

The Coronavirus pandemic: a unique crisis of civilisation

Sungur Savran

The crisis humanity has found itself in since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic is unique in modern history. It is, as we have said from the beginning, a crisis of historic dimensions and significance. We have to come to terms with the intellectual challenge that it poses. To do this, we have to grasp it in its multifaceted forms of appearance in order to understand how these different facets are really the constitutive components of one single historic crisis. In other words, we first have to look at the phenomenon in its complexity and then move towards a synthesis that brings out the full significance of the crisis we are going through.

Pestilence is not alien to human history. But modern capitalism has prided itself, to a certain extent rightfully, to have mastered these nightmarish occurrences in history through the advance of modern science in general and of medicine in particular. The Spanish flu of early 20th century seems to be an exception that was not part of the overall historical development. There is something to be learnt from it with respect to the socio-economic and political factors at play in that dramatic incident that is estimated to have taken 50 million lives, if not more, in the space of two and a half years. Accordingly, that episode now needs to be studied afresh so as to see what kind of light it may shed upon today's unravelling tragedy. We will come back to it briefly later, to compare at least one aspect of that incident to our present-day catastrophe. That seemingly exceptional episode apart, the Coronavirus crisis is unique in the historical development of the capitalist mode of production,

at least in its highest, imperialist stage, in that the pandemic is not the result of underdevelopment but finds its best expression under the conditions of advanced capitalism.

What are the different facets of this crisis that can provide us with the necessary elements in order to unearth its significance? Let us first express a caveat: it is yet too early to grasp the phenomenon in its full import. The epidemic, having started as a local health crisis in one single state of the vast continent that China is, goes back at most five months. However, that was not the defining moment. The decisive character of the crisis flows from the fact that the Wuhan *epidemic* has become a *pandemic*, a world phenomenon. That is the first aspect that is unique to this crisis, namely that it is a worldwide, universal crisis. (We will come back to this point shortly and explain why this is the decisive moment, in dialectical terms.) This aspect then is only a three-month-old baby. As the crisis unfolds, there will come into being other phenomena which may prove to be central to the dialectical unfolding of the crisis, that may, in other words, mark its further development and dénouement. We can of course predict some new aspects that will emerge as the crisis develops and we will try to do that below. But predictions cannot replace observation and dissection, leading to new syntheses. So the analysis here is performed *tentative*.

Once that caveat has been expressed, we can now proceed to look at what for the moment form the three constitutive moments of this crisis: the health crisis, the economic crisis, and what we will call the civilizational crisis.

A tragedy that is the making of capitalism

The Coronavirus seems, at first sight, akin to what is usually classified as a natural disaster. For some it is even a God-sent malediction. This translates, in the wooden language of vulgar economists, into what is called an “external or (exogenous, in more elaborate language) shock”. That, though, is the most deceptive aspect.

The scientific answer to the question of whether the Coronavirus has its roots exclusively in natural processes or, alternatively, whether it is also connected to the socio-economic conditions that have historically been prepared by capitalism will probably require a long period of research and reflection. Until then, we will have to assume, since we do not have contrary evidence, that the virus emerged independently of socio-economic conditions or, in other words, that it is a purely natural phenomenon. Many are those who derive from this that the catastrophe brought about by the virus was *inescapable*. There are those who go further to assert, in perfectly Malthusian spirit, that it is an instrument used by Allah or God to regulate the functioning of human society.

This inescapability argument is a pure case of *non sequitur*. We have claimed from day one that the catastrophe that has descended on humanity is the making of capitalism. The *virus* may not be, but the *catastrophe* is. It is the result of the contradiction of the potentialities created by capitalism itself and the limits posed again by capitalism to the full enjoyment of these potentialities by humankind. Let us explain what we mean briefly.

