

Through Pluripolarity to Socialism: A Manifesto

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The ruling class unable to secure working people their existence is 'unfit any longer to be the ruling class' and 'impose its conditions of existence upon society,' said Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, urging revolutionaries to smother capitalism in its European cradle, already in 1848. That Springtime of the Peoples was soon followed by the Paris Commune and revolutionary activity worldwide has kept the spectre of communism haunting capitalist classes and advanced the democratisation of social relations in the teeth of determined counter-revolution.

In capitalism's imperial core, working people's struggles won welfare states and regulated capitalisms after the Second World War, in its peripheries, national independence and developmental states. Meanwhile, some countries, beginning with the Russian Revolution in 1917, embarked on building socialism. Increasingly, they organised production for need, distributed work and its rewards equitably and related to one another in a spirit of cooperation. Despite incomplete successes, great problems and stunning reverses, the struggle they started for a world beyond capitalism, alienation, imperialism and other social injustices continues.

Today, after decades of mounting capitalist contradictions, capitalist ruling classes, neoliberal or residually social democratic, in rich countries and poor, are giving Marx and Engels' words a macabre significance. Over four decades of policies favouring capital, neoliberal financialised capitalism has lost productive dynamism and turned to unproductive plunder, created unacceptable mass poverty, shocking inequality, festering social division, draconian political repression, a growing threat of exterminist nuclear war, mass movements of population and an ecological emergency of climate warming, pollution and biodiversity loss, rendering our planet increasingly uninhabitable. To top all this, today it is responding to a raging pandemic by sacrificing lives to capital and profit and increasing political repression. Rosa Luxemburg famously feared that the alternative to socialism was barbarism. Today, however, it is human and planetary annihilation.

By the 2010s, smouldering discontent burst into flames with increasing frequency.

The decade began with the Tunisian protests that set off the ‘Arab Spring’ and continued through European protests against austerity. It drew to a close amidst schoolchildren’s protests against climate change, Indian Muslim women’s struggles for citizenship rights, Black Lives Matter, ‘yellow vests’ in France and protests against hopeless economies and political repression, from Turkey to Chile to Nigeria. By 2020, farmers laid siege to a government intent on corporatising agriculture and workers organised the biggest General Strike in history in India, the world’s largest capitalist country.

As ramshackle capitalisms responded to the pandemic inevitably shambolically, matters nosedived. Whether they denied it or falsely pitted lives against livelihoods – the capitalist class’s euphemism for profits – their response to the pandemic amounted to the social murder of millions and induced economic crises of historic proportions.

By mid-2021, citizens were demanding inquiries into these murderous responses in imperial countries, millions in Brazil’s streets were accusing their government of genocide, and Indians were gearing up for the same. A broad tide of discontent against capitalism also rose: Chileans elected an Indigenous Mapuche woman to head their hard-won constituent assembly. Bolivians saw through a coup attempt. Palestinians found unprecedented unity and resolve against another Israeli assault.

The capitalist world is today a political tinderbox: capitalism’s suitability is questioned as never before, political establishments are losing their grip and the credibility of the mainstream media is threadbare.

By contrast, socialist countries’ responses to the pandemic have been exemplary: China, Vietnam and even blockaded Cuba lost relatively very few lives and even aided other countries fighting the pandemic. China, at least, also resumed growth at a smart clip.

Indeed, in 2021, no country represents working people’s advance – economic, technological, ecological and social – more than China, though the achievements of other socialist countries like Cuba also rank high. To its already impressive record – the greatest political and industrial revolutions, the thorough eradication of feudalism, the end of extreme poverty, major contributions to resolving the ecological emergency including in renewable energy, afforestation and nuclear fusion – China now added vindication against the novel coronavirus and international leadership in the fight against it.

No wonder, the ruling Communist Party of China celebrated a proud centenary in July 2021. The party had made China the indispensable nation in humankind’s struggle for socialism, offering aid and inspiration as a worthy example of a country pursuing socialism in accordance with its national conditions.

Today, however, that struggle stands at a perilous juncture. Its long-brewing crisis brought to a boil by the pandemic, manifestly making a poor contrast to China’s manifold successes, the leading imperialist nation seeks to lead other imperialist and

lackey countries in a New Cold War against China. Like the old one, this Cold War is also a general imperialist offensive against peoples' autonomous development, from Palestine to Peru and from Vietnam to Venezuela. The variety of means through which they wage it is backed by the world's most fearsome arsenal, including nuclear, chemical, biological and cybernetic weapons of mass destruction. Never has so much destructive power been concentrated in so few irresponsible and desperate hands to wield against so great a majority of the world's people and peoples with an objective interest in socialism.

Our Manifesto appears in this moment of danger from deep and wide discussions among activists of all continents representing many socialist traditions. Its historical and theoretical assessment of the present conjuncture seeks to advance class and national struggles for socialism.

The Geopolitical Economy of Capitalism and Socialism

Capitalism is intimate with revolutions. Bourgeois revolutions had to usher it into history, revolutions have threatened it from the start and, beginning in 1917, popular revolutions have been ushering it out of history. For it is, contrary to liberal myths, the most unnatural form of social production humanity could have chanced on, founded as it is on the 'the separation of free labour from the objective conditions of its realisation', 'from the soil as [our] natural workshop' and from other means of production.

