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# **CHANGE the SYSTEM**

# **FOR SOCIALIST RECONSTRUCTION**

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# 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.**
- **Ensure major taxation of the super-rich and big corporations** and close all tax havens to raise the necessary funds.
- **Bring into public ownership key sections 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 people** 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!**



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International Socialist Alternative,  
active on all six continents.**

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which has longer versions of many of the  
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## Socialist Alternative in COVID



The last few months have been stressful and worrying for everyone as COVID-19 descended on society. SA Canada decided in mid-March to be safe and go online – we would physically distance while staying politically active. These months have revealed many failings of capitalism, some of which are explored in this magazine, as capitalists put profits before safety.

SA Canada stepped up its online activity, doubling the number of website articles and Facebook posts. Our website and Facebook activity has soared with dramatically increased numbers of views, likes and reach.

COVID has convinced many people that the system needs to be changed. We have recruited, with 25% of our members joining during COVID. The explosion of anger around BLM and racist cops saw huge demos, including many in Canada. The inequality, injustice, and failure of capitalism to protect people's lives have all led to a deep questioning of the system.

A highlight of the summer was International Socialist Alternative's Virtual Marxist University with over 1,500 people from at least 37 countries discussing, in up to 9 languages, over a week. The finance appeal raised an amazing \$326,480. Most of our members attended, staying up late into the night or getting up early, to join an event across many time zones.

Over recent weeks, SA Canada members have been on BLM and Indigenous rights rallies, have actively supported workers whose jobs are at risk due to COVID layoffs, and have campaigned for housing rights.

During COVID we only produced a few, slim printed magazines. Now we are back with a bumper 20 pages. Whether online or in-person, SA Canada will continue to build for a socialist society.

# For Climate and Jobs

Martin LeBrun

Behind COVID-19 an even greater disaster is coming for humanity – climate change. Headlines read: *2020 warmest year on record, Siberia devastated by record breaking fires, Canada's last intact ice shelf gone*. By 2050, rising oceans may have drowned cities including Miami, Mumbai, and Jakarta. As with COVID, capitalism is the root cause of this disaster.

Rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented change is needed, but Canada's leaders are infuriatingly inactive. Hypocritically, Trudeau bought the Trans Mountain Expansion pipeline for \$4.5 billion tax dollars and then declared a climate emergency. Building it voids all the climate targets and will cost \$12.6 billion, while only creating 90 long-term jobs!

The Liberals' market-based carbon tax does not work as it targets individuals' minor lifestyle changes, rather than oil and gas companies' profits as they pay tax at a lower rate.

While the NDP and Greens have better policies than the Liberals and the Tories, they do not address the root of the crisis – capitalism. They focus on a narrow electoral approach, rather than help build organized mass movements based on the social and economic power of the working class.

## A Socialist Green Jobs Program Needed

Canada is in an economic depression – facing years of high unemployment and extremely low growth. There is an opportunity to tackle both the jobs and climate catastrophe, together with a just transition program.

Clean energy is plentiful as the earth is bathed in the sun's light. There are many methods to harness this energy: all that is needed is investment.

Oil and gas no longer provide jobs; the sector has shed 28 percent of its workforce since 2014. Each barrel of tar sands oil is sold at a loss. Every \$1 million invested in a green economy provides ten times more jobs than the same investment in the oil and gas sector, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

A socialist Green Jobs Program would include massive public investment in renewable energy, retrofitting and insulating homes and buildings, humane and affordable food production, good urban public transit, upgraded rail for freight and passengers – all of which provide good union jobs. Ending built-in obsolescence, waste, and subsidies to polluting companies would greatly reduce pollution. The tar sands and nuclear power need to be phased out.

The workers in these industries should not pay for the cost of the transition. Instead, they should be guaranteed re-training and well-paid

jobs in socially useful production. The \$353 billion stashed in tax havens, if publicly owned, would ensure that the rich and corporations, not working people, pay.

## Publicly Owned, Democratically Planned Economy

The capitalist class has known about climate change for decades, but instead of action they tried to hide and discredit the science. Even now, they continue to drag their feet. They are more worried about short-term profits than the fate of humanity. Bribing them to provide jobs and protect the environment is a waste of money.

In the COVID pandemic, the federal government magically found tons of money. The money is there. However, it is controlled by a tiny minority. The economy needs to prioritize human needs and tackling the looming ecological disaster. This won't happen if the wealth of society and the control of major industries remains in the grasp of a handful of the super-rich.

Freed from the lust for profits and workplace oppression, human talent and invention would blossom, finding new solutions to environmental issues. The war machine is a criminal waste of resources, money and human skills. The quality of life would be ensured without the huge waste of super-rich yachts, multi-toileted mansions, etc.

The massive 2019 youth climate marches were an inspiring step to build an organized movement. As the movement grows, the challenge will be to build a party with a bold climate platform and democratic structure that commits to campaign continuously in communities and workplaces. Core to its purpose is to end the disaster of capitalism, replacing it with a society that provides good jobs and protects the environment.

- **Democratic plan, not private profit**
- **Socialist change, not climate change**





# Canada Reopens to an Uncertain

Leslie Kemp

For over six months, Canadians have been in the grip of an unprecedented pandemic that has left few people untouched. Canada failed to protect workers and vulnerable Canadians. One of the most egregious examples was the Alberta government's refusal to shut down Cargill's meatpacking plant in High River, despite more than 1,500 cases of coronavirus associated with the plant, and three people who died. This demonstrates both the relentless pursuit of profit by capitalists and the readiness of government to protect business interests, at all costs.

As the virus first hit, Canadians witnessed its murderous rampage among those who are most vulnerable: elders living in care homes. Over 80% of deaths in Canada have been among those living in long-term care. Our revered universal health care system was exposed for what it is: not quite an empty shell but a vessel with many leaks. Health care workers lacked essential PPE. Only now is Canada arranging for the domestic manufacturer of PPE, rather than having to rely on insecure sources from elsewhere. COVID has laid bare the huge gaps in our social security network: people living on the street; renters fearful of eviction; people dying alone of opioids in record numbers; and the uneven burden of COVID on precarious workers, including those in the gig economy, temporary foreign workers, and those working in the hospitality industry and retail.



Heidie Ambrose

## School reopening

As schools across Canada have reopened, COVID cases are steadily climbing, creating high levels of uncertainty and fear. This is not surprising as the economy, particularly since the end of June, has moved from lockdown mode into various phases of reopening.

The reopening of schools, after months of online learning and a summer break, signals a new phase in how Canadians are dealing with the pandemic. While on the surface, governments recognize the importance of education for children's development, most are reluctant to pay for the necessary measures, such as smaller class sizes, physical distancing and mask-wearing, to ensure safety for students, teachers and other staff. Governments want to restart the economy. With students at home, many parents have been put in the

difficult position of staying home, foregoing both jobs and income, a trend which has hit women the hardest. Capitalism needs children in schools to ensure the economy has a steady supply of workers, and to train the next generation to be wage-earners.

While many, parents and educators alike, believe that reopening schools is needed for the social and educational development of children, they are understandably uneasy about the conditions under which it is happening. Already, in the first week of students returning, multiple cases of COVID are being reported in schools across Canada, causing some schools to temporarily re-close and others to send students home to isolate.

## Economic unease

This isn't the only worry for Canadians. The economy has been in suspended animation for months. While some corporations have made record profits from the pandemic, ordinary people have been hit hard with job loss and reduced work hours, while small businesses have struggled to survive, some unsuccessfully. There are 1.1 million fewer paid workers now than in February, before COVID-19 hit.

Essential workers in grocery stores, who at the outset of the pandemic received "hero" pay, are back to working on pre-COVID wages, with record profits going into the coffers of corporations, which accumulate wealth for their shareholders. While profits soar, many regular people are poised on the edge of a financial precipice.