As Marx and later classical Marxism, in particular Lenin in his theory of

imperialism and Trotsky in his elaboration on the concept of world revolution, made clear, capital as a social relationship possesses the potential of creating a world economy and a world civilisation. This aspect of Marx's analysis has been fully vindicated in the historical march forward of the capitalist mode of production. Capital has created a world economy, albeit not in the simplistic form envisaged by the reductionist conception of globalisation theory, but in the most contradictory fashion imaginable, where nation states remain the driving force of history, each as the embodiment of a distinct national fraction of capital, but bring together within their own constitution the deep contradiction that exists between the drive to international integration and national division. Not only has capital created a world economy, it has also created in its own image a world political integration, a world literature and art, a world scientific community, all, let us repeat, marked by the divisions created by the interests of the competing and conflicting nations.

Hence, the growing over of the epidemic in Wuhan into a pandemic is a consequence of the historical development of capitalism. Let us be as clear and down-to-earth as possible on this: it is the level of integration of the world economy, of capital, trade, and labour mobility on an international scale, of the consequent increase in international travel, tourism, education, cultural exchange etc. that is at the root of the internationalisation of the epidemic. To our knowledge, never in history has an epidemic become so internationalised, today having spread to, at very different levels of urgency it is true, close to 190 countries. And this difference in the levels of urgency is really a warning signal: once the pandemic takes into its full grip countries such as India or the poorer countries of Latin America and, worse still, the entire continent of Africa, it will become a nightmare of appalling dimensions. Even the Spanish flu of 1918-1920 did not, to our knowledge, attain this kind of reach, remaining, it seems, more of a phenomenon of the relatively advanced geographies of the Northern hemisphere.

Having developed this worldwide integration on the basis of its own growth, capitalism, on the other hand, deprives humanity of the possibility of coping with a health hazard of these gigantic proportions. The major reasons for this are twofold, one a consequence of the fact that the capitalist mode of production is constitutionally based on commodity production and the law of value, the other driven by the fact of class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. On the one hand, commodity production in its advanced capitalist form makes the capitalist system beholden to the logic of the market, which itself is marked, under capitalism, by the search for surplus value or profit. The allocation of resources through the intricate workings of the law of value, a system that completely alienates the allocation of resources from the conscious and rational decisions of society to deliver it to the hands, in the final analysis, of the stock exchange, prevents timely and to the point decisions that will act as a solution to the type of crisis that is born of the Coronavirus. On the other hand, although capitalism has created the scientific basis for coping with this kind of health care crisis in potential form, capital acts as a barrier in the way of erecting the health care systems and providing instruments that can offer the population *on a mass basis* the fruits of such advances in medicine. This is all the truer as one descends the rungs of the world imperialist hierarchy.

And in those exceptional times when the bourgeoisie allows or even works actively towards the creation of such mass-scale systems of health care (such as the so-called “welfare state” of the post-war order, a result, first and foremost, of the fear of socialism),¹ it only sustains them as long as they are necessary for purposes of class struggle and thereafter wages a ruthless assault on those very institutions it has created.

All in all, the bourgeoisie has historically created the conditions of what is a deadly pandemic, but deprived humanity of the instruments with which such a lethal threat can be brought under control.

The Coronavirus pandemic: What a difference socialism would make

This proposition can be tested by looking into the question of how an alternative mode of production, communist or socialist society still in the making, a social formation transitional to a classless society, would fare under these conditions. The question is simple: would socialism be able to cope better with the threat caused by the Coronavirus?

If socialism were the dominant social formation on the planet, the damage that the virus would cause would have been much more limited. It might even have been brought under control before it spread outwards from China, its first home. And even if it had spread afield, the number of casualties would have been much lower. This is no wanton propaganda claim. It is a proposition that flows directly from the undeniable differences between the fundamental characteristic properties of the two modes of production in discussion.

