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What to watch during
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PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT



Nurses protesting the lack of protective equipment in the US.

photo: National Nurses United (NNU)

Covid-19: capitalism has a (final) solution—drop dead

Let me introduce you to Scott McMillan, an attorney from Southern California. Maybe not a famous person, but Scott gets it.

He tweeted to his few hundred followers: “The fundamental problem is whether we are going to tank the entire economy to save 2.5% of the population which is 1) generally expensive to maintain and 2) not productive.”

And that comrades and friends is how you become a twitter superstar. You get retweeted by IMPOTUS Trump and even big Hollywood stars like James Woods.

Scott just said out loud what a significant portion of the world ruling class is thinking and – worse – doing.

The stock market – a shorthand symbol for profitability – is more important than people’s lives.

As Joseph Choonara writes in his excellent essay “Socialism in a time of pandemics”: “Above all, a pandemic on this scale intensifies the pre-existing fault lines of capitalism. At the most basic level it poses a choice: defend profits or save lives. The indications, thus far, are that the former has been the overriding priority for those presiding over the system.”

Profit over people

Trump tweets: “Our people want to return to work. They will practice Social Distancing and all else and Seniors will be watched over protectively & lovingly. We can do two things together. THE CURE CANNOT BE WORSE (by far) THAN THE PROBLEM! Congress MUST ACT NOW. We will come back strong.”

In Trump’s world it is possible to get a square peg into a round hole. As nonsensical as his statement was, it had the desired effect. The Dow Jones stock market rose immediately.

TV pundit Glenn Beck said “Even if we all get sick, I’d rather die than kill the country.” He proposes young people stay home and people over 50

go out and work. “It’s not the economy that’s dying, it’s the country.”

On the Tucker Carlson show on Fox News, the Lt. Governor of Texas, Dan Patrick had this to say in defence of Trump’s actions/inaction in the face of the coronavirus contagion (forgive me if I quote him at length): “No one reached out to me as a senior citizen, are you willing to take a chance on your survival in exchange for keeping the America that all America loves for your children and grandchildren. And if that’s the exchange, I’m all in. And that doesn’t make me noble or brave or anything like that, I just think there are lots of grandparents out there like me – I have 6 grandchildren – what we all love more than anything and what we



all care about is those children...

“We can’t lose our whole country. We’re having an economic collapse. I’m also a small businessman so I understand it... So, my heart is lifted tonight by what I heard the President say: we can do more than one thing at a time.

“My message is, let’s get back to work, let’s get back to living, let’s be smart about it and those of us who are 70 plus, we’ll take care of ourselves.”

Whether they set the bar at 50 or 70, at least they don’t mince words. They are talking about mass murder—allowing preventable death seems like murder to me. Human sacrifice. A geriatric genocide. Made somehow less heinous by the fact (or,

given how pandemics actually work, the fantasy) that only useless old bed-blockers will be culled.

Quite a message, but nothing new. Back in the day (1729 to be precise) an Irish writer named Jonathan Swift satirized people like Patrick and McMillan in a pamphlet called “A Modest Proposal: for preventing the children of the poor people in Ireland, from being a burden on their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the publick”. Spoiler alert: the proposal was to eat babies. Not raw! Not raw! We’ll cook them first.

Swift’s attack was only a slight exaggeration of the opinions of a section of the emerging Irish and English ruling class—the capitalists—regarding famine, dispossession of peasantry from the land and general social crisis: let the excess population die.

A generation later Charles Dickens personified these opinions in the character of Ebenezer Scrooge: “If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

I suspect and hope that somewhere, in our quarantined existence, our Swift, our Dickens is hard at work. I don’t envy them – with living examples like Trump satire becomes more and more impossible.

So, when you see blood-suckers like Conrad Black huffing and puffing about how Canada should follow Trump’s lead, forget the pandemic “hysteria” and get back to work, remember: this is a man who made a career out of downsizing and destroying working people’s lives. He likes to call human sacrifice “drowning the kittens.”

HillTV’s Krystal Ball recently tweeted: “Which stage of capitalism is it where we sacrifice our grandparents for the good of the stock market?”

It is a trick question because the correct answer is “Every stage of capitalism.”

Bail out workers, not big business

by Zain ul Haq

As the crisis of capitalism in Canada intensifies under the Covid-19 pandemic, the mass of workers under capitalism are yet again found at an organizational disadvantage, compared to their class enemies. At a time when even many left, centrist and liberal segments of our population are considering the temporary suspension of capitalism as we know it, capitalists are using this as an opportunity to sink their claws ever deeper into their already illegitimate grip on power. The federal government bailout is a prime example.

The bailout takes the form of \$82 billion in total (1% of the GDP), with \$27 billion in direct support and \$55 billion for businesses. Meanwhile, oil and gas business CEOs in Alberta have penned a rather shamelessly opportunistic letter to Trudeau, that in some places resembles a ransom letter and it ought to be regarded as such. The Globe and Mail points out that the letter includes demands to suspend the federal carbon tax, along with a demand for no interest loans and a suspension of income tax.