Inequality has never been greater than it is today. The very richest amass unprecedented levels of wealth. In 2019, the richest 1% owned 44% of the world's wealth. The world's 10 richest billionaires own \$801 billion in combined wealth, a sum greater than the total goods and services most nations produce on an annual basis. All of this wealth is created on the backs of those who work for wages, many of them low paid workers and in dangerous conditions. Canada's inequality ranks 12th out of 17 countries.

## Climate anxiety

The ongoing climate disaster, due to capitalism's failures, causes further stress. The astonishing number of record-breaking storms, forest fires, droughts, heat waves, and floods are signs that all is not well with our earthly home. This summer has seen record-breaking temperatures in California and the second biggest fire season ever. These kinds of events have occurred with just 1.0° C of global warming. The IPCC's report in late 2018 predicted 2.7° C could be reached in as little as 11 years and most certainly within 20 years without major cuts in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. We do not want the havoc a 2.7° increase will reap.

Taken together, these crises combine into a volatile amalgam of fear, anger, uncertainty, and despair. They lead to an existential crisis, particularly for young people, who are faced with the burden of dealing with the consequences of these disasters as well as the responsibility to do something about them.

## Politics as usual

It appears that most political parties have not got the message about the depth of these crises, nor Canadians' concern about them. Even if they have an inkling, they lack the political will to act.

The BC NDP looks likely to call an election this autumn. While, in most cases, they have acted like a responsible liberal-minded government, they failed to adequately deal with the crisis of climate change, forging ahead to build the wasteful Site C dam and continue their commitment to LNG projects, including the Coastal Gas Link Pipeline, despite fierce opposition from the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs. Their hypocrisy around Indigenous self-determination is galling, with their actions belying their lofty words.

The Alberta government is trouncing on the rights of just about everyone in Alberta: teachers, health workers, unions, temporary foreign and immigrant workers; it is determined to do what it can to prop up a failing resource sector and will bring the economy down to unspeakable depths.

Federally, the faces are changing but the politics remain largely the same. The Conservative Party elected Erin O'Toole as their new leader who, like the last leader, is a social conservative who pretends to be progressive on social issues. The Green Party is currently holding a leadership campaign. The Liberals have managed to weather a number of scandals, including the recent WE scandal, and have prorogued parliament until September 23, in an attempt to bring in a new program. There is speculation that they, too, may call an autumn election. The NDP may hold the balance of power, as they have done in the past. However, their characteristic lack of boldness and imagination may hinder real change. This could be a real opportunity for the NDP to push hard for a national pharmacare program, universal daycare, a national affordable housing program and much improved EI benefits for workers, never mind public ownership and a Green New Deal for workers.

Over the last few months Trudeau and most Premiers have had high opinion poll ratings with Canadians showing unity in the face of COVID. However, when the economic realities and a second wave of COVID hits, this could rapidly change.

## Movements and Mounting Anger

What will move governments is movement from



Unite-Here local 40, with support from SA fight for jobs

below. 2019 saw mass protests in Canada and around the world – of young people and women, for climate justice, to end austerity and inequality, and for democracy and racial justice. While COVID paused the protests, the anger remains. COVID pressure-cooked the anger, which erupted in the wave of BLM demonstrations around the world, reaching places that have not seen protests in decades. Canadians were shocked by the violence and systemic police racism against Indigenous people. This materialized in the BLM rallies held in many communities across Canada this summer. Calls to defund the police and address systemic racism won't go away soon.

Organized labour is still quiet, although that could change with events. Alberta appears to be the most volatile of provinces and there could be explosive events in the coming months. Unite Here Local 40, representing hotel workers, took a number of actions to put pressure on the BC NDP to ensure the legal rights of laid-off hospitality workers to return to their jobs.

Whether provoked by the renewed construction around the Trans Mountain Pipeline, increased rental evictions or another egregious act of police violence against Indigenous people or people of colour, there is seething anger below the calm surface of Canadian waters, anger that could erupt into new waves of protest.

At the start of World War I, it was said it would "All be over by Christmas," yet the slaughter lasted four bloody years. Most leaders act as if these current shocks will also be over in a few short months, but their impact will roll on for years.

In all of this volatile amalgam, what characterizes this period more than anything is uncertainty about the future. While there is some relief at the easing of restrictions, which caused economic hardship and a spike in overdose deaths, increased domestic violence and a wave of mental health problems, there is fear. Many people have a clear sense that the old is dying. What is unknown is what the future holds.

We hold up a vision for a different kind of future, one based on socialist reconstruction, that births a new world of equality, fair distribution of the fruits of the earth and labour and justice for all. Join us!



# The Pandemic of Women's Oppression

Amanda Elaine Woods and RA Costeau

Gender-based oppression has grown more acute under the ravages of COVID-19. Just as many of capitalism's shuddering inadequacies have been brought into daylight by the pandemic, it is even clearer today that many gendered injustices are foundational to the capitalist system we toil under. Socialism and women's liberation can be won, but only if we fight for them both, together.

Pandemic-related emergency measures have forced firms in the hospitality, tourism and service sectors to shut their doors. Women are the majority employed in these sectors, and account for 62% of jobs lost in these industries. On top of job losses and income insecurity, women are also often caregivers for their children or elderly family members. In both losing their income and having the extra work of caring for a now housebound family, women and female-bodied people are hit doubly hard by the pandemic.

The work of caregiving historically has fallen on the shoulders of women. Even today in Canada, women perform double the unpaid care work of their male counterparts. With the closure of schools, daycares, and summer camps due to COVID-19, mothers and other caregivers were expected to step in and stay home to care for their families as a result of shelter-in-place mandates. As people are returning to work and school, women are foregoing employment and staying home to care for their families.

Care work, which includes care for children, the sick, and the elderly, is woefully undervalued under capitalism. Without this work, part of "social reproduction," there would be no next generation to carry on society, and the present generation would collapse for lack of care. Social reproduction is essential to all societies – past, capitalist and a future socialist one. However, under capitalism, dedicated to profit above all else, the cost of this work is "externalized" and left to underpaid workers and unpaid (usually) women, who are expected to take care of their families and required to find income through employment at the same time. In times of crisis, capitalism defends profits by cutting already meagre social supports, with patriarchal norms foisting even more of the burden onto women – expecting them to pick up the slack for free.

Care work is work, and those doing unpaid care work deserve the same rights that are afforded to workers. Caregivers need access to safe and affordable childcare, fully funded health services, a living income for stay-at-home parents, paid education and training, and increased funding to community, sport and cultural facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed these glaring caregiving inequities and demonstrated that the demand for \$10-a-day childcare



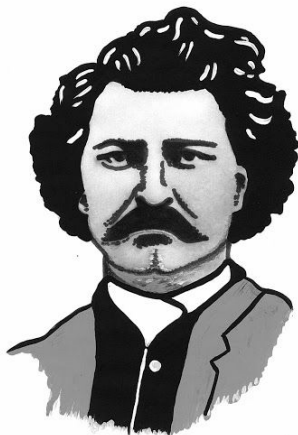
is more important than ever. Childcare workers need to be paid well and receive high quality training and education at no cost. Yes, providing quality childcare in a pandemic safe manner is substantially more costly than in typical times. Yet the need is more dire now than before, and so the fight to win it must be that much more vigorous.

The capitalist economic order gives women a raw deal. Before the pandemic, the wage gap in Canada was one of the largest (7th out of 37 countries) in the OECD with full-time working women making \$0.87 for the average man's dollar, and worse for women in marginalized groups. Like other injustices, the COVID pandemic blew existing wounds wide open. 1.5 million women in Canada lost their jobs in the first two months of the pandemic and their labour participation has dropped to levels not seen in decades. This historic drop in women's employment and income is reflected worldwide.