This simple fact is less widely understood than it should be because many socialists do not grasp, as the Bolsheviks and the Third International did, that capitalism and imperialism go together. They exploit working classes and colonial and semi-colonial nations. Both resist. Nations as well as classes struggle for socialism on the terrain of capitalism's geopolitical as well as political economy. Moreover, every egalitarian community that encountered capitalism has opposed it and today Indigenous peoples that have survived its onslaught continue resisting it in the name of ancient rights, land, the environment and community.

In class struggles between increasingly politically organised capitalist and working classes, the latter forced welfare concessions, regulatory restrictions, and taxation on the former to protect labour, the land and society.

Internationally, in the dialectic between uneven and combined development, powerful states vainly sought to preserve their imperial dominance through economic, political and military means, often in competition among themselves. Those resisting them attempted to develop productive forces through protection and state direction, asserting economic sovereignty. This resistance, not the extension of the world market or imperialism, spread productive capacity around the world. Success in challenging imperialism through economic development was greatest and most sustained where a successful popular revolution displaced private capital from political power. The result

of these struggles among and against imperial powers has been multipolarity or what Hugo Chávez more accurately called pluripolarity, referring to the multiplicity of poles of power and the variety of their national capitalisms and socialisms.

Early pluripolarity led to competition between Britain and its old and new challengers – France, Germany, the US and Japan – not only for markets but also for colonies and ‘economic territory’ because they could still take and hold weak states and stateless territories.

This competition culminated in the First World War and a veritable Thirty Years’ Crisis (1914-45) of capitalism and imperialism, undermining their foundations with its two World Wars and Great Depression. In its course, class and national struggles culminated in the defeat of fascism, two earth-shaking revolutions – the Russian and the Chinese – and the colonial revolt against the West. The outlines of these crises are worth tracing.

Crisis of Imperialism

Tsarist Russia was the weak link in the imperial chain and the Russian Revolution against it began humanity’s long march towards socialism. Occurring outside the homelands of capitalism, it had to achieve social justice and develop the productive forces against unremitting imperialist hostility. Indeed, the Russian and the nascent Chinese revolutions were as two eyes of the storm of progressive forces assailing capitalism and imperialism worldwide, making the difference between victory and defeat against fascism in Europe and Asia at the cost of roughly 30 and 20 million lives respectively.

Recognised as one of the key anti-fascist allies, China ended nearly all Unequal Treaties in 1943, becoming independent and one of the five founding members of the United Nations in 1945. Four years later, Mao’s communists went on to achieve victory in the civil war that followed Japan’s defeat, though US obstruction would keep it out of the UN and the Security Council from then until 1971.

In the moment of imperialist crisis, colonial and semi-colonial countries also achieved independence, consistently supported only by the Soviet Union and later by China and other socialist countries. The US stance was, by contrast, duplicitous. Anxious to preserve Western domination, it dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to intimidate the Soviet Union. Eager for economic access to former European colonies, it gave some support to their independence but also went to war against Third World nations no less than 50 times after 1945. Its expensive armoury proved, however, no match for the political determination of heroic peoples fighting for their independence such as the Koreans aided by Chinese volunteers or the Vietnamese led by Ho Chi Minh. US military failures litter Iraq, Syria and, most dramatically, Afghanistan today.

Independent Third World nations embarked on autonomous and egalitarian national development and industrialisation to break imperialist shackles, both inspired and aided by the now numerous socialisms that also had to develop their productive systems from a low level. While the Newly Industrialising Countries of the 1970s and 1980s, and the BRICS and emerging economies of the 2000s, are among the better-known successes, other countries also made substantial gains.

The Soviet Union's demise set socialism back, but it was not the end of socialism, only the end of socialism's beginning. The road to socialism, and eventually communism, is long. Societies embarked on it are not magically freed of class and historical contradictions. Setbacks are possible. After all, socialist revolutions to date have occurred in poor countries. Developing their productive forces is not only far harder than living off the gains of imperialism; it had to be achieved against imperialist pressure. The political leaderships that undertake this can also become bureaucratic and lose touch with the people. Aspects of Stalin's collectivisation or Mao's Great Leap Forward involved combinations of these difficulties.

The story of socialism so far brings to mind Engels' saying that socialism is not 'something that remains crystallised for all time' but is 'in process of constant change and transformation' and Marx's remarks on proletarian revolutions:

... proletarian revolutions ... constantly criticise themselves, constantly interrupt themselves, ... return to the apparently accomplished in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible.

The indefinite colossalness of our tasks requires that we secure the legacy of the Soviet Union and all attempts to build socialism hitherto with a historically just balance sheet of their achievements, limitations and failures. After all, these attempts ironically also rescued a capitalism in crisis.

Crisis of Capitalism

Developing Marx's insights, Lenin and other Marxists rightly argued that capitalism had reached its 'highest stage' in the early twentieth century. It had fulfilled its historic mission to develop the productive forces by socialising production, albeit brutally and chaotically. Early competitive capitalism socialised labour between firms. Later monopoly capitalism deepened the technical division of labour within them. Thereafter, rather than any vigorous virtues of competition it ever had, capitalism increasingly manifested the decadent and rentier vices of monopoly, diverting resources from production and suppressing competition.