Let us first take up the question of the growing over of the epidemic into a pandemic by spreading outside of China to travel the entire planet. Now, if we were living under socialism, this would certainly not have meant that there would be a less dense web of relations between China and the rest of the world in the spheres of the economy, education, travel and the like; if anything, there would have been an even deeper integration. How is it then that we can talk of the possibility of the epidemic being brought “under control before it spread outwards from China”? That is because under socialism the world will be living in a fraternal commonwealth of nations. Behind the endless competition and conflict between nation states in today’s world lies the fact that each of them is used as an instrument of a national fraction of the international bourgeoisie. This leads to a situation where, despite the semblance of unity projected by the United Nations system and all the international cooperation in different spheres, each nation state looks after, in the last instance, the interests of its own ruling class.

Had the epidemic broken out in China under socialism, all the nations of the world and the supra-national instances and agencies that united them in different spheres of activity would immediately have shared a part of their scientific skills, their trained human resources, and their material resources with China so as to help bring the Coronavirus under control. This they would have done not

¹ On this see the article “The Welfare State Nostalgia” by Özgür Öztürk in this issue.

as the manifestation of an imaginary altruism of the type “let us rush to help our Chinese sisters and brothers”, but on the basis of an awareness that in a perfectly integrated world, their own interests are dependent on the interests of the others. (As socialism develops, even altruistic behaviour would become stronger until it can be considered no longer imaginary.) In other words, they would have done it so that the virus would not wreak havoc on other human communities outside China, including their own community. Under capitalism, on the other hand, international integration marches forward hand in hand, and in contradiction, with competition or even (in this case) hostility because of the diverging and conflicting interests of the national fractions of the bourgeoisie. The consequences are clear for all to see: America has already exceeded the number of infections earlier observed in China, a country that harbours almost five times its population and Italy has achieved the remarkable feat of surpassing the number of casualties of that same country which happens to have a population 25 times its own! These countries did not lift a finger when China was being ravaged by the virus and it was they who are now suffering for it. What else does this show that in a perfectly integrated world, capitalism is an irrational and obsolete system? Should anyone harbour doubts regarding our claim, we would like to remind them that doctors from Cuba, a poor country, have rushed to the help of Lombardia, Italy. Lombardia is not *il Mezzogiorno*, it is one of the richest regions of Europe!

Let us assume that the virus could not be stopped in China under socialism either. When it reached other countries, socialism would have waged a much more effective battle against it than now simply because it is a planned system. There is a span of time of around a month and a half between the epidemic reaching threatening levels in Wuhan and its spread to Europe, and somewhat later, America. Countries living under socialism would have made themselves much stronger and more resilient in the fight against the virus than capitalist countries thanks to their planned economy. Some would object that capitalist governments could also have prepared plans regarding an epidemic. Of course they could. But this is not what we are talking about. When we say “planning” we are not talking about some files in certain computers prepared in certain talking shops in certain capitalist countries. Planning is a relation of production, not documents bearing sumptuous titles of the type “Master Plan for the Integral Fight against the Pandemic of the Century”!

Just look at this example: even in the most powerful country, wielding the largest economy in the world, the United States, the scarcity of test kits prevented the meticulous tracking of the disease and the drawing up of a realistic picture of its distribution geographically, with respect to economic groups or different population groups etc. so as to make the struggle against the virus much more effective. The whole world knows that from the rich United States to the middle-income Turkey passing through G-7 member Italy, many capitalist countries simply did not test enough for days, or even weeks in some cases, whereas the president of the World Health Organisation said very clearly that as “you cannot fight a fire blindfolded”, you cannot fight the pandemic without knowing who is infected, drawing the conclusion: “Test, test, test!”