Women's liberation is a matter of substantively supporting caregivers, unshackling women at large from the expectation that they should be the ones to produce and support the workforce, while being in that workforce at the same time. This can only be achieved with a departure from the capitalist system that simultaneously requires the labour of social reproduction while being unable to pay for it without critically compromising profit. From this perspective, women's liberation and socialist liberation are one and the same.

# Police: A Tool of the Capitalist State Against Indigenous People

Allie Pev



During worldwide uprisings following the murder of George Floyd and Chantal Moore by police and one day before yet another Indigenous man, Rodney Levi, was killed by New Brunswick RCMP, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated the painfully obvious: “Systemic racism is an issue right across the country, in all our institutions,

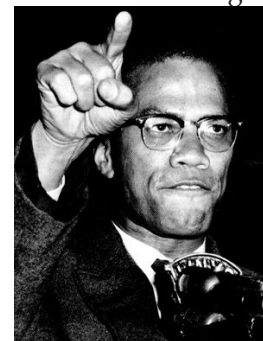
including in all our police forces, including in the RCMP.”

How could it not be an issue? The sole reason for the creation of the RCMP (originally called the North-West Mounted Police) was to clear Indigenous peoples from the plains. A staggering amount of land known as Rupert’s Land was sold by the Hudson’s Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada in 1869. Following this transaction, John A. Macdonald, through the North West Mounted Police, began violently removing Indigenous peoples from their lands and confining them to reserves to make way for the settlement of the West. Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont led a powerful resistance of Métis and First Nations peoples against the Canadian government, Canadian Pacific Railway, and land surveyors intent on claiming and developing the territory. Canadians like to tell themselves they have a kinder history than the US; slavery didn’t exist in Canada to the extent it did in America and the visibility of police brutality is starker in the US than it is in Canada. Canadian history is filled with the horrors of police and state sanctioned violence against Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC).

Police were involved in at least 460 fatal interactions with civilians across Canada between 2000 and 2017. 699 police officers were involved in these fatal interactions; 179 of those officers were RCMP, 89 were from the Toronto Police Service, 43 from Service de police de la Ville de Montreal and 39 from the Edmonton Police Service. Indigenous and members of the Black community are disproportionately represented in the fatalities, and in every interaction between police and prison. Black and Indigenous Vancouver residents are disproportionately stopped for street checks (police arbitrarily demanding and recording identification absent of any sort of police investigation). Indigenous people, although roughly 5 percent of Canada’s population, make up more than 30 percent of those in federal custody.

The police are a tool of the capitalist state to uphold the class division of society. “To Serve and Protect” is not a false statement, but it is misleading. Police serve capitalist property relations and protect the status quo for the ruling elite with absurd amounts of ever-increasing funds. In the past 10 years, the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) budget has grown more than \$100 million and education funding in BC has declined by over \$100 million. The VPD reported that they responded to more than 5,000 calls related to mental health in 2019 yet provincial mental health and substance use funding continues to be modest at best: \$26 million in 2020-2021. Compare this to VPD’s \$314 million 2020 budget. Albeit, the above examples draw from two different levels of government, it is clear that money in a capitalist society travels to the reactive side. From marginal funding increases for harm reduction to appallingly low income assistance rates, to the lack of affordable social housing across Canada, the desperately needed community supports are chronically underfunded.

Police culture is racist, violent, and rife with prejudice and unchecked power. Capitalism needs the police to enforce this systemic inequality and will continue to use racism to maintain its control. No amount of cultural competency training and reforms can mend this. Calls to defund the police from Socialist Alternative’s Seattle City Council Member Kshama Sawant and COPE’s successful motion: *Decriminalizing Poverty and Supporting Community-led Safety Initiatives* have begun an important dialogue about taking power from the police and back into community control. If the police were abolished under capitalism, another institution to oppress the working class would take its place. We must abolish the capitalist system that uses the police to enforce its rule.



**Malcolm X said “You can’t have capitalism without racism.”**

**Socialist Alternative Canada says:**

- **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**



# The Dire State of Canadian Youth

Kyle Fillo

While COVID-19 has slammed on the entire country's brakes, this sudden stop has been as severe for Canada's youth as nearly any other group. Young people across the country are working and living in some of the most precarious situations. Many have been halted in the middle of transitional periods, forced to forgo some newly found independence, or struggle on without even the meagre resources older Canadians have accumulated.

This is the second global economic recession/depression in these young lives. With outrageous home prices across the country, rapidly accumulating student debt, and an unbelievably uncertain job market, the future is bleak for young workers and students, and this is taking a toll on the mental health of all youth in Canada.

## Work

Even before COVID-19, the global economy was speeding towards a recession, and the subsequent months have seen a serious depression. For Canadian youth, in real terms, this means a ~25 percent unemployment rate as of July 2020. With jobs drying up across nearly all sectors, even jobs typically available to young people, like fast food, retail, and manual labour, will become increasingly competitive, as laid off adults scramble to find any employment they can.

It's also becoming increasingly clear that the federal government isn't going to play saviour here. As made evident by the Liberal WE scheme to pay student "volunteers" below minimum wage, Canadian federal leadership views this massive stockpile of youth labour as an easily exploitable group of desperate workers, rather than a valuable asset to put towards economic recovery and individual skills development.

## Study

Like young workers, students are facing uncharted waters, in a new school year unlike any before. The past decade has seen skyrocketing tuition and student debt, with the average nationwide debt for the graduating class of 2015-2016 of \$13,306 (Stats Canada). The 2020-2021 school year will incorporate radical structural changes to accompany this financial strain. Nearly all Canadian higher learning institutions will be operating purely online, throwing students and instructors into a hellish, alien, learning Zoomscape. Adding insult to injury, these distance video lectures will cost the same as regular classes, in spite of a general concern from professors that distance learning is a far inferior process and product.

These issues with distance learning are far more pronounced for the thousands of international

students than universities. Universities, desperate for their higher tuition fees, while governments have cut support for education, have sought to attract and retain these students. From concerns with border closures to their lack of support structures in Canada, international students are even more likely to suffer the effects of distance learning during a pandemic. When taken as a whole, the impact of COVID-19 on Canadian universities will likely be felt far into the future, with administrations across the country looking at the closure of physical campuses as a method for saving maintenance and utility expenses, along with the salaries of those who keep Canadian campuses running.

## Mental Health

The country is facing an unprecedented mental health crisis, including but not limited to economic, social, pandemics, technological, and obviously psychological factors, which will come down in full force on Canadian youth.

Along with immediate causes to deterioration of mental health, such as being forced back into childhood homes for quarantine and prolonged physical isolation from their peers, there is a more generalized mental health strain on younger generations. Generation Z, in particular, have an understanding that the global capitalist class, wringing the natural world of its resources, has burdened youth with catastrophic climate problems that the guilty parties won't live to see play out.

Whether it is a job market that is neither effective or efficient, educational institutions with a hand in their wallets and little care for quality education, or the climate crisis, Canada's youngest generations have been betrayed by capitalism and are quickly realizing that socialism is the only path forward to a future planet that is at least habitable, let alone equitable.





# Capitalism Made COVID a Disaster

Bill Hopwood

Capitalism turned the coronavirus into a huge disaster. COVID-19 was not an inevitable and unavoidable pandemic; capitalism made it more likely that a virus would cross to humans and did not prepare for that. Once the virus was known to be infecting humans the response was inadequate. Almost everything capitalism did and is doing made this virus far more deadly and damaging than it should have been.

Cutting forests for agriculture increases the interactions of humans and domesticated animals with wild animals, especially primates, bats and rodents. AIDS, Ebola, Yellow fever and COVID-19 are among many virus diseases that crossed from animals to humans. Deforestation is on the increase, opening more opportunities for viruses to jump to humans.

Capitalism boosted profits with just-in-time delivery and long supply chains that are easily disrupted. Canada imported all its N-95 masks. Most of the chemical building blocks of pharmaceuticals are made in China and India. COVID-19 wreaked havoc with this short-sighted approach.

