bourgeoisie and enter the path of struggle for the workers' and peasants' government.*"

24. In our 24 March statement we said: "What measures appropriate to the situation would a government take if it was genuinely concerned to protect the health of the vast majority?"

Such a government would place the entire production apparatus under state control and immediately direct it towards producing goods that are indispensable for stamping out the epidemic: masks, testing kits, disinfectant products, medicines, etc. It would organise the systematic testing of the whole population. To do so, it would not hesitate to requisition the big enterprises (starting with the pharmaceutical corporations) and the banks' assets. Such a government would immediately reopen all hospital facilities that have been closed down, it would requisition all available premises needed to house as soon as possible the hospital facilities and life support units that are indispensable for meeting current and future needs. Such a government would take the billions from where they are today, in order to ensure that medical care is free to all, and that the funding is there for all the medical staff and equipment that are needed to run hospitals properly.

Such a government would organise the containment of the whole population, in particular by obliging businesses to guarantee the payment of wages to all employees who are isolating themselves at home. And in the dominated countries, where the vast majority of the workforce is in the 'informal sector', without regular wages or guarantees, such a government would guarantee to each worker an income to live on satisfactorily during the period of confinement. It would organise the distribution of the foodstuffs and basic subsistence products needed by the population. Such a government would nationalise or renationalise basic

research, and would allocate to scientific teams the funds needed for research into emerging viruses and other diseases. Such a government would proceed immediately with the requisition of residential buildings and would house all homeless and badly housed people, for whom the 'containment' measures that have been announced are meaningless as long as they do not have a home.

Such a government would decree an immediate halt to evictions, it would declare a moratorium on the payment of rent and rental charges, it would decide to immediately ban lay-offs and job cuts. Such a government would order price controls on basic necessities and medicines, in view of the fact that the major retail chains and pharmacy chains are pushing up prices everywhere on the pretext of the pandemic and the economic crisis. Especially in order to do this, such a government would requisition the big powers' military budgets, which today continue to fund imperialism's military interventions against the peoples. More generally and irrespective of the country, such a government would redirect credits allocated to the military towards the needs of the hospitals.

Such a government would immediately stop servicing both the domestic and external debt. It would confiscate the billions tied up in speculation (especially the speculation currently being carried out by the big corporations in relation to the fall in the value of their own shares!) and apply them to servicing the healthcare needs of the vast majority. Because a government that would take such measures which are needed for the survival of working people, measures that are contradictory to the demands of the capitalist class, would not hesitate to break with that class.

For our part, organised in the OCRFI and fighting for the reconstitution of the Fourth International, in each of our countries we declare ourselves in favour of forming such governments that will exclusively serve the interests of the vast majority, and we will support any step by the working-class organisations in this direction. Governments that will not hesitate to requisition the pharmaceutical corporations, large companies and the enormous assets of the banks in order to fund measures for protecting the urban workers, rural workers and the youth."

25. Eight months have gone by; we have nothing to take away from this statement. Today, we must send out a cry of alarm. For eight months, all governments, whether "left-wing" or "right-wing," have shown their powerlessness to fight the epidemic. In eight months, they would have had time to hire doctors and nurses to open more intensive care beds. Not only did they not do this, but in some countries they even went on closing beds, services and even entire hospitals.

They had eight months to build schools, create classrooms, to hire more teachers so as to reduce class sizes. They did nothing of the sort. While the governments and their virologists are every day lecturing people about each individual's "personal

responsibility", buses, trains and subways are packed with people who are totally unable to respect social distancing.

Eight months have gone by since the epidemic first appeared, and no new bus or underground networks have been planned, no drivers or technicians have been recruited to use existing resources and increase service frequency

One thing is very clear; the principle of capitalism, based on profit, is such that it is not able in any way to protect people – and especially workers and their families – from a pandemic. The measures taken by all governments are marked by repression against the majority. They are only a pretext for measures against the workers and the rights that protect them such as the 8-hour day, the right to strike, and guarantees against layoffs and job-cuts. They serve as a pretext to undermine young people's gains, the right to education and work, free expression, the right to demonstrate and to organise.

The most basic right – healthcare – can only be defended if bourgeois governments are driven out. Only governments of workers, of the majority of the population, can defend the interests of the majority. To achieve this, the unity of workers and their organisations is needed. Fourth International activists are committed to acting everywhere to promote the unity of workers and their organisations around the most urgent demands.

The streets of every city in the United States have reverberated with the slogan "Black Lives Matter": the lives of Black people matter. Yes, the lives of Black people, the lives of workers, the lives of young people and oppressed peoples the world over matter. But in order for them to matter, they must be able to free themselves from capitalist exploitation.

Workers, young people, working women, to liberate humankind from the chains of exploitation and oppression, to crush the hideous barbarism that capitalism in its death agony offers us as our only future, join the fight for liberating socialism, Join the fight for the Fourth International!

Afghanistan: Delegation of OCRFI Afghan activists

Algeria: Organising Committee of International Socialists of Algeria (COSI)

Azania-South Africa: Azanian section of the Fourth International (AS-FI)

Bangladesh: Bangladeshi section of the Fourth International

Belgium: Internationalist Socialist Organisation (OSI), Belgian section of the Fourth International

Benin: Liaison Committee of Trotskyists of Benin (CLTB)

Brazil: Internationalist Communist Organisation (OCI), OCRFI

Burundi: Burundian section of the Fourth International

Canada: Liaison Committee of Trotskyists of Canada (CLTC)

China: Guest from China

Côte d'Ivoire: Prof. Ouattara Mamadou, Vice President of the Steering Committee of the Reunification of Fractions of the Higher Education Union of Côte d'Ivoire (CNEC)
France: Internationalist Communist Tendency (TCI) of the POID, French section of the Fourth International
Germany: Julius Monath, Günter Rex and Max Schumacher, members of the German section of the OCRFI
Greece: Andreas Guhl, editor of *Ergatika Nea* [Labour News]
Haiti: Berthony Dupont, *Haiti Liberté* [Haiti Freedom]
Hungary: Supporters of the Fourth International
India: *Spark* group
Italy: Dario Granaglia, Monica Grilli and Lorenzo Varaldo for the Internationalist Socialist Organization (OSI-OCRFI)
Korea: Korean delegation to the Third OCRFI International Conference, Sikhwa Jung, Korean activist
Mexico: Internationalist Communist League (LCI-OCRFI)

Morocco: Group of OCRFI supporters in Morocco
Pakistan: Pakistani section of the Fourth International
Palestine: Guest from Palestine
Peru: Internationalist Socialist Group (GSI)
Portugal: *A Internacional* [The Internationale] Group
Romania: Romanian Trotskyist Group and sympathizers
Russia: Group of OCRFI supporters in Russia
Senegal: Senegalese Group for Revolutionary Studies (GSER)
Serbia: Jacim Milunovic, worker activist
Switzerland: Wolfgang Eichenberger, on behalf of the Swiss delegation
Togo: Lawson Drackey Messan, activist of the Fourth International (OCRFI)
Tunisia: L, Tunisian activist
Turkey: *Sosyalizm*
United Kingdom: British supporters of the OCRFI
United States: Socialist Organizer
Zimbabwe: Chimurenga Vanguard (OCRFI)

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EDITORIAL NOTES

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE OCRFI, 8-10 NOVEMBER 2020

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Some elements of the discussion in the International Conference

The Alarm Manifesto of the Organising Committee for the Reconstitution of the Fourth International (OCRFI)

HISTORY

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Friedrich Engels (1820-1895):

The fight for an independent party of the proletariat, “one that is conscious of itself as a class party”



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