America is now facing, at the time of writing, a shortage of Personal Protective

Equipment, Intensive Care Unit beds, respirators, even high-grade masks etc. And yet we know that car factories can immediately be restructured so as to produce respirators, that hospitals can be built and furnished in a matter of days (cf. China), that many textiles factories can be overhauled so as to produce quality masks etc. So where is the planning that capitalist countries can make? It may be retorted that no one could have known before the fact that such would be the scale of the calamity. But even now, when the Surgeon General admits the problem, not only America but all capitalist countries are still having trouble in mobilising the resources necessary to supply rapidly in response to such an urgent need the equipment necessary. They fight it out over whatever there exists according to the sacrosanct rules of the market, not only among nations, but also among the 50 states of the Disunited States of America. And when need be, they even resort to piracy, like the case of a hefty delivery of equipment to be sent to the Land of Berlin being diverted to the United States as it was being flown out from Thailand to Germany! And why all this scarcity despite not only overall planning but also concrete decisions of governments? Because under capitalism the entire production system is geared to the production of surplus-value and you cannot expect capitalists to forgo their profit and produce for the general interests of society. You need nationalisations to swiftly overcome barriers set by the capitalist relations of production.

A more complete discussion of the difference socialism would have made would take as far afield. Let us wind up by mentioning one last vital difference. Socialism is based on meeting the basic indispensable needs of the working population such as education, health care, housing and others. Nobody lives a miserable existence, remaining jobless or even homeless and uncertain of their future. Hence the overall public health picture is incomparably better under socialism than under the richest capitalist country. Even in the case of the experience of socialist construction in the 20th century, bearing the burden of so many distortions and deformations and defects, this was an indubitable achievement. Capitalism, on the contrary, is class struggle. Capital does take a step back or two when circumstances impose that (the so-called “welfare state”). But when its interests dictate another course, it will step up class struggle and cut down on all social services in cold-blooded ruthlessness. Thus the neoliberal assault on all gains of the working class! The bourgeoisie, in a frenetic course to take back what it had conceded over the three decades from the end of the second war all the way up to Thatcher and Reagan, has decimated the health care system around the world. That is why patients are lying on the floors of hospital wards in Italy and Spain! That is why the richest city of the world, New York, home to Wall Street, is the epicentre of the pandemic!

A crisis deeper than the Great Depression of the 1930s

It is now common knowledge that a financial crash has accompanied the Coronavirus crisis almost from the moment the epidemic became truly a pandemic. The spasmodic development of stock markets around the world that started with the collapse of 9th March has now become a headlong plunge despite all the packages and bailout programs promised by the governments and central banks of

all countries. In a previous piece written immediately after the crash started,² we tried to establish the correct relationship between the Coronavirus crisis and this financial crash. Our overall verdict at that moment was the following: as we have explained time and again, since 2008, the so-called “global financial crisis” set off not a “Great Recession”, as vulgar economics persistently claimed, but the Third Great Depression in the history of capitalism. In the 12 years that have gone by, the institutions of the international bourgeoisie were only able to postpone the crisis, without being able to find a solution that would resolve or supersede the crisis situation. This postponement fundamentally took the form of cheap money (so-called “quantitative easing” and negative policy interest rates), which then flowed into the stock market to create the longest (11 years from 2009 to 2020) bull run in history. This made financial markets vulnerable to the bursting of the bubble once again, with historically high price earnings ratios. The crash this time was really the bursting of a bubble that was waiting for a trigger factor. The Coronavirus was precisely that factor.

We added that with this second crash, the Third Great Depression was entering a new phase of its development. What set the Third Great Depression apart from the first two (1873-1896 and 1929-1948) was that, under the impact of, first, the much more activist policy of governments and central banks from day one and, secondly, of the spectacular growth of China on the basis of its own special momentum, the world economy did not suffer as deep and sustained a slump as the previous experiences. We predicted that because of the limitations to further possible intervention on the part of governments (already very heavily indebted) and central banks (many already in the negative interest rate zone) and also because of the expected fall in the growth rate of the Chinese economy, this new phase of the Third Great Depression would make it look much more like the 1930s in terms of growth, investment and unemployment.