These overripe capitalisms plunged the world into the Thirty Years' crisis and after 1945, capitalist economies could stabilise and even enjoy a three-decade-long 'golden age' only by borrowing social welfare, public ownership and planning, and in the case of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, land reform from the policy-toolkits of Communist-led countries. These measures promoted growth, expanded working class consumption (compensating for lost colonial markets), and sponsored research and development for productivity growth. The US was forced to tolerate and even aid the very statist 'miracle' recoveries of rivals because they inoculated Western working classes and Eastern peasants from communism.

Its attractions were substantial. Communist-led countries enjoyed robust and enviably sustained growth, reinforced by technological innovation. The Soviet Union produced deterrent nuclear weapons by 1949, launched the Sputnik satellite in 1957 and put Yuri Gagarin into orbit in 1961, forcing the US into the envious vanity of landing 'Man' on the moon.

No wonder many other Third World countries turned to communism while the most committed of the Third World's other efforts at autonomous national development also preferred Soviet or Chinese models to Western 'development' recommendations. Their success was considerable even if short of high expectations.

The postwar world had moved decisively leftward and so did the international order. Though the US sought to emulate nineteenth century UK-style world dominance pluripolarity had advanced too far. Its Cold War swagger notwithstanding, the US was constrained by rival capitalist powers pursuing state-led combined development, socialisms proliferating and stabilising and Third World countries asserting their sovereignty.

The Bretton Woods institutions of international governance, with the United Nations at their core, emphasised the equality and sovereignty of nations and non-aggression. The US managed to force the dollar on the world, but only by promising dollar-gold convertibility, a burden it would prove unable to bear. It managed to organise the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) only to be deterred by the Warsaw Treaty Organisation. Capital controls, planning, economic and trade management, and fiscal and monetary policy geared towards full employment and development were normal and pervasive and confined capital in national cages.

Third World countries, with most at stake in these arrangements, built powerful international institutions and movements – the Bandung conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77 + China and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development – to harness them for development, autonomy and South-South cooperation. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence – respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and

mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence – agreed by Zhou Enlai and Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954, inflicted setbacks on imperialism and capitalism.

While there were some left reversals, pre-eminently the Sino-Soviet split, most expected the world's leftward inclination to continue into socialism.

However, capital remained in command of imperial economies. While it expanded productive capacity with the support of states, though increased working-class consumption and socialist and developmental advances vastly expanded demand, inevitably production outstripped demand. Productivity growth also peaked, despite considerable state support and, as highly organised Western working classes and Third World countries demanded higher wages and prices, they squeezed imperialist capital's profits. As investment and growth slowed, imperialist economies entered a crisis: the Second Slump of the 1970s fatefully coinciding with US defeat in Vietnam.

Neoliberalism: Elixir for Senile Capitalism?

Capitalist economies now faced a choice: deepen socialistic reform, public ownership and initiative and invest in the still growing Third World to expand demand or, as the neoliberals bank-rolled by capital recommended, lift postwar restrictions on capital at home and campaign to lift them abroad. The former favoured working people and the Third World and the latter capital and its comprador lackeys.

Capital won. The left was weak, politically and intellectually, historically split over reformism, the First World War, successive socialist revolutions after 1917, pervasive and insidious Cold War repression and welfare states and improved living conditions. It could not organise the vast majority – workers, women, nationalist movements – that had everything to gain from the first option and everything to lose from the second into a meaningful political alternative. Nor could the Third World. Despite socialist and revolutionary advances in, for instance, Afghanistan, South Yemen, Angola and Nicaragua, developmental and revolutionary processes faced intense pressure from imperialist and comprador forces and betrayal from unfolding counterrevolution in the Soviet Union.

Neoliberalism announced its arrival with an attack on working people and their historic gains and a massive interest rate shock sending most Third World countries careening into two 'lost decades' of development. Working people's misery spread to the former Soviet Union and European socialist countries with capitalist restoration there.

Yet, though neoliberalism reigned, it failed. It could not resume dynamic capitalist growth even in imperialist economies. It had to fail. It is intellectually disingenuous. Emerging in capitalism's monopoly phase, it sought to defend capital's privileges against empowered working classes, and later against socialisms and autonomous national development, by singing the praises of economic liberty, property rights and free market

competition. By sponsoring its revival over half a century later, neoliberal capital dreamt of nothing less than pre- 1914 authoritarian and imperial capitalism.

However, the historical clock can never be turned back and neoliberalism advanced unevenly – going farthest in the already more liberal Anglo-American heartland of capitalism – and faced popular opposition at every step.

Domestically, neoliberal policies rolled back state ownership, regulation and social protection. It attacked trade unions and left working people with high unemployment, stagnant real wages, fewer benefits, a smaller welfare state, more powerful employers and fewer social services.

Internationally, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank became imperial countries' overbearing bailiffs. Overlooking creditor responsibility, they forced Third World countries to repay debt. In the 1980s and 1990s, as they ramped up exports, markets for the few primary commodities and low-tech industrial goods they produced were glutted and prices, export revenues and incomes fell. By demanding a shrunken state, they also prevented the state-directed combined development Third World countries needed to become more productive, competitive and able to repay debt with less effort. Meanwhile, in all-too-many Third World countries, imperial capital enjoyed greater access to resources, goods and labour, quashing sovereignty, people's democracy and national development.

