



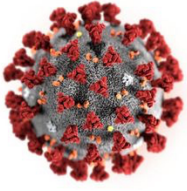
# THE WHOLE SYSTEM is ROTTEN

- COVID-19
- RECESSION
- CLIMATE DISASTER

# For SOCIALIST RECONSTRUCTION

# The Whole System is Rotten:

## COVID-19



As COVID-19 engulfed the Earth, most governments failed to protect society. A rare few acted quickly and decisively to test, trace, isolate and provide personal protective equipment (PPE), managing without lockdowns and widespread closures to contain the virus. Many, such as Canada, acted too little and too late. Others, such as the US, Brazil, India, Russia and Britain, ignored the virus and ended up with terrible disasters. Months after China's initial failure to stop the outbreak, it is globally out of control. Governments around the world, desperate to restore profits, have ignored surging cases as they re-opened.

Health professionals' multiple warnings of pandemics were ignored. Most countries had not prepared and did not act quickly, so they were forced to lock down society to prevent health systems collapsing. Capitalism turned a virus into a human disaster. Pre-existing conditions, including under-funded and privatized health and care systems, long supply chains, and the undermining of the social fabric, all made COVID far worse.

Months after the start of COVID, Canada's testing is still inadequate. There remain widespread shortages of PPE. "Care" homes became death and disease traps. Little action was taken to protect "essential" workers in care homes, meat packing plants or on farms.

Public health officers expect a second wave. Dr. Sandy Buchman, president of the Canadian Medical Association, warned in late May "we're gambling by reopening" as the health care system was "sick" before the pandemic and is now "breaking down" because of the lack of PPE and staff fatigue. He pointed to a continuing lack of testing and tracing. The situation has not significantly improved since May. Yet provinces are rushing to re-open and will blame people as cases rise.

Seeing the US disaster, many Canadians feel complacent that things went better than they actually did. Canada luckily escaped a total disaster, although places such as Montreal were very close.

## World Economic Depression



Before COVID's outbreak the world economy was on the verge of another deep recession, with economies slowing, world trade in decline, mountains of debt (\$253 trillion at the end of 2019), and a mounting US-China trade war. COVID turbocharged these trends and pushed the world economy into a deep depression, possibly the worst ever. Hundreds of millions of workers have lost their jobs.

Large parts of the economy, such as tourism, airlines, hotels and retail, are unlikely to rebound. Consumer spending will drastically decline as millions have lost their jobs. Most workers are already up to their ears in debt and many more are worried about the future. Capitalists are unlikely to invest significantly in industry with huge overcapacity of production and dropping demand. Throwing money at the banks, as governments around the world have done, will not get the real economy going. It will only fuel more speculative bubbles.

Canadian workers have been hit hard. In June, the labour underutilization rate, which includes the unemployed, those who wanted a job but were not looking for one, and those who were working less than half of their usual hours, was 26.9 percent overall, and 40.5 percent for youth. This is 230 percent higher than a year ago. The resource sector, especially oil and gas, is reeling. A key driver of the economy was construction, based on the housing boom, but this may come to a grinding halt.

Millions of small businesses are hanging by a thread and a second wave will be disastrous. The federal government acted to prop up businesses and the banks and provided modest relief to working people with \$2,000 a month CERB, an expansion of EI and other actions. However, these schemes and the pause on tenant evictions are set to end in the autumn. Then, the full force of the economic devastation will be apparent. There could be waves of evictions and mortgage foreclosures.

Already the bankers, the rich, and their friends are talking about new austerity and cuts, to pay for the temporary measures. Journalist Andrew Coyne argues that "we're going to need everyone working flat out – not just five days [a week], but six or seven – just to pay the government's bills." We can be sure he means workers not the bosses. The decision, by the billionaire owners of Amazon, Loblaws, Metro and other major retailers, to end the \$2 per hour "heroes" pay for workers, despite soaring profits, is an indication who big business thinks should pay for the crisis.

## Not All in this Together

For the last few months, as Canadians united to respond to COVID, Trudeau and most Premiers had high opinion poll ratings. When the economic reality and a second wave hits, this could rapidly change. The vast majority of people have abided by physical distancing and other steps to slow the virus. With re-opening, most Canadians remain fearful of the future. Alongside fear and anxiety, there is some relief at the easing of restrictions, which caused economic hardship, a spike in overdose deaths, increased domestic violence and a wave of mental health problems.

What enrages people is injustice and a lack of fairness. Police handed out fines of \$880 for sitting on a park



# For Socialist Reconstruction

bench while government health officers facilitated the re-opening of the Cargill meat plant that was the source of 1,500 COVID cases and three deaths – the company was not even fined.

Politicians, companies and others repeat that “We are all in this together.” Yet it is so cruelly clear that it is not the case. The homeless are still homeless, the old and the poor are dying, Indigenous communities still don’t have clean water, but very few bankers got ill. Big business is getting generous support from the Liberals while rent debts pile up.

The wealth of five of Canada’s richest people grew 9 percent between March 16 and May 16. Meanwhile farm workers, with pitiful wages and terrible conditions, are dying to put food on the table.

Canadian society was deeply unequal before COVID and the unfolding economic devastation will increase inequality.

## Climate Pandemic Coming



Behind COVID, the climate disaster continues to build with 2020 set to be the hottest year on record. Siberia is in the midst of a devastating heat wave with fires raging. Scientists are increasingly alarmed at the pace of change, which is faster than they had expected. Heat

waves have increased in length and frequency. The polar ice caps of Greenland and Antarctica are melting six times faster than in the 1990s, a rate that is both increasing and faster than expected. The devastation of the climate disaster will not hit as fast as COVID-19 but will be far worse and much harder to overcome.