We still believe that this is the fundamental diagnosis and prognosis in a nutshell, but have since revised our view in one respect. The Coronavirus crisis *will* have its very real specific effect on production, investment, unemployment, thus the depth of the slump, in short on the real economy. This can be denied only by turning one’s back on the real world. For the risks created by the virus and the “stay home” or “lockdown” policies that have been, after considerable delay, adopted by most governments in those countries that are seriously afflicted by the pandemic have an undeniable direct impact on the activity level of the economy and indirectly on fixed capital formation, i.e. investment in real terms.

That is why, given the dimensions of the catastrophe into which capitalism has turned the epidemic and the pandemic, it can very safely be predicted that the recession or slump that will ensue in the coming months or even years will take a heavy toll on growth and result in very high levels of unemployment.

The D-word was forbidden among the profession of vulgar economics save for the courageous few. The euphemism “Great Recession” was precisely devised to

² “2020 Stock Market Crash: a New Phase within the Third Great Depression”, <http://redmed.org/article/2020-stock-market-crash-new-phase-within-third-great-depression>.

hide the severity of the crisis, the fact that it was really a crisis that partook of the nature of depressions. What made this possible was the fact that this depression unfolded in a more gradual and hesitant manner than those that went before, that is, without an abrupt, deep, and persistent collapse in the real economy for the reasons mentioned above. Now that this will no longer be true, it may easily be predicted that the D-word will finally become permissible to use within the orbit of vulgar economics as well.

The circle closed

In a paper published in 2011, but was first presented in October 2009 at a conference, that is only a year after the collapse of the Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers, itself the harbinger of the so-called “global financial crisis”, we advanced the idea that what had set in was the Third Great Depression and used this new situation to test Marx’s theory of the manner in which economic crises were the modality in which the capitalist mode of production manifested its nature of barrier in the way of the further development of the productive forces, this development itself being the historical product of the constant revolutionisation of productive forces by capital.³ In other words,

We set out to show, in the footsteps of Marx and Engels, that the ever growing contradiction between the socialisation of production and private appropriation does not imply an absolute stagnation at a certain stage in the development of technology and the productive forces in general, but manifests itself periodically in the form of crises, each time more threatening to the existence of the capitalist mode of production, and to point out that the current world economic crisis implies a renewed confirmation of this proposition.⁴

We formulated Marx’s theory of crises and the relationship of this theory to the exhaustion of the capacity of the capitalist mode of production to advance humanity in terms of four major propositions:

- (1) Crisis is an inevitable moment in the pattern of development of capitalism.
- (2) Economic crisis implies not only a slump but a destruction of previously created productive forces.
- (3) Given its nature, economic crisis threatens the very existence of capitalist society.
- (4) This threat increases over time.⁵

The first three propositions were very easy to test. All the historical empirical material that existed amply demonstrated that the first three propositions passed the test of time. However, the last proposition could not have been either proved or disproved at that moment. The testing of this last proposition is of momentous

3 “Capitalist Crisis or the Crisis of Capital?”, E. Ahmet Tonak (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on the World Bank and the IMF*, Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2011.

4 Ibid, p. 36.

5 Ibid, p. 26.

importance for the following reason: as the productive forces developed by capitalism progress on their road to socialisation as opposed to the relations of production that remain anchored on private decision-making for allocation because of capitalist private property in the means of production, capitalism should come more and more into contradiction with the productive forces that are progressively ever more socialised. If the major economic crises of capitalism, which have now assumed a special form called depressions, are, in the last instance, reflections of this fundamental contradiction, then the crises themselves must threaten capitalism ever more violently. To put forward the idea that the present economic crisis could exercise even greater ravage than the notorious Great Depression of the 1930s was a bold move, not to say audacious, since very few economists, even among the Marxists, so much as granted the idea that we were now going through a depression, let alone admit that it had the potential of becoming more severe than that of the 1930s. This is what we had to say on the question in 2009:

The only serious question is whether the threat will increase this time relative to past experience, whether, in other words, this crisis will wreak more havoc than the Great Depression. This is yet to be seen. However, the incomparably higher level of the socialisation of production and the equally incomparable advance of internationalisation today relative to the 1930s are *a priori* reasons that point towards a state of things that make it a distinct possibility for this crisis to be even more severe than the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁶

“This crisis” is now definitely going to become “even more severe than the Great Depression of the 1930s”. The circle has been closed: the fourth and last proposition has also been tested and shown to hold. Thus Marx’s prognosis was correct: capitalism goes through crises (depressions) of increasing severity as a result of the contradiction between the socialisation of the productive forces and the private nature of appropriation and accumulation. These result in an increasingly violent and spasmodic movement in the body politic within these great depressions. It is the outcome of these that will decide which way world capitalism will go: a reconsolidation of capitalist rule or revolution and socialism?

It may be retorted that what has made the present-day crisis more severe than even the Great Depression is the Coronavirus crisis. It is impossible to measure which factor, the self-propelled dynamics of the Third Great Depression or the Coronavirus pandemic, will contribute more to the severity and profundity of the crisis. Future researchers can perhaps calculate the relative weight of the two factors, but it is impossible to gauge these while we are living the present as history.

However, even if the Coronavirus pandemic were the major factor behind the deepening of the present-day crisis, this would not vitiate the vindication of the fourth proposition under discussion. For we have shown above that capitalism is complicit in the Coronavirus pandemic. It may not have *created* the virus. But capitalism accelerates its spread freely to take the form of an absolute doom to

⁶ Ibid, p. 36.

claim tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands or maybe even millions of lives through a thousand cracks it has inflicted on the health care system, from shortages of medical kits to those of personal protective equipment, Intensive Care Units, ventilators, medicine or vaccine.

Hence, the Coronavirus catastrophe may well be outside of the classical crisis formation mechanism of capitalism, but it is itself the making of capitalism. It is good to return to the Spanish flu as a point of comparison. If this epidemic was so ravaging in its overall effect, it was because it came at the end of the Great War. It took an uncountable number of young lives on the trenches. But that was not all. The world was absolutely ripe for a public health disaster because of the travails of a war that killed between 10 and 20 million people, left still others injured and maimed and created desertland across the geography of the hostilities. Could anyone in their right mind say, under these circumstances, that the Spanish flu in its full import was purely a natural disaster? Could any sane person refuse the central part that capitalism in its imperialist stage of development played in the First World War? If such is the judgment we reach on the Spanish flu, then the part played by capitalist social relations in today's catastrophe is hardly any different.

A crisis of civilisation

Once the Coronavirus pandemic reached proportions of a catastrophe, capitalist society shed its appearance of civilisation and displayed itself for what it was: a class society as callous and hierarchical as slave-holding or feudal society. The bourgeoisie, while putting on a mask to protect itself from the Coronavirus and taking refuge in self-isolation and quarantine, at the same time unmasked its ugly face by throwing millions of proletarians onto the streets, drove them into crowded means of transportation, and sent them flocking into factories and workplaces, leaving "freedom, equality and Bentham" behind, entering the abode of the despotism of capital, where they were expected to produce surplus value for their masters, all the while reproducing the virus among themselves, thus making the factory also a collective deathbed. Never has capital exposed itself so clearly for what it is: a Pharaoh bidding labourers to build pyramids of surplus value for its ever expanding socio-economic power.