However, a moribund capitalism could only misuse its political advantages. It could not reverse declining economic growth, productivity growth and investment. Its miserly refusal to pay decent taxes, wages or supply prices worsened demand conditions and inequality, as did its offshoring of manufacturing to lower wage locations.

Worse, instead of investing in production, capital, especially in imperial countries, increasingly indulged in unproductive, predatory and speculative financial activity. The US facilitated this. After the dollar was forced off gold in 1971, it systematically encouraged dollar-denominated financial activity so demand for, and the value of, the dollar remained high. Rising debt and asset bubbles sucked money out of working people, small businesspeople, governments and taxpayers while inflating the wealth of tiny elites as governments resolved increasingly frequent financial crises to favour creditors.

Information and communications technology (ICT) played a most ironic part in all this. Soviet era experimental cybernetics had demonstrated ICT's potential for democratic socialist economic management and planning. Neoliberal capitalists used it instead to offshore production while controlling it, aid the concentration and centralisation of capital, indulge in plunder and financial speculation, appropriate land and resources, increase control over employees and manipulate customers, short-circuiting rather than addressing the demand problem and proliferating false needs in oceans of unfulfilled

real need. Such capitalisms diminished human wellbeing, the quality and quantity of jobs, and social services.

Neoliberal capitalism also led, despite slowing growth, to the ecological emergency of pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss and unspeakable cruelty to farmed animals as capital turned everything the earth offers humanity gratis into plunder and profit. Indeed, the current pandemic may be just the latest zoonotic virus to jump to humans thanks to accelerated encroachment on and destruction of wildlife habitats.

Despite clear scientific consensus pointing to the need for state and international action, capitalism's insistence on profit and market-driven 'solutions' is only making things worse.

Neoliberalism worsened capitalism's growth performance each decade and after 2008, growth was slower than during the Great Depression. By the late 2010s, most acute observers expected a major economic crisis of hollowed out capitalist productive systems typified by the neoliberal leaders, the US and the UK, as protests and social unrest proliferated. In the event, the pandemic triggered the crisis, exposing and worsening the shocking perversity of neoliberal capitalist economies as never before.

Reviving economies and addressing the ecological emergency and the pandemic will require industrial policy, state investment, social redistribution, environmental planning and public health infrastructure on a scale comparable to socialism and require ending capitalists' control over the state and policy.

The road to it lies wide open. Popular discontent with neoliberal capitalism is broad and deep, especially among those also marginalised by gender, race and in other ways.

Left Abdication and Populism

However, working people's historic parties and unions, with some honourable exceptions, have mostly failed to mobilise this discontent.

Major trade unions in capitalist countries had historically chosen class collaboration with capitalist multinationals and supranational institutions under the demobilising influence of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Under the neoliberal assault, such trade unions generally shrank, leaving a growing precariat the world over unorganised. However, multiple radical grassroots trade unions are proliferating and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), heir to anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggles, remains socialist and anti-imperialist, uniting 120 million workers in 135 countries across the imperial divide.

Working people's historic parties fared worse. When right-wing parties moved rightward towards neoliberalism in the 1970s, many of these parties followed them, loosening their links with working people, though often only after bitter struggles.

Clearest in the West and in Eastern Europe, such changes are also visible in some Third World countries.

Educated or intellectual elements of these parties led the way. They classically combined large working classes with small intellectual groups. However, in recent decades, the latter, led by politicians like Tony Blair and the Clintons, have grown numerically to dominate the parties they once served and steered them towards neoliberalism, often under the rubric of 'globalisation.'

Expanding post-war public and corporate bureaucracies needed credentialed personnel and expanded the professional managerial stratum. Under neoliberalism, production offshoring centralised management, engineering, design, legal, marketing, advertising, finance and other such functions in Western countries, swelling these groups further. This professional managerial layer, elevated high above the mass of working people, enjoys many privileges, including access to private or public resources. The neoliberal political establishment – elected politicians and bureaucrats in governments, trade unions and NGOs – hails from this stratum. With professional and family links crossing party lines, a cross-party political establishment reflecting the neoliberal policy consensus emerged to give us the disorienting spectacles of the Ford Foundation financing the World Social Forum, Tony Blair drafting EU political party financing statutes, and political parties and foundations relying on European Union and state funding, inevitably with neoliberal strings.

Party differences are now increasingly merely about how parties mobilise their voters. While right parties naturally appeal to petty-bourgeois social conservatism, historic working-class parties, now dominated by professionals, combine the neoliberalism that supports their incomes and lifestyles with social liberalism. Even at its best, social liberalism focuses on the struggles of individual, usually privileged members of marginalised social groups – women, 'visible' minorities, sexual minorities, ethnic minorities. While social liberalism prompts the 'culture wars' that grab headlines, it neglects the vast bulk of the working-class members of these groups, who are disproportionately impoverished, unemployed and precariously employed, whose situation does not improve and, combined with neoliberalism, even worsens. This is chiefly why the traditional European social democratic parties have lost support so precipitously.

