



The severity of the coronavirus crisis and its consequences has opened a debate about what the world will look like after the pandemic. Dozens of articles are being written. Some are betting on a supposed return of the “role of the state” and a better “redistribution of wealth”. Others warn that we could already be on the road to strengthening authoritarianism.

By Miguel Sorans, a leader of the Socialist Left and the IWU-FI

The severity of the crisis is not in dispute. First, the pandemic. Millions infected in 185 countries and over 100,000 dead. In the second place, the social consequences on the peoples of the world are serious, with millions out of work or receiving reduced salaries because of the nefarious role of the world’s big businessmen and bankers. With millions who have no access to daily food, or water to wash their hands. The economic and social crisis of capitalism will deepen. Many say that the crisis will be like the capitalist crash of 1929. But in reality, we come from the crisis of 2007/08 which was equal to or greater than that of 1929. And now the head of the IMF, Kristalina Georgieva, warns “that the world is in a worse recession than in the crisis of 2008” (Clarín, Argentina, 26 March 2020). The very leaders of world imperialism tell us we are already living through the worst crisis of the capitalist economy in its history. For the first time, we can say that the capitalist world is almost at a standstill. Those at the top tell us it is because of the pandemic. Yes and no. Because, in reality, the coronavirus came to deepen the crisis of the economy that already existed. By the end of December 2019, we were already on the verge of a new global recession.

Would we be moving towards a better world?

“If there is a positive side to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that it has injected a sense of unity

into polarised societies. To the surprise of many, this was said in an editorial in the British newspaper Financial Times. Such is the degree of the crisis that some imperialism spokespersons seek to give an optimistic and “solidarity-based” version of capitalism. They claim that: “Redistribution will be back on the agenda. The privileges of the rich and elderly are at issue. Policies until recently considered eccentric, such as basic taxes on income and wealth, will have to be in the mix” (BAE Business, 5 April 2020). Others, like Joseph Stiglitz or the American economist Carmen Reinhart, propose a “collaboration” of the rich countries by granting, for example, a moratorium on foreign debts.

Because of the seriousness of the crisis and the social upheavals that could be created, there are bourgeois sectors that propose some palliatives to cushion the debacle that is being experienced. We cannot even rule out that some exceptional measure will be implemented because of the crisis and social pressure. But there will be no fundamental improvements, nor progress for the working class and the popular sectors. Over 50 million new unemployed are already announced in the world. Imperialism and the multinationals will once again try to unload the crisis onto the backs of the masses, with new plans of adjustment, plunder and exploitation. The only change, the only redistribution of wealth in favour of the people, will come from the struggle to impose workers’ governments all over the world.

The danger of a more authoritarian world?

At the immediate juncture, governments are taking advantage of the pandemic and quarantine to demobilise the masses. For this, governments are appealing to national unity and, in other cases, to the militarisation of the crisis, sharpening the authoritarian features of many regimes and governments.

The health crisis has increased the role of the armed forces (distributing food, setting up hospitals, making transfers) and the police in controlling quarantines. Virtual control has also grown. It is estimated that some 40 countries use mobile phone tracking systems and various applications to monitor quarantines or follow personal movements and contacts, in China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Russia, Israel, the United States and many European Union countries. Eight major European operators, including Telefonica, will provide the European Commission with location data of their mobile phone customers.

There is a danger that after the pandemic, all this will be used against peoples who rebel or to

prevent them from doing so. This is not a new trend. Already before there were advances by ultra-reactionary and authoritarian governments (Trump, Bolsonaro, Erdogan, Putin, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela or the dictator Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines). Or the repression in Chile of the carabineros (police force) on the mobilisations against Piñera. But it remains to be seen whether the authoritarian regimes will prevail. Because what predominated before the coronavirus crisis was the tendency to political destabilisation of capitalist regimes and governments by popular mobilisations. At the beginning of the coronavirus, there was a revolutionary wave of a struggle that was shaking the world. Part of that wave was the popular rebellions in Chile, in Lebanon or the workers' strike in France. There doesn't seem to be a structural setback in the willingness to mobilise, but a short-term realignment of the mass movement, which adjusts to the quarantine situation to avoid the contagion. For now, there are no mass mobilisations, but there are strikes or partial protests to demand health security in the pandemic's face or against layoffs and wage cuts. But once the coronavirus is over, there may be new mobilisations or popular rebellions in many parts of the world against the social and economic consequences of the coronavirus crisis. This is what we revolutionary socialists are preparing for.

Henry Kissinger's justified fears

Perhaps the person who has best reflected this possibility, of a world with new and greater social confrontations that question the capitalist-imperialist system, has been Henry Kissinger, one of the historical references of imperialism.

The former chancellor of Richard Nixon, who started the rapprochement of Mao's China to U.S. imperialism (1972), and who suffered the defeat of the Vietnam War (1975), published an opinion column in The Wall Street Journal ([https://www.wsj.com/ .../the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever...](https://www.wsj.com/.../the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-forever...)).

“When the COVID-19 pandemic is over, many countries' institutions will be perceived as having failed,” he predicted. “The historic challenge for leaders is to manage the crisis while building the future. Failure could set the world on fire,” he warned. Kissinger, at 96, remains lucid in his defence of the system. He knows that people are visualising the debacle: “institutions will be perceived as having failed. And that the world “could burn”. That is why in that same article he advises that “Programs should also seek to ameliorate the effects of impending chaos on the world's most vulnerable populations.”

His fear, as a faithful representative of the world's oligarchies, is justified because Kissinger knows about the wave of rebellions that have been taking place since 2019. He knows that the people are fed up with capitalist austerity plans and the growth of poverty and exploitation. Kissinger and company fear this possible "raging fire" of the people's rebellions. Social confrontation is posed as a hypothesis based on reality. The post-Coronavirus world will be the aggravated continuity of everything we know today about capitalism. That is why from the IWU-FI we have called for "the broadest unity of action of the workers, popular, youth, women's and environmental organisations, and the anti-capitalist and socialist left, to coordinate a movement of the international struggle for the workers and a popular emergency plan towards a fierce struggle to end this capitalist-imperialist system and impose governments of the working class and the people" (International Call, March 2020. www.uit-ci.org). Changes can only come from the mobilisation of the working class and the people.

14 April 2020