This picture is common to all capitalist countries, rich or poor, imperialist or subordinated and oppressed, despotic or democratic. All evidence shows that the "lockdown" or "stay-home" policy is advocated for the bourgeoisie itself, its agents within the corporate hierarchy, the modern, well-to-do petty bourgeoisie, the liberal professions that are part of this petty-bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals of this class. Not even the personnel of the coercive arm of the state is spared. But proletarians of all types and across industries are simply forced to go to work and face the high risk of infection under pain of layoffs or straightforward starvation. It must be emphasized that not only workers employed in those industries such as pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, hospitals, food and agriculture, transportation and cargo services etc. that are now universally dubbed "essential", but car factories or luxury textiles or others working for the world market also have to go to work or face layoffs. This is because capital is value in motion and ceases

to exist as such as soon as it comes to a standstill. So rather than the bourgeoisie starving for surplus value, let the proletarians die if necessary so that capital lives on! How hypocritical are the admonitions of the state authorities to stay at home when millions of workers are forced out on the streets and into their workplaces every single day of the week!

This we characterise as a crisis of civilisation. After having caused what may turn out to be a terminal crisis in nature itself, i.e. climate change, the other element that contributes to the production of wealth alongside human labour, it is now labour power itself that is being increasingly menaced by decimation, if not extinction, under capitalism. Viewed from the point of view of capital, this is the destruction of the very labour power which provides the source of surplus value and hence is self-defeating from the point of view of even capital itself. Of course, with the abundance of a reserve army of labour worldwide, this does not seem to pose a mortal danger for the moment. Nonetheless the very logic of the entire process seems to remove the ground underneath capital.

The situation is even graver when viewed from the vantage point of the proletarian. Capitalist society no longer exploits or even at times threatens the very basis of the existence of the proletarian. It now sends the proletarian to his or her death. This is a civilisation that lightly sends millions to their death. The proletarian is forced to revolt against capitalism for sheer survival!

Such is the crisis of capitalist civilisation. Surely one would understand more readily why millions of men and women would opt for revolution under these circumstances.

Whither class struggle?

The very analysis of the constitutive components of the present unique crisis we are going through permits us to reconstruct it easily as a synthetic whole and thus grasp its significance. The crisis we are going through is in effect the most acute existential crisis of capitalist society in its history. All three constitutive moments show that this society is no longer an adequate form to the content it has conjured up. Its social relations have entered into contradiction with the productive forces that it has created, which themselves are raising a hopeless scream in search of central planning. Its system of nation states, saddled with the interests of the national fraction of the bourgeoisie in each state, is riddled with the contradiction of integration with the rivalry and competition that beset this integration. And its class nature both works to destroy the basis of existence (the health care system) of a society that depends on the mass of proletarians but at the same time sends these very proletarians to death when the system that it itself has nibbled away endlessly for the last four decades fails.

If that is the case, that is if we are going through the process of a capitalist society in its death agony, then we must be prepared for all kinds of “solutions” it would give a try to, solutions that would break all hell loose. Such is the “alternative” that is now hoping to grow exponentially at this moment of the breakdown of globalism and neoliberalism, which comes into its element in this atmosphere of withdrawal to the “defence of the nation”, that so-called “populist” movement which is nothing

but an incomplete version of fascism, one that we analyse in another article in this issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* under the label of “proto-fascism”. Another escape route may seem to be, at least to certain sections of the bourgeoisie, a world war, which would certainly lead to a menace not only to humanity at large but also to all living species, given the menace posed by the weapons of mass destruction wielded on all sides.

These are the kinds of developments that we need to look out for so as to be able to analyse them more clearly as they become concrete menaces, in order to save humanity and all living species from the destructive power that capital has become at this threshold of a new period in history. The antidote is already there for anyone with the right method to see. The third wave of world revolution started with the Arab revolutions of 2011, went into an eclipse after the defeat of the Egyptian revolution in 2013, but was revived with uprisings, revolts and revolutions around the globe from 2018 on and, particularly, in 2019. The Coronavirus crisis has caused a generalised malaise in the working class across the globe. It is now more and more the proletariat that will become the chief protagonist of the fight against capitalism. This promises a new dawn for social struggles. The proletariat will once again prove to be the principal protagonist in shaping the future of society by bringing down the bourgeoisie.

21 April 2020