This professional stratum prefers meetings, conferences, forums, media debates and electoral campaigns to the tough work of mass political organisation in working class neighbourhoods and factories. Meanwhile working people suffering low pay, low prices for their products, unemployment, alienation and precarity still seek a socialism of their collective rights. They are, however, divided along income, skill, gender, race and other social lines and politically bewildered by manipulative 'culture wars' between the right and left wings of the objectively reactionary and counter-revolutionary neoliberal

political establishment and their common witch-hunts against genuinely radical leaders and movements.

This establishment has taken to portraying as ‘populist’ both right and left efforts to mobilise the mass of the discontents of neoliberalism. Both Trump’s or Bolsonaro’s or Modi’s far right politics and Corbyn’s or Maduro’s left politics are accused of focusing on social division. However, the former manipulates the social divisions neoliberalism created to get to power and the latter seeks to heal them by reversing neoliberalism. Worse, the political establishments’ even-handedness is illusory: they can tolerate Trump holding office, but genuinely progressive politicians are to be stopped before they come anywhere near it or continuously hounded in office.

The *common* problems of the people are not even discussed, let alone addressed. Although majorities in capitalist countries – in the Third World, post-Communist countries or the deindustrialised West – remain opposed to neoliberalism, as political establishments reject even the mildest concessions, this opposition can find little or no political expression.

As economic decline reduces middle class career paths, the precariat comes to include educated young people and older managers. Ominously, as in inter-war Germany, many formerly centrist ‘middle classes’ are now tempted by extreme right ideas. Many in spontaneous rebellions against neoliberalism expressing the tenacity of working people, such as the French ‘yellow vests’, fall foul of reaction. The political and moral crisis of international communism after 1991 and the betrayal of Communist leaders, who preferred professional ascent through party bureaucracies to serving working people, compounds the problem. Fictitious ‘solidarities’ – ethnicisms, racisms, communalisms – demagogically turn them against other victims of the same system to prevent them from identifying those really responsible for their misfortune.

Today, therefore, class struggle rages *within* the left when it should be waged *by* the left.

However, as the economic crisis deepens, neoliberal political establishments lose control over politics, particularly as, on the international plane, the successes of socialist societies highlight the decay of capitalism and its costs.

Neoliberalism and Western Decline

Neoliberalism could not sustain the shock and awe of its initial offensive against working people, the Third World and, eventually, against the Soviet Union and East European socialism. As the wide gap between neoliberal ideas and reality continued widening, neoliberalism was forced to morph in response from its original Thatcher-Reagan form into ‘globalisation’ in the 1990s, US ‘Empire’ in the 2000s, and ‘austerity’ in the 2010s.

When the West danced on the grave of the Soviet Union, the US State Department's in-house philosopher, Francis Fukuyama, announced that History had ended. Humanity had reached its goal: liberal democracy and capitalism. It could go no further. A stunned world expected unipolarity and hoped for a peace dividend. History itself had other ideas.

Unipolarity?

Rather than unipolarity, it accelerated advance towards pluripolarity. As neoliberalism locked the West into ever-slower growth, the world economy's centre of gravity began shifting towards the fast-growing socialist market economy of China and towards large developing capitalist countries that had then pulled back from the worst of free market fundamentalism, such as Brazil, India and Russia.

By the 2010s, these countries demanded reform of international governance institutions, including the IMF and the World Bank. When the West refused to cooperate, they, particularly China, launched new ones. These included the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the New Development Bank, and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America. China and Russia also led Eurasian integration, harnessing China's growing economic gravity – two thirds of the world's countries today trade more with China than the US, its Belt and Road Initiative, and Russia's revived military prowess to the economic and security needs of neighbouring countries. The resulting Eurasian pole, covering nearly a third of the world's population and over half its territory, overcomes the destructive legacy of the Sino-Soviet split, at least for anti-imperialist purposes.

Africa and Latin America also asserted themselves against the West. Latin America's 'Pink Tide' of left-wing governments refused to go away despite ferocious US efforts to undermine it. In Africa, despite setbacks such as in Libya, national and left forces are rallying. Former French African colonies witnessed mass movements against the neo-colonial CFA Franc. French occupation of the strategically important Central African Republic was opposed and elections organised under the protection of Russian and Rwandan troops. SADC countries opposed British-led regime change efforts in Zimbabwe while a number of neighbouring countries are helping Mozambique fight the ISIS-influenced insurgency in the north of the country.

Africa and Latin America are today economically and politically more independent and are reviving the Pan Africanism and Pan Latin Americanism that generations of revolutionary men and women fought for, demonstrating that their revolutionary seeds are still sprouting.

Peace Dividend?

The peace dividend also failed to materialise. The US attempted to compensate for its dwindling economic centrality with military aggression. Wars proliferated, festooned with slogans of 'human rights', 'democracy' and the 'responsibility to protect' citizens of allegedly failed states, and became hybrid. They promoted not democracy but neoliberal capitalism to open poor countries to imperial capital's overexploitation, up to and including slavery, while violating the most basic of human rights – to life and development. They also punished defiant countries such as Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, the DPRK or Yemen by blockading medicines, oil and food.

These wars also proved interminable. For the financialised and deindustrialised West still home to major arms production industries, wars were industrial policy. Able to destroy but not rebuild, fighting wars as much to test and advertise weapons as to win them, the US-led West, aided by garrison states such as Israel, won no victories. They only left trails of destruction.