The letter also reads, “Our companies represent over 100,000 Canadian workers”. This is a sinister combination of desperation and self-righteousness. One would have to work hard not to recognize the threatening tone of these demands and what this would mean for the both the environment and the increasing inequality. What’s really being said is that if the income tax isn’t squashed and their demands not met, things won’t be very good for the 100,000 workers.

The US government has already adopted the logic of these lobbying efforts, by, unsurprisingly, getting rid of all environmental regulations for now. This shows what socialists have been asserting forever, which is that a small group of people at the top make decisions that the mass of people have to live with and have no say in. It is an anti-democratic system.

The likely amount of the oil industry bailout will be around \$15 billion.

For workers there is Temporary Income Support and Employment Insurance, for which there have been over 900,000 applications already, which is going to take effect in April. This has to be seen as bread crumbs for the working class for

these measures are barely enough to keep workers afloat. The standard one week waiting period has been eliminated for workers in quarantine seeking EI health benefits, however, these measures have not been extended to Canadian workers who are underemployed.

The measures being taken by the federal government to bail out the mass of people are significantly smaller than the measures being taken to bailout capitalist enterprises. One has to realize the unjust nature of the principle behind the bailouts. Throughout the history of capitalism, the mass of people have constantly bailed out private corporations that are ultimately unaccountable to the public, are totalitarian in their nature and are almost guaranteed to come back crying for a public bailout in another decade. The principle is the



following: the people must pay for this system to survive, but the people shall have no say in how this system functions, or whether this system should exist at all, in other words, it’s not optional. A logical evaluation of the crisis would suggest that if the economy is to be paid for by the public, then it should be owned by the public. The bailout of the business sector should include conditions for how enterprises are to function in the future.

Layoffs will be plentiful and have already begun, the retirement savings of older citizens are likely to be severely reduced, if not gone. As Trudeau had to acknowledge himself, as reported by the Star: “We recognize that market disruptions are massive and many Canadians have seen their retirement savings and pensions reduced significantly. We will be taking measures to ease the impact of that”.

We have yet to see actions by the government that will ensure that in the future, businesses function in a manner so that that the damage done by crises like this one is minimal. This can only happen through permanently increased public oversight.

Alberta attacks public service

Jason Kenney’s UCP government is using the Covid-19 emergency to destroy public services in Alberta.

While people are distracted by the health crisis and divided by the need to self-isolate, Kenney has attacked doctors, front line health workers, teachers, and public servants across the board.

Kenney has been in neo-liberal attack mode since election: one of his first acts was to set up a “War Room”, funded at \$30 million, to attack environmentalists, Indigenous activists, or anyone else who spoke a nasty word about the tar sands.

He and his ministers did all they could to encourage vigilante right-wingers like the Yellow Vests to attack actions in solidarity with

the Wet’suwet’en land claims.

Then, even as the selling price of Alberta oil plummeted, Kenney introduced a budget based on the laughable assumption that the price of oil would stabilize at \$58/barrel.

At the time of writing tar sands oil is selling for \$3.82/barrel.

The “crisis” created by Kenney’s irresponsible budget give him the excuse to do what he always wanted to do—slash public services.

Health

Even before the budget, Kenney attacked doctors. In February this “rule of law” premier simply ripped up the existing contract with doctors. Instead of negotiating he brought in legislation designed to re-

duce the number of family doctors. The number of patients a doctor could see was capped. Crucially, the “complex modifier”, which allowed doctors to spend more time (and bill the government more) for patients with complex issues, was struck down.

“Albertans aren’t that complex,” said Health Minister Tyler Sandro.

In the February 27 budget, as the Covid-19 threat was rising exponentially, Kenney cut health spending by \$220 million. That would result in 500 fewer nurses. Granted, late in March as the bodies and criticism started to stack up, the looming nurse layoffs were postponed and \$500 million found for health. But almost half of that just replaces pre-

vious cuts, leaving just \$280 million as new money.

Shandemic

In the midst of this, Health Minister Shandro became the poster-boy for the UCP privatization agenda. He and his wife own a private health services and insurance company called Vital Partners. VP covers services that Minister Shandro just delisted—what a coincidence.

Angry doctors pointed to the gross conflict of interest. One posted a mildly critical meme. Mr. and Mrs. Shandro responded by going to the man’s home and throwing a fit in his driveway. Shandro has yet to apologize, citing on-line threats directed toward his wife that have

oddly never been made public. And Jason Kenney has resisted calls for his resignation.

Job slaughter

In recent weeks, as Albertans have face uncertainty about health, wages and rent, Kenney and crew have laid off 26000 teachers, education support workers and health workers. They’ve used the pandemic as an excuse to slash jobs.

Meanwhile the province has invested an additional \$1.5 billion in the Keystone XL pipeline, with an additional \$6 billion loan guarantee for next year. Kenney claims it is about creating 5000 jobs – about a quarter of the jobs he has killed in the education sector.

Ford gaslights students

by Pam Johnson

Doug Ford calling his government's meagre announcement of a loan deferral for six months a 'support' for students would be laughable if it wasn't so pitiful. Ford's shameless attempt to use the pandemic to suggest he supports students is gaslighting at its worst.