Public health workers have been warning for years of new dangerous pandemics. These warnings were constantly ignored. There was no planning or preparations. Amazingly, Canada shut down its early warning system, Global Public Health Intelligence Network, in May 2019. Protective equipment stocks were rundown. To pay for tax cuts for the rich, public health systems were starved of funds. Canada's acute hospital beds were slashed, from 4.99 acute beds for every 1,000 people in 1976, to only 1.96 in 2018.

At the end of 2019, when it was known that the virus was infecting humans, China's ruling class, hoping to avoid hitting profits, repressed early whistle-blowers. Most governments around the world did too little, too late. If at the start, mass testing and tracing had been introduced, along with plentiful supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE), mass lockdowns could have been avoided. Lockdowns were proof that the first lines of action had not been implemented soon enough or in a decisive manner.

South Korea's first identified case was on January 20. By the end of January, the government directed the development of testing kits. In less than four weeks, thousands were being made daily, with mass testing starting in March.

Despite warnings in early January, including from Canada's military intelligence, it was at least two months later, when the horror of overwhelmed hospitals in Italy and Spain made the news, before Canada began to prepare for the pandemic. In the spring, hospitals were not overwhelmed, only because 400,000 surgical operations were postponed, with



long-term health impacts. It has taken many months for Canada to get to adequate levels of testing and there are fears that test materials are running low. There are still weaknesses in tracing.

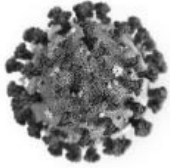
Canada, like most countries, did not put production for COVID on an emergency footing. The dire shortage of PPE dragged on for months as the government had endless discussions with business. In World War II, government directed companies to make whatever was needed for the war effort. The government should have done the same with COVID, ensuring plentiful supply of test kits, PPE and other needed equipment. If there was a shortage of labs to do the tests, it should have taken over private or university labs.

Essential workers were cheered, but governments did not raise the minimum wage. While hotels were closed, thousands continued to be homeless. In Ontario and Québec, private care homes were death traps with low-paid over-worked staff – no action was taken for months to give them decent pay and regular hours. Unsafe working conditions were allowed in the food industry. In industry after industry, the bosses' profits came before workers' health and lives.

Now the economy and schools are reopening. The same questions will be posed again. Have enough precautions been taken to be safe? Or will profits and cost-cutting take priority and re-boost COVID-19? So far, almost everywhere, reopening has started a second wave.

Canada only looks good because of the disaster in the US. But here, as elsewhere, capitalism made society vulnerable to COVID and the response to the outbreak has been woefully inadequate.

Capitalism cannot be trusted with our health.



As COVID-19 engulfed the Earth, most governments, including Canada's, failed to protect society. A rare few acted quickly and decisively to test, trace, isolate and provide personal protective equipment (PPE), managing without lockdowns 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 have reopened, even as cases surge, guaranteeing a second wave or the continuation of the first wave.

Multiple warnings from health professionals of pandemics were ignored. Because most countries had not prepared and did not act quickly, they were forced to lockdown society to prevent the collapse of health systems. Pre-existing conditions including underfunded and privatized health and care systems, long supply chains, and undermined social fabric all made COVID far worse. Capitalism turned a virus into a human disaster.

Now there is a race for a vaccination, with multiple research projects all in competition. A sane society would cooperate and share information. As private pharmaceutical companies see massive profits in a vaccine, they are striving to be first. Testing of possible vaccines for effectiveness, safety and side effects are all being curtailed; cutting corners is widespread. Much of the research funding is coming from the public purse, but the profits will go to private shareholders. Yet again, profits are put before human well-being.

### 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.

Canada is being hit hard by the depression. Spring 2020 saw the sharpest drop in history, with output falling by 38.7 percent, at an annualized rate. As the economy has reopened, unemployment has dropped from the peak but at over two million it is still double that of a year ago. Youth unemployment at nearly 25 percent, has doubled in a year. July's 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

# Triple Shock: COVID, Unemployment, Climate Change Change the System: For

usual hours, was 22.4 percent overall, and 34.7 percent for youth. Young people, women, immigrants, visible minorities and Indigenous people are all finding it harder than the average to get work.

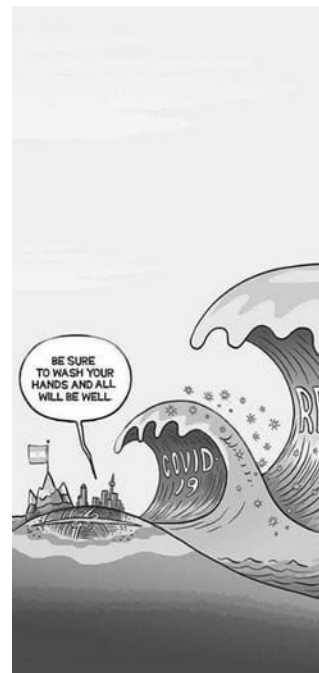
The media had some good news stories about the economy with summer reopening. Consumer spending bounced back to the start of the year. However, this boost will be temporary, as people are making up for not shopping for months. Consumer spending will inevitably take a hit as over a million have lost their jobs. Most workers are already up to their ears in debt and many more people are worried about the future, so even if they still have a job they will be more careful about spending and increasing their debt.

Large parts of the economy are unlikely to rebound such as tourism, hospitality, airlines, hotels, culture and retail. Many companies did not reduce their workforce, taking advantage of government wage supports. However, as this support ends and the new economic reality sets in, job losses will spread. Canadian and US banks, in spring, promised not to cut jobs in 2020. Now they have announced they will cut workers, demonstrating yet again that they are not to be trusted.

Canada's housing sales and construction are booming, with house prices up across the country. Behind this are low interest rates and the suppressed sales of the last few months, but this won't last. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has warned of a coming drop in sales and prices. This, in turn, will hit the construction industry, a key part of Canada's economy.

Prices for most raw materials, especially oil and gas, are down as the depression has hit demand. Many resource towns are suffering, and Alberta is reeling, aided by Kenney's incompetent policies.

The economy is driven by consumer, business and government spending. Consumer spending will not stay at pre-depression levels. Businesses only invest in new machinery, raw materials and buildings if they see profitable sales ahead. Even before the depression there was widespread overcapacity of production internationally. Canadian companies were not





# Employment and Climate Change

## Socialist Reconstruction



investing, instead they bought back shares and hid money in tax havens. Throwing money at the banks and businesses, as governments around the world have done, will not get the real economy going. It will only fuel more speculative bubbles.

Millions of small businesses are hanging by a thread and a second wave will be disastrous. The federal government's modest relief to working people of \$2,000 a month in CERB will be reduced, with an expansion of EI at a lesser amount. The pause on tenant evictions has now ended. We will then see the full force of the economic devastation. There could be waves of evictions and mortgage foreclosures.

Already the bankers, the rich and their friends are talking about new austerity and widespread privatizations to pay for the temporary measures. Such action would further damage living standards and weaken the economy.

### Not All in this Together

Politicians, companies and others say, "We are all in this together." Yet it is cruelly clear that this 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 have suffered. Big business is getting generous support from the Liberals while rent debts pile up.

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

Canada was a deeply unequal society 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 has had a devastating heat wave with raging fires. Verkhoyansk, in eastern Siberia, which holds the record for the coldest place in the Arctic circle, saw 38°C. Scientists are increasingly alarmed at the pace of change, which is faster than they had expected. 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 previous expectations.

Climate change is increasing the strength of, and damage caused by, storms, hurricanes and typhoons. 2020 is heading for a record year for Atlantic hurricanes.

The devastation of the climate disaster will not hit as fast as COVID but will be far worse and much harder to overcome.

Incredibly, big oil is lobbying for even bigger government hand-outs and for reduced environmental protection requirements. This must be opposed, and all government funds should be directed to convert to clean energy, refurbishing buildings, greening cities and environmental repair.