Rising militarism, repression, impoverishment and environmental destruction generated waves of migrants further repressed by border controls Western countries enforced and farmed out to neighbouring states. The Berlin Wall may have fallen but hundreds more sprouted in its wake, curtailing freedoms of speech, truth-telling, whistleblowing and protest. Human rights violations became routine, not only in the Third World but also in Western cities such as Minneapolis or Paris.

How can there be human rights without peace and development, social justice and social rights? How can states and peoples attain these without sovereignty, acknowledgement of the world's pluripolarity, and respect for, rather than stigmatisation of, countries, such as China or Cuba or Nicaragua, which seek to fulfil these most fundamental of human rights.

Capitalism commits its crimes against humanity and against the very possibility of society to the tune of anti-Communist propaganda, trying to prevent people from realising that socialism would better protect their human rights – liberal freedoms of speech, religion or association as much as rights to a decent, well-occupied, healthy and culturally rich life.

This was the parlous state of the West's economy, society, politics and international influence when the pandemic arrived.

Capitalism and Socialism in the Pandemic Stress Test

Unprepared despite forewarnings, initially denying its seriousness, capitalist countries, rich and poor, were hit hard by the pandemic. Social and health infrastructures, already severely weakened by decades of underfunding, were overwhelmed in most rich countries and collapsed in many poor ones. Unmet health care needs, Covid or non-

Covid, spiralled upwards. Capitalist governments claimed to be torn between saving lives and livelihoods when in fact they were endangering people for capitalist profits.

In the US, public authorities' prioritised support for swooning financial markets, unprecedented in scale and variety of measures, above all. Some neoliberal governments even dallied with reaching 'herd immunity' through infection, no matter the death toll. Public outcry prevented this but not the only slightly less murderous 'mitigation' strategy: using profit-reducing lockdowns as sparingly as possible to keep hospitalisations low enough so weak public health systems would not collapse.

Long committed to corporate and commodified medicine, neoliberal governments simply refused to bolster health systems or build the community-based social and medical care capacity for testing, tracing and supported isolation of cases and contacts necessary for suppressing the virus. Instead, politicians offered their capitalist friends opportunities for private profiteering in the name of providing health and public services. Meanwhile, hesitantly applied lockdowns were inevitably prolonged and repeated, sending economies plummeting into deeply negative territory and endangering the real livelihoods of billions.

Shambolic cycles of hesitant lockdowns and too-early easings in neoliberal capitalist countries also kept enough 'essential' workers exposed, and bad faith government communications kept enough resisting restrictions and vaccinations, to register some of the highest case and fatality rates in the world.

While rich countries offered some transfers (to keep up demand rather than support people), this was not possible in most already indebted poor countries whose governments became even less able to respond to the pandemic or meet basic needs.

Already deep social divisions have deepened further. High-income earners worked from home. With full salaries and reduced outlays, they even paid off debt. As support for financial markets set them on unprecedented bull runs, moneyed elites became wealthier and billionaires more numerous.

Working people, especially precariously employed women, racialised minorities and other vulnerable groups, by contrast, either suffered poverty, unemployment, isolation, loss of savings, predatory debt and sheer despair, or were low-paid 'essential' and 'front-line' workers, kept working and in addition, exposed to infection, illness and death. Poor access to healthcare, overcrowded, multi-occupancy sub-standard housing and homelessness increase the risk of infection, morbidity and fatality. With many unions representing these workers inadequately or not at all, and opportunistic employers failing to protect their health, their plight remained largely unaddressed.

As child-bearers subject to male control, principal providers of unpaid care for the young, sick and elderly and the holders of lower paid jobs, women were additionally set back by the pandemic and lockdowns. Demands of childcare with school and day care

closures led millions of women to give up employment. Female-headed households were particularly hard hit. As healthcare systems collapsed, millions of women lost access to contraception and under lockdowns suffered disproportionately from domestic violence.

Other marginalised groups were also vulnerable. Thanks to government disinformation and right-wing scapegoating, various minorities – East Asians in North America, Muslims in India – suffered rising violence and hate speech. Discrimination in employment, housing, health care and social services against sexual and gender minorities intensified, also exposing them to greater health risks.

Finally, isolation and lack of social engagement and participation, disrupted education and exams, all hit the young particularly. Those without reliable access to computers, the internet and electricity suffered worse and many may drop out of school altogether. Dismal job opportunities and the possibility of never being employed further deepened youth hopelessness.

The contrast with China's socialist system was stunning. Equipped with an impressive health infrastructure for a developing country, governed by a party able to prioritise saving lives single-mindedly – building fully-equipped hospitals in days or mobilising health care workers from around the country to rush to Wuhan – China suppressed the virus, saved lives and now boasts an economy once again leading world growth.

Other socialist experiences were similar: as of 06 August 2021, alongside China's 3.22 deaths per million, Vietnam, Laos (the most bombed country in the world), Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua limited Covid-19 deaths per million to 27.94, 0.96, 281.11, 128.92 and 29.59 respectively. Compare this with 1,858.96, 1,920.72, 704.81 and 1,661.87 for the US, UK, Canada and France respectively, though East Asian capitalist economies, with their traditions of state interventionism and 'Confucian' social mores, did better with 120.61 and 41.21 deaths per million in Japan and South Korea respectively.