His government ended grant programs and forced loans on to students, increasing their already exorbitant debt burden. This crumb will not reduce stress for students who were already stressed by the pressure to get a degree at high cost, face a disintegrating job market and climate catastrophe to boot.

Students have been forced to make a sudden shift to an entirely remotely taught curriculum, and many students were also kicked out of their residences. International students who pay double or more the tuition costs of domestic students are especially impacted with no access to the campus.

'It is not practical for universities to pressure students to focus on assignments while they are faced with concerns over their basic necessities', said one Carleton student. .(U)

niversities care more about pushing students through the system than they do about investing in delivering good quality education.'

Indeed, along with the meagre loan deferral, Ford's entire privatization agenda for post-secondary education was on display in the announcement today. He took the opportunity to promote his govern-



ment's rebranding of post-secondary education as 'publicly assisted' rather than just public. He welcomed the private sector to the public trough to 'help' with the transition to digital learning.

Ford has previously declared post-secondary education 'open for business'. Ford made a media show last fall of attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Niagara University, a private, Catholic

University in Vaughan.

Not once are faculty or support staff, the people who make these institutions run, mentioned in Ford's announcement. Faculty have been rushed to put all of their courses online, whether it makes academic sense or not, with no compensation for the extra work this requires. Support staff at community colleges were initially told they would have to work on the campuses after classes were cancelled.

Sadly, college and university administrations are in lock-step with the province in pushing to get the semester done on their terms without consulting either faculty, staff or students about the best way to do this.

Queens University graduate students have launched a tuition relief campaign. <https://action-network.org/letters/suspend-summer-tuition-for-graduate-students>. And remember, it was just over a year ago that thousands of college and university students were on the streets protesting Ford's assault on students.

Ford's pale gesture of support during this crisis does not even come close to hiding his real agenda, which is to rip publicly funded education to shreds and hand the spoils to his corporate buddies.

Worthless

Canadian oil is now worth almost nothing but that won't stop Trudeau and Kenney throwing more money into the tar sands hole

As of end of trading on Friday, March 27, Alberta's tar sands bitumen was trading for less than \$5 per barrel, about the same price as a Big Mac. It was selling for less than it costs to ship it.

Put this in perspective. The toy Barrel of Monkeys sells for \$18.

In the oil and gas board rooms, in Alberta's legislature, in Ottawa's corridors of power, the gamblers who promoted Canada as the great energy superpower of the 21st century are reeling in shock.

On March 17, in an emergency midnight session of the legislature, Jason Kenney's United Conservative government passed a budget that even then was based on a fiction. Kenney pegged the price of oil at \$58 per barrel and wagered it couldn't go any lower.

Wishful thinking. A week later global bond rating firm DBRS Morningstar bumped Alberta down to a AA rating, saying the numbers in its budget were "invalid": "Unfortunately, a lot of the economic assumptions and pricing assumptions that this plan was based on in this environment are no longer valid. That's not a criticism of government. That's just a recognition of what's transpired in the weeks since."

Pre-existing condition

Of course the global economic slowdown is related to the Covid-19 pandemic. But just as the virus is a greater threat to victims with pre-existing conditions, so the slump exposed the tar sands' mortal weaknesses.

It cost too much to extract. It cost too much to ship. It cost too much

to use. It cost too much to clean up after.

Capital has been fleeing from the oil patch for years. But the blame was put on Indigenous people, whose territories were the site of resources and pipelines; and on environmentalists who exposed the folly of more investment in fossil fuel as global warming increased in severity. But these were scapegoats.



Warnings of economic disaster have been around for years. High cost Canadian oil just couldn't compete. Politicians and corporate elites who styled themselves as disciples of capitalism's "free market" either would not or could not face the basic reality of their own system.

Money down the well?

What to do? For Jason Kenney and the oil business he slaves for, the answer is obvious: the federal government has to bail out the industry yet again. It may require some restructuring, they coyly admit, but the industry must survive.

Must it? Will the Canadian public, suffering economic hardship to defeat the coronavirus, sit still for

yet another multi-billion-dollar hand out to the oil barons? Will Trudeau and Morneau wrest control of the industry by nationalizing it lock, stock and (forgive me) barrel? At least then they could pretend there was some meagre reward behind the risk.

But even nationalizing an industry in its death throes would be a huge mistake. Some 265 researchers from various disciplines have written an open letter to the federal government, essentially begging them to stop throwing money down a hole in the ground.

They argue: "Instead of purchasing equity in oil and gas, Canadian governments should pursue the retraining of fossil fuel workers, and public ownership of Canada's renewable energy sector, where government coordination and large scale investment are needed in the short term and where investments will be repaid.

Funding is also urgently needed to support energy and water conservation, public transportation, regenerative agriculture and other areas of mitigation and adaptation to global warming."

In the short term federal support must go to the health of working people. In the long term it must be invested in sustainability, environmental justice and public service.

We cannot pretend we can go back to business as usual.

The government of Alberta is failing the twin test of economic crisis and public health crisis in spectacular fashion. We are about to see if the federal government is going to follow them down the well.