### Don't Reopen - Reconstruct Society

The talk is of reopening the economy, but it won't. People are not going to spend, and business is not going to invest. It will take ongoing and massive state action to revive the economy.

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 reopen that economy, we need a new economy.

All levels of government have a financial crisis, yet the rich are getting richer, while calling for massive cuts to government services. To reconstruct the economy, taxes on the super rich must be dramatically increased, along with closing all tax havens. Now is the time for federal wealth and inheritance taxes and for cities to bring in a Mansion Tax. Vital sections of the economy should be brought into public ownership so society can democratically plan to meet human needs and tackle climate change.

Major class battles lie ahead: defending services, stopping evictions and foreclosures, taxing the rich and changing society. Canadian union leaders have to move beyond words of criticism and prepare for solidarity and action to defend jobs, services and wages. Similarly, the NDP should raise 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 are providing good jobs, ending poverty and mass inequality, and protecting the environment. If you agree, why not join us.





Women's Protest 1930s

The world is in a Great Depression, possibly worse than the 1930s. Experts' predictions keep getting gloomier. In June the IMF projected that world GDP will contract by 4.9 percent, worse than its April forecast. The World Bank predicts a contraction of 5.2 percent. Their longer-term predictions all assume a swift control of COVID-19, an increasingly unrealistic view. The World Bank warns that "A downside scenario could lead the global economy to shrink by as much as 8 percent this year."

Job losses across many sectors will continue, especially in a second wave as a rash of bankruptcies and closures continue to spread. Construction has held up so far but will come to a halt as the depression hits home. Unemployment in some sectors will in turn hurt demand across the economy. In Canada, the brunt of this is being borne by low wage workers, particularly women (especially with young children), young people, visible minorities and Indigenous people. Many gig workers and other self-employed have seen their hours of work disappear.

Capitalist apologists claim that the economy was healthy in 2019, and that this recession has been caused by the external shock of COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdowns. This is not the case.

The pandemic is in no way "external" to capitalism. Capitalism turned the virus into a disaster. Governments did not prepare for a pandemic, weakened health systems and reopened too soon, putting profits over safety. In some countries workers had to choose between going to work, risking COVID, or stay home and starve. A democratic workers' government would have acted promptly to contain the virus.

### 2019: Recession Coming

The world economy was on the verge of a recession at the start of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic was the trigger that toppled the chronically weak economy. In October, 2019, the IMF was lowering its projections for global GDP, down to 3.2 percent for 2020. US was growing at under 2 percent, Europe around 1 percent,

Japan was arguably in recession, and even India and China, the fastest growing economies over the past decade, were slowing.

The widespread vulnerability existed before the pandemic shock. The fundamental weakness of the global economy is an excess of productive capacity, a decades' long trend leading to a chronically low rate of return on investment in manufacturing. There are too many factories making goods that cannot be sold for a profit. Of course, in a sane society, an abundance of goods would be positive news. Too much food, wine or clothes would mean people could take time off work and even celebrate. But, as capitalists are only interested in selling things for a profit, over-capacity is bad news.

The result of this profit squeeze in recent decades was a shift away from production in mature economies to outsourcing production to emerging economies where workers have worse wages and working conditions. As more emerging economies oriented themselves towards producing goods to be consumed in North America and Western Europe, global overcapacity increased and there was less reason to reinvest profits in new factories or machinery. In this situation some capitalists hoarded their money in offshore accounts, or speculated on the stock markets, in real estate and on mortgage debt.

In 2008 this speculative market crashed, triggering the Great Recession. The international response was coordinated action of ultra-low interest rates, huge cash bailouts of trillions of dollars to the banks and big business. Almost none of this money was re-invested in production; it fuelled more speculation and stock buybacks to raise share prices – and thereby, senior executives income. Rather than solving the fundamental problems, these policies have almost doubled corporate debt, and inflated more speculative bubbles.

### US - China Trade War

China had a major role following 2008, investing dramatically in infrastructure projects, and importing huge amounts of raw materials, semi-manufactured goods and machine tools. This boosted the economies





# Depression

Schweitzer

of nations who exported to China, from Brazil to Canada, Germany to Australia. Countries around the world, including Canada, pursued deeper trading relationships with China. Today, China's economy is not dynamic; it will only grow by one percent this year. It is awash with concrete and steel, with nothing left to build. Debt is now over 300 percent of GDP. Clearly, China will not be able to turn to the same solutions of a decade ago.

The mounting rivalries among the capitalists – US, China, Europe and Russia – makes a coordinated response to this depression unlikely. Instead, the growing trade wars will deepen the crisis, as happened in the 1930s.

A prerequisite for any significant recovery is a widely distributed vaccine. Even then, the deeper causes of the Depression will need to be tackled. The US experiment of economically coercing working people back to their jobs has driven up the rates of infections and deaths, while the economy has continued its historic contraction. The most that more responsible governments will be able to do is to run large deficits: subsidizing wages, and sending money directly to workers who are staying home.

## Debt

As long as interest on public debt does not exceed the rate of growth of GDP, a situation of deficit spending can be maintained. As the debt rises however, (and in mature economies it is already 122% of GDP, the highest in 150 years) the portion of its tax revenue a government spends on paying down interest continues to climb. This ratio, again in advanced economies, is already at 10%. The capitalists will always sacrifice public services first to cover this interest. However, if the ratio climbs too high this will limit tax breaks and handouts available to businesses, which will eat into corporate profits. No government can borrow indefinitely in a prolonged period of low growth without pushing the consequences either onto corporations by raising taxes, or onto the working class by inflation and austerity. As always, the degree to which either of these is implemented will be determined through class struggle.

Corporate debt is a more volatile



problem, especially in sectors of the economy that have been exposed by the pandemic such as retail, tourism, hospitality, and the energy industry. Alberta's oil sands production is at its lowest levels (4.4 million barrels per day) since 2016, shedding international investors and losing money on every barrel. Many retail corporations and restaurant chains are heavily indebted, and cannot long survive the reduced consumer spending. Corporate bankruptcy filings in 2020 are the worst since 2009.

With little incentive for capital to invest in these fragile, debt burdened sectors they are unlikely to recover to their pre-pandemic levels. Many workers who have lost their jobs will have to find new work in their fields, or in a new field altogether, often for lower wages. Most people are aware of the trouble the global economy is in, but thanks to emergency government benefits, emergency renter protections and mortgage deferral programs, the effects of this economic crisis are not yet being felt by many people. However, these protections and benefits will expire, leaving tenants burdened with new rent debts, and no job to return to.

## Public Planning Needed

Consumer demand has been hit hard by COVID and the depression; this will continue due to unemployment and fears for the future. Capitalists are unlikely to make major investments as future profits look slim. It will require massive state intervention – through increased public ownership, major increase of taxation of the super-rich and big corporations, and a jobs program – to provide well-paid union jobs that focus on meeting human needs and the environment.

The democratic control of work and society by workers and communities will be vital to avoid corruption and the formation of a new elite and also to take advantage of all the skills and knowledge of society.

The BLM and other recent protests show the explosive anger at the status quo in society. A prolonged depression will increase this to rage. A democratic campaign for a new society will win mass support and ensure that the working class does not pay for this crisis.



# World of Struggle Returns

Chris Fofonoff



International Socialist Alternative in Belarus

2019 was full of huge protests worldwide, a mass explosion of accumulated anger, which marked a definite political turning point. Protests and strikes against austerity and ruling-class political corruption, as well as for climate justice and women's rights, swept India, Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon, France, Chile, and dozens of countries. Many governments fell or made major concessions.

2020 is going to be even more consequential. It was clear at the start of this year that a major economic recession was approaching, though it was impossible to tell precisely what would trigger it and when. The world had never truly recovered from the 2007–08 Great Recession, with low economic growth rates, continued brutal austerity, and historic levels of inequality battering large parts of the globe.