Capitalist countries bent over backwards to not recognise this socialist success. Even the prestigious medical journal, *The Lancet*, preferred to demonstrate the superiority of suppression over mitigation with a study confined to OECD countries, excluding the exemplary socialist models of suppression.

Unwilling to make the public investment in skills and people to suppress the virus, eager to increase Big Pharma profits, neoliberal governments bet all on vaccines. However, vaccines, while necessary, are not sufficient against the pandemic. A proper, community-based system of testing, tracing and well-supported isolation is essential, particularly when vaccine hesitancy, prompted by erosion of trust, keeps vaccinations well short of the levels required for population immunity even in rich countries and the Third World remains largely unprotected, keeping new variants emerging and spreading.

Indeed, neoliberal vaccine apartheid will ensure they do. Rich countries buy up short supplies and keep them short by insisting on honouring Big Pharma's 'intellectual property rights' and preventing many countries from manufacturing them. When China and Russia augment world vaccine supplies through affordable sales and donations, the West derides this as 'vaccine diplomacy' and discourages poor countries from accepting them.

As new variants emerge, while new vaccines or boosters will bring Big Pharma bigger profits, they will also keep capitalist societies in a cycle of local or national lockdowns and easings and all that means for livelihoods of working people, not to mention deepening uncertainty, inequality, hopelessness and death.

Recovery when it comes is guaranteed to be weak and K-shaped, further deepening inequalities between a small, ever more obscenely wealthy elite and the rest.

Class and National Struggles for Socialism

The stark contrast between socialisms' successes and capitalisms' failures has placed the fate of capitalism in the balance of international power. Advances towards socialism in the near future will involve international struggle as much as domestic class struggle, if not more so.

Imperialist capitalists are responding by trying to inaugurate a new stage of neoliberalism, a pseudo-philanthropic one. Its dominant discourse will claim to provide people with key essentials, whether vaccines, green or medical technologies or education and health care services. Of course, with demand further depressed by the economic crisis the pandemic triggered, the state will be the preferred customer. The discourse of the 'rights' of citizens to demand certain products and services will proliferate. So will that of the need for a greater state role and higher state spending. Corporate private production of these 'essentials' for profit will be justified by arguments about private sector 'innovation', 'choice' and 'efficiency.' Tax revenues will pay for the actually inefficient and authoritarian private production of shoddy and inadequate goods and services. Financial speculation and rentier activity will continue unabated.

Of course, this new neoliberalism will unquestionably face resistance due to deepening social divisions and the advanced productive debility of capitalism. Even without organised and canny left opposition, its manifest failures amid proliferating revelations of fraud and corruption will rock politics. Internationally, efforts to export these practices and discourses beyond capitalism's imperial core will meet limited success as the more responsible governments look to alternative trade and investment links, such as those centred on China.

Indeed, as pluripolarity advances, imperialist and dollar dominance recede and capitalism continues malfunctioning, the New Cold War propaganda against China will

sound increasingly hollow. Worse, divisions within the imperial camp – within NATO, between states and even within capitalist classes – can only grow thanks to China's growing economic attractions, even for the West, its traditional allies and corporations. US attempts to rally European, East and South Asian and Antipodean 'democratic' allies into a new 'Indo-Pacific Quadrilateral' strategy are already stalling.

The 'rules-based international order', based on allegedly universal values the US proposes, is increasingly exposed for what it is: an imperialist denial of the right of the Third World to develop imposed through military aggression, sanctions, embargoes and wars. China's support for an international 'community with a shared future for humankind' based on common values and UN principles and the Five Principles of peaceful coexistence offers a far more attractive alternative capable of addressing humanity's common problems.

Capitalism is at a domestic and international impasse and the classes and nations fighting for socialism must advance in solidarity. In this advance, some governments and movements, such as Iran or Yemen's Ansarullah, for example, may at first glance appear strange fellow-travellers for working people and their socialist nations and movements. However, they are subject to imperialist aggression, wars, blockades, economic and financial sanctions, colour revolutions and regime changes, and therefore deserve at least anti-imperialist solidarity.

People's and Peoples' Demands for Socialism Today

Capitalism long ago ceased to be historically progressive. Humanity faces the task of wresting the world-girding socialisation of production from its control right on the verge of a new industrial revolution involving robotics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, quantum computing, biotechnology, the Internet of Things, 3D printing and the like. Capitalism cannot develop their full potential while China leads the way, increasingly gaining control over their standards, intellectual property and associated rents from the capitalist world and challenging the cyber supremacy of the US security state.

Today a number of peoples are already building socialism, but most are left paying the price of keeping declining and extortionate capital in control. It is high time all working people began building socialism by forming themselves into a 'class for itself', overthrowing the capitalist class and taking political power.

Of course, we will reach communism – a society that produces use values, rather than (exchange) value, and distributes the social product by taking 'from each according to their ability' and giving 'to each according to their need' – only at the end of a long road. We must traverse several stages of socialism – increasingly socialised production, distribution and outlook – before our productive capacities, our societies and our cultures become capable of relating to other individuals, groups and societies in solidarity, whilst living harmoniously with other species and the planet.