Liberals are not on workers side

by Michelle Robidoux

As the COVID-19 crisis has unfolded, Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has enjoyed a bump in the polls. Two-thirds of Canadians say he has done a good job handling the crisis (with the exception of Québec, where his approval rating is on par with Americans' support for Trump's handling of the crisis at 49%).

Trudeau may bask in the glow of this jump in support, but it was decisions by past Liberal governments that created conditions – from underfunding healthcare and employment insurance to slashing corporate taxes – that mean today many will suffer or die.

Shamefully, the Trudeau government's decisions in response to the COVID-19 crisis continue us on a path of even greater and deadlier crises in the future.

Healthcare: In a joint statement on the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of health coalitions write that "our ability to endure crises and care for each other has been eroded through decades of austerity budgets, privatization and inadequate planning. Even during "normal times," the health care system is at capacity."

As a recent CBC report stated, "Some of Ontario's biggest hospitals were filled beyond 100 per cent occupancy nearly every day in the first half of [2019]."

Five hospitals in the Greater Toronto Area, as well as the main hospitals in Hamilton, Sudbury, Peterborough and Niagara Falls all spent more than 160 days over their funded capacity during the 181-day period from January through June 2019."

This situation did not come out of nowhere. It can be traced back to the restructuring of federal healthcare funding to the provinces implemented in 1996 by Liberal PM Jean Chrétien. Dubbed the Canada Health and Social Transfer, this "reform" of the federal funding formula meant a dramatic decline in funding to the provinces.

Until the late 1970s, federal funding made up about 37% of provincial spending on health care. From 1981 to the mid-1990s, funding was further squeezed to about 16%, under Conservative PM Brian Mulroney and then Chrétien. Replacing Established Program Funding with the Canada Health and Social Transfer in 1996 as part of the Chrétien government's deficit cutting strategy meant another dramatic drop in federal funding, from 16% to about 11%.

In Ontario, the Mike Harris Tories closed or amalgamated hospitals, cut staff and privatized parts of the health system, from labs to food services. In Quebec under Lucien Bouchard, there were massive layoffs of healthcare workers and hospital closures. Right across the country, provincial austerity budgets slashed services.

While federal funding had crept back up to about 23% by 2016 (under Liberal Paul Martin's 10-year Canada Health Accord), enormous damage had been done to the health system right across the country.

Canada currently has 1.95 acute care beds per 1000 people, fewer than any OECD country but Mexico. This is down from 5 per 1000 in 1976. By comparison, Italy has 2.62 acute care beds per 1000. In Ontario, the number of acute care beds in Ontario has stayed the same for the last 20 years – while the population has grown by 3 million. This is the downstream consequence of the Liberals' policies.

Employment Insurance: While the Trudeau Liberals scramble to improvise an income support policy for the millions who are now or will soon be unemployed, the EI cuts enacted by a previous Liberal government in the 1990s set the stage for the disaster that we see today. Whereas in 1971, 95% of workers were covered by Unemployment Insurance, the renamed Employment insurance (EI) under Jean Chrétien cut eligibility to only 50% of the workforce. By 2018, only 33% of unemployed women and 38% of unemployed men qualified for EI.

While the Trudeau government has agreed to put an extra \$5 million into employment insurance-linked sick leave and has waived the usual one-week waiting period, what is needed is not a stop gap, but rebuilding a system that covers every worker.

Corporate bailouts: According to a recent Globe and Mail report, Trudeau is preparing to bail out the oil industry to the tune of several billion dollars. This is on top of the heavy subsidies the industry already receives, and the federal government purchasing Kinder Morgan's Trans-Mountain pipeline in 2019 at the cost of \$4.5 billion. They are pumping billions of public dollars into a dying industry, instead of into justice for Indigenous communities, green jobs, rebuilding vital social programs, and creating a sustainable future for the 99%.

Divide-and-conquer: Trudeau has tried to walk a line between seemingly welcoming refugees while actually maintaining policies that completely undermine refugee rights. Only 24 hours after announcing a 14-day quarantine for refugee claimants crossing into Canada at 'irregular' border points between the U.S. and Canada, Trudeau declared that Canada would now turn refugee claimants back to the U.S.

This is a policy the Liberals have repeatedly tried to implement. Thanks to strong opposition by refugee rights organizations, they were unable to do so. Now, under the cover of COVID-19 emergency policies, they have pushed it through – at a time when it is more difficult to mount a collective response.

The bottom line: Despite Trudeau's pronouncements, we're not in this together. Like the Conservatives, Trudeau's Liberals are a party of the 1% – governing for the few, not the many. We can't afford to be fooled by sparkly eyes and long lashes. If this time has shown us anything, it is that the money and resources are there to start to undo the damage caused by successive neoliberal governments. And the recent upsurge in workers' actions – from sick-ins, to walkouts and strikes – shows how it can be done.

Workers fight back

All over the world, workers who are now deemed essential are fighting against bosses that care more for profits than safety. Can this crisis lead to more workers' actions and a wave of class consciousness?