The COVID-19 pandemic, of course, stymied mass protest for a time as workers sheltered themselves as best they could from the disaster that their capitalist governments had helped to unleash through their negligent and chaotic response to the virus. The working class across the world needed to reorient themselves to a new and dangerous situation – it wasn't immediately clear how best to express one's voice in a time of economic shutdown, exploding unemployment, and a deadly virus that passes easily from person to person.

But oppressed people have protested and fought through worse before, and the protests of 2019 have now returned in earnest. In many ways COVID-19 pressure-cooked the anger.

The brutal police murder of George Floyd sparked the huge resurgence of Black Lives Matter (BLM), with the largest wave of mass protest in US history. In May and June, between 15 and 26 million people

participated in 2,500 American cities and towns. In an amazing display of international solidarity and in resistance to racism worldwide, there were protests in at least 60 countries, including in dozens of Canadian cities and towns. The COVID-19 bubble was essentially burst, the need for public protest was too powerful.

The mass protests of 2019 in Lebanon, which overcame the deep sectarian divides and forced the resignation of the government, paused due to COVID. It re-emerged from the COVID lockdown in May. The Beirut explosion of 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, known to be dangerous but which the government did nothing about for six years, has driven the Lebanese people to fury. Demonstrators shouted, "All

of them means all of them," "Resign or Hang," and displayed mock gallows.

Belarus's dictator Lukashenko, in power for 26 years, rigged the recent elections. This provoked mass strikes in key factories and huge rallies that are shaking the country's elite.

Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali have had significant anti-government protests.

Government responses worldwide to COVID-19 were mostly slow and disjointed. They are reacting with similar confusion to the protests that are now remounting. Many, such as Trump and some US state governors in brutal response to the BLM protests, are resorting to violence and repression. China's repressive capitalist regime has moved forcefully to end any autonomy for Hong Kong with a draconian coup. While a significant setback for democracy in Hong Kong, it builds further internal crises for the Chinese regime.

State repression of protest can become more confident if not resisted. However, as Trump has discovered, repression does not always work; at times it can drive protests to even higher levels.

The capitalist class will try to make the working class pay for the economic depression with cuts to jobs, public services, and wages. The temporary income supports and pauses to evicting renters, where they exist, will come to an end. Ferocious struggles lie ahead, including around the ever-intensifying climate disaster, led especially by young people.

COVID and mass unemployment may slow the worldwide rebellion against capitalism, but only temporarily. World capitalism's future is instability and falling living standards. The risings of the coming months and years will be massive. They have the potential to be world changing.



# Hong Kong People a Pawn in US-China Rivalry

Tim Heffernan

For six years, Hong Kong has been a political hotspot. From the “umbrella” revolution of 2014, demanding universal suffrage, to the mobilizations against the proposed Extradition Bill allowing “criminals” to be extradited to mainland China, there have been many huge protests, involving hundreds of thousands and characterized by vicious police repression. In June 2019, almost two million, out of a population of seven million, demanded the withdrawal of this bill. Although the bill was withdrawn in October, the protests had widened to five democratic demands.

However, the struggle was not with Hong Kong’s Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, but with China’s rulers, the mis-named Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The people of one city against a mighty dictatorship.

In May, the Chinese dictatorship imposed a sweeping national security law, taking political control. The law’s sweeping powers use widely-defined terms of “subversion” and “separatism” to ban and imprison opposition activists and groups and make it a crime to say things like “down with the dictatorship.” Mainland Chinese secret police will operate legally in Hong Kong for the first time. Hong Kong’s limited political autonomy, “one country, two systems,” is effectively abolished.

## Chinese Regime

The clampdown on Hong Kong is part of the Chinese regime’s new approach, especially under Xi Jinping. Power in China has been concentrated around Xi, unlike in the past when the CCP had various checks on the leader. The gains of China’s 1949 revolution have long gone – the “iron rice bowl” of support smashed, and land and housing largely privatized. China is a capitalist country, with a large state role. According to Forbes, it has the second most billionaires in the world and many, including Xi, are part of the CCP leadership. The capitalist class and political rulers are one and the same.

The regime has mounting economic, political and environmental crises. This strong-man policy is sign of growing concerns about the future. Xi’s policy is strident Han-Chinese nationalism, increasing repression of minorities, and allowing no opposition. Making any concessions on Hong Kong would have been seen as a sign of weakness.

## New “Cold War”

The national security law will have huge implications globally, especially the likelihood of sanctions as part of the new US-China “Cold” War. The EU previously tried to balance between the US and China, but is increasingly lining up with the US’s position that China needs to be contained. This is about much more than Hong Kong, but about trade,



Huawei and technology. This is a new era of inter-imperialist rivalry

China has embarked on the road to a world economic, military and political super-power, with “wolf-warrior” diplomacy, and clashes and conflicts with India, Canada and Australia.

China will try to cushion itself against the Western backlash by speeding up its attempt to build a separate trading bloc from the US and EU through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This is an imperialist infrastructure program of loans and investment launched in 2013 in 70 countries. But BRI is in trouble because of the pandemic and global slump. There is growing opposition in many countries. Chinese loans account for six percent of global GDP, and many countries cannot repay these debts and are calling for writing them off.

## Illusions in China and the West

The repression in Hong Kong, alongside anti-China rhetoric of western politicians, will increase Hong Kongers’ illusions in the West. Although there is enormous anger at the CCP dictatorship, because of severe clampdown, people feel there is no way forward. Already some of the liberal democrat leaders have fled or gone silent. People in Hong Kong are looking for outside help. But US imperialism will exploit this only to further its own global aims – the people of Hong Kong, Taiwan or Belarus – all are seen as dispensable pawns.

On the other hand, some trade unionists and “left” activists continue to have illusions that China is socialist, and therefore refuse to criticize the Chinese regime and are influenced by propaganda that the Hong Kong protests are pro-American. The trade unions in Canada should do more to protest against China’s repression in Hong Kong, of the Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang, and in support of Chinese workers’ struggles.

An enemy of our enemy is not our friend. No support for either Trump or Xi.

**Canadian socialists should learn the facts and arguments about China. For information and news: [chinaworker.info/en/](http://chinaworker.info/en/)**

# US Workers Face Crises: Fight Back Coming

Rebecca Green



Despite making up only 5 percent of the global population, the US accounts for almost 25 percent of all COVID-19 fatalities. Tens of millions have lost their jobs and tens of millions

could face eviction. The Trump administration's criminal negligence is to blame, but the existing private healthcare system, decades of neoliberalism, the enormous wealth inequality, and precarity for America's working and poor were a rotten foundation when COVID-19 hit. The crisis has exposed the profound exploitation and inefficiency of US capitalism, leading workers and youth to fight back.

## From Bernie to BLM: Workers & Youth Fight Back

The 2016 and 2020 Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns inspired millions around a platform that represented working-class interests, from Medicare for All to a \$15/hr federal minimum wage and a Green New Deal. In his historic 2020 run, that broke fundraising records without accepting a dime of corporate cash, Sanders constantly reminded: "Not me, us!"

When the pandemic arrived, millions had just watched the Democratic Party establishment sabotage Sanders' campaign in favour of billionaire-backed Biden. Grocery workers began organizing for hazard pay. Nurses organized standouts for PPE. Amazon warehouse, fast food, and retail workers walked out over unsafe conditions. Educators threatened strike action to prevent unsafe re-openings of schools. Tenants began to organize for rent reductions, cancellations, and eviction defense. When George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police, millions took to the streets to demand an end to police terror and racism in the biggest protest movement in US history. Bus drivers, longshore and grocery workers organized work stoppages in solidarity with the protests. The demand to defund the police to refund social services and education took hold in cities across the country.