Big oil is lobbying hard for even bigger government handouts and for reduced environmental protection. This must be opposed, and all government funds should be directed to convert to clean energy, refurbishing buildings, greening cities, and environmental repair.

## Mounting Anger

2019 was a year of mass protests in Canada and around the world – of young people and women, for climate justice, to end austerity and inequality, and for democracy. Governments were shaken and some fell. COVID restrictions paused the protests, but the anger did not go away. COVID pressure-cooked the anger, which erupted in a wave of BLM demonstrations around the world, reaching communities that have not seen protests in decades.

Humanity is being hit by multiple shocks: COVID-19, a deep economic crisis and the mounting climate disaster. Most leaders act as if these current shocks will be over in a few short months; their impact will roll on for years.

## Don't Re-open - Reconstruct Society

The talk is of re-opening the economy, but it won't. With millions unemployed, lost wages and facing a rent crisis, people are not going to spend as they did before. Business is not going to invest. Where will demand come from? It will take ongoing and massive state action to revive the economy, policies that most Canadians support.

The economy and society before COVID-19 was cruelly unequal; millions had low-paid gig jobs. Systemic racism and sexism were widespread. The world was barreling towards a climate disaster. We don't want to re-open that economy: we need a new economy.

All levels of government face a financial crisis. Yet the rich are getting richer and, at the same time, are calling for massive cuts to government services, which would deepen the depression and damage lives. To reconstruct the economy, taxes on the super rich must be dramatically increased and all tax havens and loopholes closed.

Seattle City Council, pushed by Socialist Alternative and our Councillor Kshama Sawant, agreed to tax big corporations including Amazon over \$200 million a year. Now is the time for federal wealth and inheritance taxes and for cities to bring in a Mansion Tax.

Major class battles lie ahead: defending services, stopping evictions and foreclosures, taxing the rich and changing society. Up to now, most Canadian union leaders have limited themselves to words of criticism about unsafe work, lack of PPE and scrapping “heroes” pay. They need to prepare for solidarity and action to defend jobs, services and wages. Similarly, the NDP has largely stuck to words in legislatures and not raised a bold program to transform society to clean energy and good union jobs.

Socialist Alternative works for a society that takes care of people and the planet. Capitalism prioritises profits for the few. Whether it is climate disaster or homelessness, the solutions exist; the barrier is the private control of wealth and production. Key features of a new economy include democratic workers' control, providing good jobs, protecting the environment and ending poverty and mass inequality. If you agree, why not join Socialist Alternative.



# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

## Defund Police: Re-fund Services

Malcolm X said “You can’t have Capitalism without Racism.” This is as true today as when he spoke.

Sparked by the outrage at the police’s brutal murder of George Floyd, calls to #DefundThePolice have echoed around the world. Protests, rallies and marches across the US and Canada are demanding fundamental change.

In Canada, there have been more police murders in 2020 than in all of 2019, with at least 23 people killed by police in the first six months, many during wellness checks. Chantal Moore, a young Indigenous woman, was killed by New Brunswick police doing a wellness check. This follows years of police violence towards Indigenous people, Black people and people of colour.

There is overwhelming evidence that Indigenous and Black people are far more likely than others to be assaulted and killed by police. Embedded with systemic racism, police forces are an instrument of the state used to suppress dissent and oppress people. Engels wrote about the “armed bodies of men,” which ultimately defend the interests of the ruling class. A key part of a



state apparatus that includes armies, the legal system and prisons, police are beholden to the capitalist class and governments that do their bidding.

Enraged by constant police violence and the lack of police accountability, the demand to cut police budgets and end police wellness checks is growing. Almost 400 people signed up to speak on a motion to review police

budgets, proposed by Vancouver COPE Councillor Jean Swanson. The speakers’ passionate experiences and arguments are testament to the determination of people to find a new way forward that does not result in people dying needlessly at the hands of police.

- **“Defund” the police and Re-fund public services:** Cut police budgets by 50% and direct that money to support mental health, community services, addiction services and building social housing.
- **Community control over public safety:** Democratic control over the police with community say on policies and practices, budget, hiring, etc.
- **End the Legal-Criminal system – for Restorative Justice**

# ABOUT SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

## What We Stand For

### The Whole System is Rotten

We oppose capitalism’s focus on profit before people and environment. Capitalism does not serve the interests of the vast majority of humanity.

- **Ensure secure income and housing for all.**
- **Major taxation of the super-rich and big corporations** and close all tax havens to raise the necessary funds.
- **Public ownership of key sectors of the economy** including banking, the internet, the energy industry, transportation and privately-owned utilities.
- **A comprehensive, universal, public health system,** integrated with social care.
- **A Green Jobs Program** to provide well-paid union jobs that meet human and environmental needs, including a shift to renewable energy, a mass program to build high quality social housing, refit existing buildings, and upgrading the rail network for passengers and freight.
- **Democratic control of work and society.**
- **Justice for all** with everyone having guaranteed access to food, quality housing, health care, child care, education and basic amenities including quality drinking water.

For a Socialist Reconstruction



Socialist Alternative Canada is part of International Socialist Alternative, active on all six continents.

For news from around the world:

<http://worldsocialist.net>

If you agree with the ideas in this special issue, join Socialist Alternative!

[contact@socialistalternative.ca](mailto:contact@socialistalternative.ca)

We invite you to check out our website, which expands on many of the points in this issue and has many more articles on Canada and from around the world.

[socialistalternative.ca](http://socialistalternative.ca)