Italian workers are calling for a general strike against government incompetence

Working class response to the pandemic

by Carolyn Egan

There has been widespread working class response to the pandemic that we are facing. It varies from country to country, but ordinary people around the world have taken things into their own hands. Many walking out of work places in protest, others demanding personal protection equipment from their bosses, or organizing for government aid for those laid off, or unable to work because of their precarious employment.

"We won't die for Dow" posters have gone up in New York City, while nurses and health care workers hold up placards pleading for necessary equipment in front of their hospitals. Front line workers are showing tremendous courage, and are more than willing to do their jobs (three thousand retired nurses responded in one day). They are demanding the protective equipment that is so necessary to maintain their health. Building trade workers are speaking out about the conditions on the job sites: no hand sanitizer, no washing facilities and often close quarters. A widely viewed video showed an impromptu meeting at a work site

with a worker berating the manager because they were forced to work in an unsafe environment and potentially bring the virus home.

I'm a health care worker who goes to work every day and was on a conference call with other trade unionists last week. It included transit workers, retail and call centre employees, some from the building trades, teachers, library workers, hotel workers and more. Some workplaces have closed down entirely, such as schools, other members are working from home, some sectors are totally devastated such as retail, restaurant and hotels. It is very clear that low paid and precarious workers are the most affected, the majority of whom are women and people of colour. We are seeing the rise of racism, divide and rule, and the closing of

borders. Workers were speaking about the actions that have been taking place in their workplaces as they build solidarity and fight back.

Wild cat strikes caused the shut down of the auto industry across North America and Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) workers walked out of Service Canada Centres because of unsafe conditions forcing closures across



Workers in Toronto argue with the boss about safety measures

the country. Sanitation workers have staged work place actions and transit drivers in many cities are demanding safer conditions. In Windsor the transit system

has been shut down because of workers demands. Grocery workers have forced a \$2 an hour wage increase, and protective barriers have been put up at check out counters. Health care workers have been speaking out about the bleeding dry of hospitals and long term care facilities for years, which has exacerbated the crisis. Rent strikes are being called and mutual aid groups are being set up in neighbourhoods.

Suddenly there is a keen awareness that it is the working class that actually makes the economy run and creates the wealth that the 1%, the ruling class, uses for its own benefit. Suddenly there are billions if not trillions of dollars to be spent when

we have been told for years that there is not enough money to fund our hospitals, schools or social services. The money has always been there, but it has been going to

the very top while the gap between rich and poor has been growing.

The class divisions in society have intensified and all the contradictions of capitalism have been laid bare. It is a sudden escalation of the crisis in the system. The Corona virus was a precipitating factor but it cannot be separated from capitalism itself, the spread of factory farms and the incursion of the market into more remote areas where new viruses develop and spread to humans through other species. Read Joseph Choonara's "[Socialism in a Time of Pandemics](#)".

We are not all in this together, as the prime minister keeps telling us. There are the robbers and the robbed. As we fight our way through this crisis we must build a strong movement that learns from our working class history that has been forged in struggle by the exploited and the oppressed of every race, gender, sexuality and ability. We have to harness the working class anger that is erupting into an organized resistance which goes beyond reforms, and puts forward a real alternative of a transformed society where working people have control of our workplaces and our communities.

Workers actions around the world

Zimbabwe



Nurses and doctors in Zimbabwe in southern Africa began a strike last week to protest against the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors

Association spokesperson Tapiwa Zvakada said doctors won't resume work until the government provides them proper protective gear they need while treating patients.

"There is a difference between heroism and committing suicide," said Zvakada. "Let PPEs be available first and then we will be able to offer our services and help our patients."

Nurses in the public hospitals who have also joined the strike said the health ministry have not responded to previous requests for PPE

Quebec

In Quebec, doctors have threatened to walk out if they don't have any protective equipment.

Nurses and other frontline healthcare professionals are being asked to denounce the dangerous and unacceptable conditions they are exposed to as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on a website launched by the nurses union, FIQ, which represents 76 000 members.

The website is called « Je dénonce! » and is intended to demonstrate the daily reality of nurses. The website will also keep track of the

number of healthcare employees who have contracted COVID-19.

The Quebec healthcare system was already a battleground caused by capitalist austerity which led specialist doctors to give back their bonuses to be reinvested in the system several years ago.

Even then everyone working in the healthcare system saw priorities were wrong. But this pandemic has sadly demonstrated that every party in power in the Québec government in the last thirty years has ignored the people who knew best.

London, UK

Ambulance workers are in a "mutinous mood" over the lack of proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

One frontline ambulance worker in London, who did not want to be named, says that workers are "terrified" of carrying out their duties without the right kit. They told Socialist Worker, "When you're in the ambulance service you're taught the first thing is, 'Safety, safety, safety.'"

"They said we need a certain

grade of masks, but now they have lowered the level and it doesn't sit right with people.

"We feel we are being let down—there is a real mutinous mood over the lack of kit."



United states

Workers at the General Electric plant in Lynn, Massachusetts walked off the job to demand that the company reverse its decision to lay off thousands of workers. They called for the plant

they work in to be retooled to build ventilators rather than jet engines.