In doing this, the key is seizing control over the state from capital. The role of the public power, the state, is essential and distinctive and control over it should be in the hands of working people. Though capital may rule over considerable private enterprise, particularly during the early socialist stages, a socialist state must progressively subject all production to social ends through planning for the general interest. Whether to socialise given means of production will be a contextual and often pragmatic decision.

Each country, with its historical configuration of productive development, social organisation and culture, will proceed along this path with its own pace and pattern. Some may join the journey late, some may take interesting detours and some, likely a small number, may not join in anytime soon.

The overriding principle of ‘people and planet over profits’ implies the following major demands of people and peoples struggling for socialism:

1. Physical, economic and emotional suffering during the pandemic makes the full socialisation of health care, with universal access free at the point of use, the lever that opens the gates to socialism. It must include community-based public health systems extended to the remotest districts and villages capable of offering the best prevention and treatment approaches for present and future pandemics. Such healthcare systems are possible in poor countries as well as rich and have two further advantages. Their need for skilled medical practitioners will expand public education, training and research in prevention and cure, offering high quality work for many. Their need for an active public authority strongly committed to social welfare is just what is objectively necessary for the transition to a socialist society. If such a public health system proves possible, if not wholly at least substantially, people will clearly see, demand and be willing to work towards, extending its model to other cognate spheres, such as education, child and elder care or housing.
2. To chart the onward path of socialist advance, we recall what Marx knew well: the two main elements of production, land and labour, are not commodities and nor is the chief instrument of their social organisation, money. Capitalism, by treating them as such, entangles itself in contradictions – of the private appropriation of the fruits of social labour, environmental devastation and precarity of agricultural and primary commodity producers, and mismanaged money and financial crises.

Decommodifying land, labour and money will constitute a major advance towards socialism.

The urgency of resolving the ecological emergency cannot be overstated. We must take land and water bodies into public ownership for a viable and actionable plan to prevent ecological calamity. Such a plan should be based on wide popular participation and large-scale state investment, and will necessarily include divesting from fossil fuels, investing in and deploying renewable energy and zero-

carbon public transport on an unprecedented scale, restoring biodiversity, afforestation, and reorganising the food system. It will also promote the rational and equitable provision of housing and allocation of land for various economic purposes.

Universal access to work and its rewards for all able to work, combined with support for those unable to work and a reduction in work time for all as productivity advances, opens the door to autonomous and creative pursuits capable of advancing individual fulfilment, science and culture to previously unimagined levels.

We must nationalise money and banking to transform them into instruments of socially organised production and distribution.

In recent years, in addition to land, labour and money, imperialist countries have sought to commodify knowledge and technology through intellectual property rights. Like nature, culture, knowledge and technology are the common heritage of humankind, its second nature. We must reverse its commodification too and make education and research public and flows of knowledge free.

3. Further socialist advance lies in the rational principle that monopolies – such as resource extraction, transportation, the digital platforms whose private ownership prevents the full exploitation of their potential to benefit society – and the production of the essentials of life – food, housing, education or healthcare – be heavily regulated or nationalised. Their private ownership ill serves society.

Progress towards socialism will be smoother where, thanks to class and international struggles, public provision and public ownership are already quite advanced. Of course, we must remove their existing limitations – class, patriarchal and racist biases – and democratise them, not just formally but substantially.

4. All countries, particularly the wealthy ones, must also separate, through debate and discussion, real need and ‘need’ simulated by capitalism’s need for markets through consumerist illusion and planned obsolescence generating, rather than satiety, only permanent dissatisfaction and covetousness, not to mention environmental destruction. A critical corollary is halting all wasteful activity – for instance, arms production (beyond basic defence) or financial speculation.

These goals will be easier for societies to pursue in the right international environment.

5. We must oppose the US-sponsored imperialist New Cold War and build an ambitious multilateral international governance enabling all countries to develop, create economic, gender, racial and religious equality, and address shared challenges through economic, political, financial, scientific and cultural cooperation for mutual benefit in ‘win-win’ relations. True development in the

Third World requires investment in human capacities and a new scientific and technological revolution to fulfil human and planetary needs, cooperative integration of economies to enhance industrial, data and human resource chains and sustainable connectivity and green infrastructure to diffuse the gains widely.

6. We must also mount a challenge to the false and hypocritical universalism with which imperialist countries have articulated their domination for centuries. We must replace it with common values and principles to tackle common challenges: insecurity, mistrust, disrespect, war, inequitable development, rising inequalities of all kinds, serious damage to the land, soils, water, seas and air that sustain human life and whose degradation threatens ecological health, deficient health infrastructure, ineffective disaster management, and unsustainable debt. International governance needs to reflect the world's objective and developing pluripolarity. The original ideals of the United Nations Charter and the principles of peaceful coexistence advocated by the Non-Aligned Movement are excellent foundations for further constructing alternatives to institutions of US and Western dominance.

The diversity of our world and its civilisations is a great resource and only principles of equality, mutual respect and mutual trust can sustain it. While peace, development, equality, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of humankind, there is no universal political model. Instead, the world must engage in constant exchange, mutual learning and in sharing the benefits of progress.

Workers of all countries, oppressed peoples and nations, Unite!