## 2020 Elections & the Path to a New Party

While the working class has started to stretch its muscles after decades of being on the back foot, the ruling class is ramping up its assaults. While the early phase of the pandemic was marked by substantial direct aid to workers through enhanced unemployment benefits and stimulus checks, this aid now hangs in the

balance. Congress initially extended unemployment benefits, a lifeline for millions that propped up the US economy, but this assistance lapsed at the end of July and no new stimulus has passed Congress. Hazard pay from major corporations in many places has been taken back, even as COVID-19 infections soar.

Trump's approach to his 2020 re-election has become clear. He intends to run a "law and order" campaign by painting a picture of street violence driven by anarchists in Democratic-run cities. Meanwhile it's the police and right-wing vigilantes who are behind the violence on the streets of Portland and Kenosha, and other cities. US workers urgently need to organize to defeat Trump, the right, and the billionaire class. Out of an understandable desperation to get rid of Trump, many are planning to hold their nose and vote for Biden who leads significantly in polls (although the gap has narrowed recently). But the Democratic National Convention that featured four Republican speakers (and only AOC from the left-wing of the party), and failed to include Medicare for All, a Green New Deal or a \$15 federal minimum wage, should be a dire warning that the Democratic Party has stopped pretending to be a party for working people. Under a Biden presidency, when the Democrats can no longer blame the Republicans, and during an unprecedented health, economic, and climate crisis, the potential for explosive struggle and the emergence of a new left party are squarely on the table.

To address the immediate catastrophe before us, and the underlying crisis of poverty, racism, and exploitation facing the US working class, we need to build upon workplace organizing and movements against racism and oppression. Only the self-organization of the working class and the fight for a democratically-run socialist society can end this hellscape.



Koshu Kunii. Trump's Repression in Portland, claiming to be "Law and Order"



# Amazon TAXED!

Logan Swan

In July, the Tax Amazon movement and Seattle's working class won a historic victory. Following a three-year struggle against the richest man in the world – Amazon boss Jeff Bezos – and the local political establishment beholden to him, workers won a tax on big business that will raise \$210-240 million a year, creating tens of thousands of green union jobs by building affordable housing.

This victory came in the midst of pandemic-triggered budget shortfalls and massive cuts to public services across the country. Instead of playing defence against austerity, we went on the offence to force big business to pay. Now, the momentum of this victory needs to be spread around the country, and the world.

## How Did We Get Here?

In 2018, Socialist Alternative launched the Tax Amazon movement and, with Marxist City Councillor Kshama Sawant, built a campaign coalition of community groups and labour organizations. The movement pressured City Council to pass a \$47 million tax, but it was shamefully repealed a month later after Amazon and other big business interests launched a counter offensive.

In a bid to prevent a similar tax in the future, Amazon and big business flooded the 2019 City Council elections with over \$4 million supporting Amazon-friendly candidates. Their main target: Socialist Alternative member Sawant, who ran on a rent control, a Green New Deal and a new Amazon Tax, and was re-elected to a third term in office.

Coming off of this victory, Socialist Alternative and Councillor Sawant's office launched a series of mass democratic Tax Amazon "Action Conferences" in coordination with progressive unions, community organizations, the Democratic Socialists of America, and environmental, tenant, and homeless advocacy groups. These public assemblies discussed and voted on the direction of the movement, launching a ballot initiative to pressure the City Council to pass the tax and about where the proceeds should be spent.

## Building the Movement During a Pandemic

Despite the huge challenges the pandemic posed to ballot signature gathering, and Washington State's refusal to accept digital signatures, hundreds of volunteers participated in COVID-19 safe door knocking and tabling. As the movement persisted in signature gathering, COVID-19 continued to spread, tens of millions lost their jobs and hundreds of thousands unnecessarily died. Amazon and other major corporations made record profits.

Growing unrest in society exploded when George Floyd was brutally murdered. The struggle focused on racism and the role of the police, but many understood



that racism denies working and poor people of all colours affordable housing, jobs, decent wages and basic dignity.

In just 20 days, volunteers collected 20,000 signatures from the angry and hopeful thousands in the streets! Smashing the inequality and poverty of racism means taking from those who have benefited from this oppression – the capitalist class – to pay for affordable housing to reverse racist gentrification. This renewed momentum pushed the total signatures to 30,000 by early July, enough to qualify for the ballot.

Under this pressure the Democratic establishment came to the bargaining table, offering a \$173 million annual Amazon Tax with a ten-year expiration. Continued pressure won another \$40 million and the expiration extended to twenty years.

## The Role of Socialist Alternative

This victory did not come from shady negotiations between corporate giants and their paid-for politicians. It happened because of the self-organization of working people through the Tax Amazon movement around a class struggle strategy led by socialists.

There is nothing unique about Seattle that made this battle easier. The critical factor was a Marxist on Seattle City Council who bases herself on movement-building. Kshama Sawant used her council seat to build the Tax Amazon movement from below to pressure the political establishment, all while pointing to the enormous crisis of capitalism and need for independent organization of the working class.

Elsewhere, working people in cities facing major deficits will need to wage battles to win business taxes. The self-sacrificing working class and young people who wage these battles will be most effective if we recognize that neither corporate party is on our side, and that we need to build our own power and independent organization in order to win.

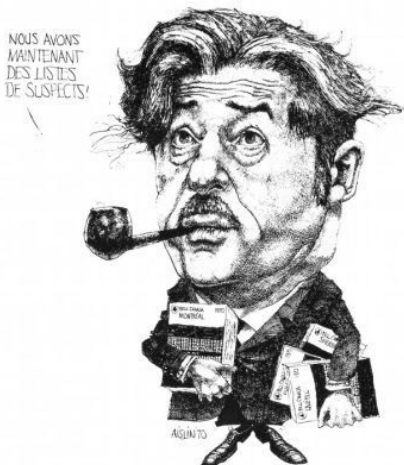


For information on the US and Socialist

Alternative: [www.socialistalternative.org](http://www.socialistalternative.org)

# October Crisis, 1970

Martin LeBrun



by Aislin. Federal Minister Marchand holds phone books, saying “We now have a list of suspects.”

On October 16, 1970, Liberal PM Pierre Trudeau enacted the War Measures Act, its only usage in peacetime. Québec was flooded with 6,000 armed troops. The Act suspended democratic rights, allowed censorship, and authorized the police to search and arrest people without warrant.

The spur for this huge attack was the Quebec Liberation Front’s (FLQ) abduction of British diplomat James Cross on October 5. When the government refused to release jailed FLQ members and send the kidnappers overseas, the FLQ kidnapped Québec minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte on October 10.

The Act stated it could only “be in force during war, invasion, or insurrection.” The Québec and Canadian governments claimed they faced an insurrection.

FLQ, with about 30 members, was a left-wing nationalist terrorist organization, founded in 1963, which saw bombing symbols of federalism as a means of advancing Québec nationalism. The attacks left one person dead, 20 injured and most FLQ members in prison. Kidnapping was a new tactic. After the kidnappings, a few thousand gathered in support of FLQ slogans. Hardly an insurrection.

Over 3,000 homes and buildings were searched, and 497 people detained. Detainees were held for a week on average, often with no contact with the outside world. Freedom of the press ceased during the crisis, with the RCMP intimidating editors, and interrogating and detaining prominent journalists. Some of the people detained were sympathizers of the FLQ, but many were union members, journalists, artists and writers. Only 18 were criminally charged.

Outside of Québec, the RCMP raided left-wing activists’ homes and offices. BC passed an order to fire any educator advocating “the policies of the FLQ,” without specifying these policies.

Only the NDP voted against the Act, with Tommy Douglas correctly pointing out that the government “is using a sledgehammer to crack a peanut.” Every major

English language newspaper in Canada supported it. Québec media was divided. Most French Canadians opposed the FLQ’s methods. Québec’s unions and the Parti Quebecois (PQ) called for the repeal of the Act.