"The crisis we face with the COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have seen in our lifetimes. It requires us—all of us—to work for the common good and save lives," said Chris Shelton, president of Communications Workers of

America (CWA), which represents GE workers. "But at a time when our country is depending on skilled workers to make essential products like ventilators, our members are left

wondering why they are facing layoffs instead of having the opportunity to use their skills to help save

lives. We challenge GE to partner with our members and the management of its own Aviation and Electronic Lighting divisions to convert some of its unused capacity to alleviate our critical national shortage of life-saving ventilators."



Hamilton Transit driver on coping with COVID-19

Socialist.ca spoke with **Blake McCall** a Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) driver and activist in Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) local 107.

How have you been navigating this situation as a driver?

Blake McCall: Its been tough. The speed at which events have been changing has been lightning fast and it feels we are in the dark sometimes. All you can really do it so go day by day and try to keep sane. The hardest part for me has been the lack of trust that I feel in the passengers. You start to question every single person's motives for being out on the bus - holding on to suspicion if they actually need to be out - or being angry at the slightest cough or sneeze. This isn't my job and I never had these concerns or cares before but in the past two weeks its all I can do not to overreact to people I don't know. The contradiction to that is I have found some passengers much more willing to talk about their concerns and workplaces. For example, I had a passenger going to work at a call centre. The week before the company had, without warning, took them off of their jobs, did emergency retraining mid-shift and put them back in a more difficult job. And she was just willing to offer this info to me without prompting while also working through her mind how, in fact, the work she was doing was essential. It's little moments like that, that help a lot to get me through the day.

Transit drivers are on the front-lines during this crisis, what is the mood amongst HSR drivers?

BM: Morale is extremely low. Many workers have kids and deal with eldercare and are worried about our exposure and what that means to loved ones. There is frustration from lack of clarity of the issues of masks. Some drivers do not feel safe with out wearing one and yet management is still threatening to send people home if they do.

How many people should we be allowing on the bus at any given time? We have reduced service to Saturday schedule during the weekdays essentially to have room for the expected numbers of drivers to be off on self quarantine, childcare etc. Though the ridership is down the number of passengers still means there are trips where there is no way they would be able to self isolate from each

other. Many drivers, including myself feel we need to limit the number of passengers on the bus at any one time. However our directive from management is that as long as they are 6 feet away from the drivers, they are taking their own risks by getting on the bus and it is not our job to enforce self isolation. This is quite simply infuriating and makes us feel as though we are helping to spread the virus.

This is compounded by the fact we see how much is still open. We are taking the Tims workers, grocery store workers, other retail and manufacturing workers to work, and they have no other way to get there to say nothing of the folks that need groceries and cannot afford to buy in mass quantities. Ford's joke list of essential businesses, along with the HSR refusal to take social distancing seriously put us all in danger to further



spreading the virus. All of this leads to increasing anger and uncertainty among the drivers.

It seemed to take a while to get the HSR to block the front entrance on buses, how hard did ATU have to push to get management to take this seriously?

BM: Our local has been fighting hard for various COVID-19 health and safety (H&S) issues since January. Besides the exec and H&S committee, the membership of the local is mobilized and empowered on their own to demand changes directly to supervision and management. They are hearing from a full chorus of angry voices. The back door entrance happened within days of the request and shortly after Ottawa blocked off theirs. The real frustration was the incredibly slow rate it took to get us hand sanitizer. We only had a full stock in the past week. The HSR only had fewer than 100 bottles. It's also good to put this in context of lack of washroom facilities where we can actually wash our hands with soap and water. Often our bathrooms

are only porta-potties which are irregularly filled with hand sanitizer. So often drivers have just brought our own from home. But when hoarding started it became even more frustrating to see how the employer had sat on their hands so long, when they tried to get hand sanitizer there was already a backlog in orders and took over a month to get it in. The crisis has brought up important questions of safety and whose responsibility it is to make our workplace safe. For too long the workers have taken the problems in their own hands. Why were we bringing in our own in the first place?

Lastly we are still working 40hrs a week. We need to be pushing for a reduced work week. It is only sure way that we can reduce our risk of exposure, and also help our mental health is to ensure we are not in the drivers seat for so long. As this crisis drags on the numbers continue to increase this is what we need to be fighting for now.

Knowing the City Council and the constant attacks by them and the province on public transit, it seems pretty clear that they will try to use the drop in revenues from this crisis as an excuse to further cut service. What do you see as opportunities in this crisis to set the stage

for resistance to the likely austerity coming down the pike?

BM: I have no doubt with the drop in revenue and ridership our pretty right wing council is salivating at the chance to further cut bus service. We changed to free service almost overnight when no one said that it could happen, yet money was found to provide that service. I think we need to hang on to that for as long as possible. It makes us safer and clearly we are able to afford it. We need to hang on to this as transformative moment for public transit and ensure fight to make it permanent.

The importance of the bus service for the city is crucial as well. We all know that we are important but I think really seeing what we are doing in the midst of a crisis should be enough to ensure that we demand more. If during a crisis the service should be running by then when the crisis is over should we be facing cuts? This also goes for our support of other workers, we now know who is essential to our lives and we should be fighting to make sure they are paid for it.

Niagara falls bus driver speaks out

by **Sandi Mansfield** ATU local 1582

Well this last week and a half has been a whirlwind of activity....

Workers want buses cleaned and sanitized. Members have complained for years how dirty the buses were. But we were told there's no money in the budget to deep clean buses on a regular basis if they have ever, been done.

BTW no hand sanitizer on buses for operators. Gloves were doled out

like gold.

In the last week service was reduced first by pulling all the peak service buses off the road. The operators who lost their run were still paid full rate and given different work. Some operators were assigned to cleaning buses. We also blocked off seat behind driver to give distance.

Then they reduced service to "Sunday service" which cuts out the only bus in town accessing the food bank (apparently there is a plan to fix

that).

Finally the buses are rear loading. The union has fought really hard to ensure our safety and keep everyone working, including the on call/casual operators.

A number of workers have booked off and some have had to self isolate. We are also in the midst of contract negotiations.

Conditions for drivers and workers on the Niagara frontier vary widely and dangerously.

COVID-19 and capitalism

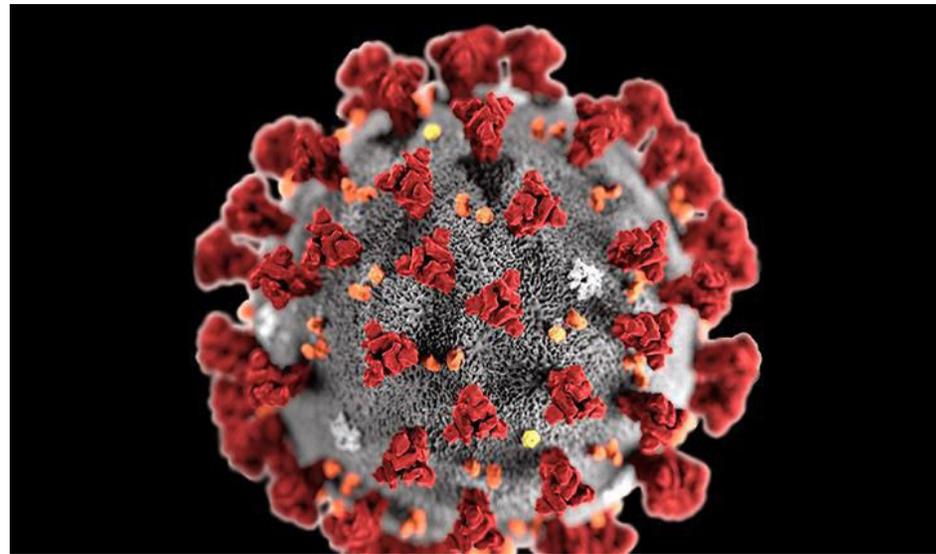
International socialists tendency statement on the Covid-19 pandemic

1. The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic is generally presented as a “natural disaster”, an “external shock” to the normal functioning of the capitalist system. But this is quite untrue. There have been various novel coronavirus and influenza outbreaks (SARS, MERS, H5N1): epidemiologists warned of the threat of a global pandemic. The conditions for these outbreaks have been created, as the work of Marxist biologists such as Rob Wallace have shown, by the spread of intensive factory farming and the penetration by the market and capital of remote areas where new viruses develop among wild animal and bird populations.¹ It is a good example of what Marx called the “irreparable rift in the interdependent process between social metabolism and natural metabolism” created by capitalist agriculture – and, more broadly, of the destruction of nature driving climate change. This is a thoroughly capitalist pandemic that, if not combated, would take the lives of some 40 million people (according to projections by Imperial College London).

2. States’ response to the pandemic equally reflect the priorities of capital. In the advanced capitalist economies, neoliberal austerity has meant minimal emergency planning (or even, as in the case of the Trump White House, disbanding the team responsible for preparing for pandemics) and healthcare systems that have been stripped to the bone. Governments have vacillated between a minimal response designed to keep the economy going (as in the notorious “herd immunity” strategy, which allows the infection to spread among the population, gambling with the lives of the vulnerable, that was initially attempted by Boris Johnson in Britain and is still being implemented in the Netherlands and Sweden) and lockdowns imposed by authoritarian measures. The failure to plan and prepare in advance has made it much harder to pursue the trace-test-and-treat strategy pursued in some Asian countries, at the cost of many thousands of lives, including those of healthcare workers battling to keep overwhelmed intensive care units going.

3. The pandemic is also precipitating a major economic recession – probably greater than the Great Recession of 2008-9. There is also nothing natural about this. It reflects the nature of an economic system governed by the logic of profit. Lockdowns inevitably disrupt production – the closure of the Chinese economy at the beginning of the year has been rippling through global supply chains, and the spread of the pandemic is shutting down sectors in the rest of the world. But in a different society this would not lead to the soaring unemployment we see around the world. The extreme panic on the financial markets indicates the fragility of a world economy that has been kept afloat for the past ten years by ultra-cheap central bank money and a huge accumulation of corporate debt (a condition exacerbated by the decision of Russia and Saudi Arabia to launch an oil price war). The same flight to cash (above all dollars) that we saw at the height of the crash in 2007-8 has frozen markets and sent all

asset prices falling. States have stepped in on an even greater scale than they did then, flooding the financial system with liquidity and offering myriad forms of support to business, especially the big corporations. These measures have frequently included forms of income support to workers who have been laid off, but these have been limited in both amount and coverage, frequently excluding workers in the growing informal sector (for example, in the gig economy where insecure workers are often forced to describe themselves as “self-employed”) and undocumented migrants. Once again, the priority has been to defend profits, not the lives and livelihoods of ordinary working people.