Laporte was found murdered, his killers captured and jailed. Cross was released and his kidnappers flown to Cuba. The War Measures Act and the troops in Québec were in place until early 1971.

## Significance

Trudeau, the “champion of civil liberties,” did the most in modern times to crush civil rights. The October crisis demonstrated the undemocratic core of Canada’s government. Why did Trudeau use a “sledgehammer?” Equally concerning as the FLQ was to the Québec and federal governments, were the much wider and more powerful changes of the Quiet Revolution – a nationalist and class movement that transformed Québec from the most right-wing, priest-ridden part of Canada to the most left-wing.

In the 1960s, there were rising anti-colonial, labour and social movements internationally, including in Québec. In the late 1960s, terrorism became popular among left and nationalist students and intellectuals. This was a disaster as it substituted small groups for mass democratic movements and inevitably led to both increased repression and popular hostility to the tactics, and often the ideology behind the tactics.

After nearly 20 years of the staunchly Catholic and right-wing Premier, Duplessis, the Liberals won the 1960 election and were pushed by many struggles to bring in changes. There was an explosion of unionization and some of North America’s most militant union battles. This “Quiet Revolution” separated Church and State, including ending religious education. School funding quintupled, Hydro-Quebec was nationalized, and universal healthcare and a provincial pension plan were implemented.

In 1970, the major trade union federations (FTQ, CSN, CEQ) created the Front d’action politique (FRAP) pointing to a mass workers’ party. Montreal’s authoritarian mayor Jean Drapeau used the October crisis to smear FRAP as associated with the FLQ, which weakened FRAP and helped boost the PQ, a non-working-class party, to dominate sovereigntist politics. In 1972 the unions formed a Common Front with a 200,000 strong strike. Workers won a significant hike in the minimum wage, paid maternity leave and universal daycare.

It was the workers’ mass movements that made change in Québec, not a small group of terrorists. The working class isn’t done putting its stamp on Québec history.

**For more information on Québec and Alternative Socialiste: [alternativesocialiste.org](http://alternativesocialiste.org)**



# Kenney's Assault on Alberta Continues

Jared and Laura Blustein

Alberta has a long history of community support, cooperatives and working-class struggle. Yet, the United Conservative Party (UCP) government is set to dismember and undersell our province's wealth and security, bankrupting current and future generations.

If good timing is vital to comedy, Premier Kenney is no comedian. At the start of the global pandemic he picked a fight with the province's doctors, cancelling their pay agreement, resulting in close to 40 percent of them now looking to leave the province. Doctors are worried about growing privatization and the resiliency of the health care system with rising COVID-19 infections.

Kenney announced a \$100 million proposal to build the largest private surgical facility in Alberta, aiming to replace the legacy of Tommy Douglas with a US-style health system. The deal lacks transparency, with widespread corporate lobbying, and could result in massive debt and inadequate health care.

In another act of absurd timing, the UCP paid \$1.5 billion for a share of the Keystone pipeline, which may well never be built. Oil prices have hit rock bottom and every barrel from the oil patch is selling at a loss. Alberta is in a deep recession. The \$1.5 billion is needed to support workers and public services – instead the UCP is cutting education and health care staff.

In classic double-speak, Kenney claims to depoliticize the school curriculum with a homophobic, racist, right-wing advisor, Chris Champion, who thinks including Indigenous perspectives in lessons is a fad and questions the suffering of residential school survivors. The province has rushed to send teachers and students back to school. There is no extra money for smaller class sizes, extra teachers or more cleaners.

With Alberta having Canada's highest number of COVID cases by population for most of the summer, parents, students and teachers are rightly worried.

Kenney is ending a decades-old restriction on coal mining in parts of the Rocky Mountains and Foothills. This was done without First Nations' consultation, breaking treaty obligations, and with utter disregard for the environment. This is especially frustrating given the potential for geothermal, solar and wind energy, which would create lasting employment and sustained energy sovereignty.

Alberta is hurting. The province's unemployment rate is the second highest in the nation and the province's future hangs in the air. Yet, Kenney speeds up tax cuts for big business (projected savings for Alberta's big five oil companies are around \$4.3 billion) despite Alberta already having the lowest corporate tax rate and a runaway deficit, heading to \$24 billion this year.

The government rolls out new attack legislation at a record pace. Bill 1 restricts fundamental rights to peacefully assemble and protest. Bill 30 allows for the privatization of public health services, placing the emphasis on profit rather than patient care quality. Bill 32 aims to undermine unions' democratic rights by dismantling their collective power.

Alberta is increasingly ready for fundamental change.



## Housing Disaster (from back page)

Low income people, overwhelmingly renters, have been hit hardest by COVID-19 and the pandemic. Under no circumstances should the burden of repaying missed rent be placed on tenants. Landlords cannot expect that their rent be guaranteed in full when the income of their tenants has not been guaranteed in full. Furthermore, the pandemic is not over, and we are in the middle of a recession. Many tenants who are returning to work face reduced hours or wages, making it a burden even to resume paying rent as before.

The ending of the eviction moratorium provides a perfect legal opportunity for landlords to evict tenants en masse. This will result in thousands of people being thrown onto the streets in cities across the country, adding to the homeless crisis that was not tackled during COVID.

To the capitalists, housing was never about homes: it was about profits. Construction and housing sales are key parts of the economy. Although rents have dropped slightly, rent remains expensive in major cities. House prices have gone up in the last couple of months. But at some point, housing sales and construction will be hit by mass unemployment. Also, unemployed workers may not be able to keep up with the mortgage payments, leading to foreclosures.

Governments must immediately extend renters' protection from evictions. Canada has over one million empty properties; these should be taken over to house people, as is happening in Barcelona. Now is the time, as part of a jobs program, to launch a national drive to build 50,000 units a year of good quality social housing, using union labour. To ensure housing is a right, it has to be taken out of the control of the capitalist market.



## *Ray Goerke and Salman Zafar*

Housing is far from a human right in Canada, and COVID-19 has made a precarious situation even worse. If you are unable to pay your rent, you are looking at the very real possibility of eviction. Protections put in place due to the pandemic are being lifted across the country, which exposes millions of people to being thrown onto the streets.

The newly passed Bill 184 in Ontario makes it easier for landlords to evict tenants, allowing the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) to issue eviction orders without a hearing. The Ontario government argues that the bill encourages the use of alternatives and negotiated settlements between tenants and landlords. However, many tenants will not be in a position to afford the repayment plans proposed by landlords following months of unemployment caused by the pandemic.

In PEI, the court order to halt evictions expired on June 15, 2020 and the provincial government did not pursue renewing it, citing “few individuals raised the issue to the Justice and Public Safety Ministry” as an excuse.

In Québec, there were more than 6,000 applications in July for evictions due to non-payment of rent. Now that the provincial moratorium on evicting tenants has expired, the number will only go up.

In BC, the eviction ban expires on September 1 and the government is implementing a repayment plan to allow tenants until July 2021 to repay owed rent, but similar to Ontario’s Bill 184, how does a worker who has been unemployed due to the pandemic, pay for owed rent with no stable income? In BC, 88,000 households, 15 percent of renters, have accumulated rent debt during the pandemic. The rent payback is in reality a rent increase for tenants.

Across the country, organizations of tenants are already protesting the actions (or inaction) of their provincial governments and preparing for the looming wave of evictions. Hundreds of protesters gathered at the provincial legislature in Ontario to protest Bill 184 and called for Toronto Mayor John Tory to take action to protect tenants. In BC, the Vancouver Tenants Union (VTU) organized a mass letter-writing campaign to pressure Minister Selina Robinson to change the government’s position. The Nova Scotia Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) organized a rally at the legislature in Halifax to demand tenant protections. Organizations like the VTU and Keep Your Rent in Toronto are organizing networks of tenants in their cities to coordinate resistance to mass evictions in the coming weeks.