4. Governments frequently use the rhetoric of war in the face of the pandemic and appeal to a supposedly shared national interest. But the burden of the crisis is falling on the backs of workers. Healthcare workers are often being forced to risk their lives without the proper personal protective equipment. While some groups of workers are able to work online from home, large numbers especially of manual workers are being forced to carry on working, often more intensively and on a larger scale, usually in conditions where it is impossible to practise social distancing – in farms and factories, supermarkets and pharmacies, warehouses, delivery vans and lorries, refuse trucks, buses and trains. Workers in the informal sector, who dominate the urban population in large parts of the global South, are badly hit by lockdowns, which cut off their income instantaneously, as we have seen in the desperate flight of millions of migrant workers from India’s cities. Covid-19 has provided a stark reminder that the world of 21st globalized capitalism still runs on labour – labour that is now exposed to new dangers.

5. In self-defence, the system has resorted to the tried-and-tested ideological mechanism of divide-and-rule. Trump’s insistence on talking about “the Chinese virus” has legitimized a myriad of racist attacks and insults directed at East Asian people. Migrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable, as has

been shown in the horrific scenes on the border between Turkey and Greece. States are busy arming themselves with extra repressive powers, which they will be loath to surrender when the immediate crisis is over. And the blame game between the United States and China and the paralysis within the European Union will deepen inter-imperialist rivalries.

6. The coronavirus crisis, in other words, arises from conditions created by the contemporary forms of capital accumulation and its consequences are mediated through the class antagonism and inter-capitalist competition that constitutes capitalist

society. But the official leaders of the left and the workers’ movement have fallen in with the government calls for national unity. Social-democratic politicians and trade-union leaders have largely echoed official policy and welcomed the measures to prop up the economy, even though these are designed to defend profits, not lives. But despite the demobilizing effects of this stance, groups of workers have taken action – most notably in France, Italy, and the US, forcing the closure of non-essential workplaces and demanding protective equipment where they need to keep working. This basic working-class response needs to be spread through wider action and to be generalized into a programme that become an axis of struggle.

7. This programme should include demands such as these:

- State direction of the economy to reallocate resources to healthcare, to producing the equipment needed to treat patients and protect their carers, and to providing for the essential needs of the population;
- The permanent provision of free healthcare on the basis of need properly funded by progressive taxation;
- This reallocation of resources to be funded through drastic cuts in military spending;
- Essential workers should be those who really make an essential contribution to the welfare of the population and should be provided

with safe conditions of travelling to work and performing their jobs;

- All non-essential workers who are unable to work from home to be paid, irrespective of their legal status, a living wage;
- State financial support for communities, with the support of their local municipal authorities, to organize to support the vulnerable and to ensure the adequate distribution of food, medicine, and other necessities;
- Nationalization without compensation of firms engaged in profiteering;
- No racist scapegoating: close the refugee centres and provide their inmates with housing where they can self-isolate; follow (but better) the example of Portugal and grant the right to remain to migrants and refugees;
- Defend civil liberties: no special powers to the police – restrictions on movement to be enforced by local communities.

8. The Covid-19 pandemic has harshly exposed the limits to capital. Right-wing governments headed by the likes of Trump, Merkel, and Johnson have been forced to invade domains forbidden to the state under neoliberalism, underwriting a huge range of economic activity and commissioning industrial production to provide equipment required by the health emergency. Even though inadequate and carried out to protect capitalism and from above, these policies demonstrate that there is an alternative to the dominant form of neoliberal capitalism. This has come at the very moment that the pandemic itself – like the East African floods and the burning of the Amazon last year and the Australian wildfires at the start of 2020 – reveals the scale of capitalism’s destruction of nature. In other words, genuine socialism – where working people take democratic control of the world and its resources and produce for need not profit – is both possible and necessary. There should be no return to the normality that is breeding these disasters. The pandemic is a frightening event that demonstrates the true destructive power of capitalism. But a powerful political response from the left can lay the basis for another kind of world, where humankind has a future.

The Coordination of the International Socialist Tendency

Territorial Acknowledgement

As settlers, we acknowledge our occupation of lands that are the Indigenous territories of Turtle Island. Furthermore, we support all struggles for Indigenous sovereignty in whatever forms they take by the hundreds of First Nations and Inuit communities that have resided here for many thousands of years, and by Métis communities that have developed in the last hundreds of years.

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WHERE WE STAND socialist.ca/ourstand

The capitalist system is based on violence, oppression and brutal exploitation. It creates hunger beside plenty, it threatens our sustenance through unsafe and unsustainable farming, and kills the earth itself with pollution and unsustainable extraction of oil, minerals, animals, trees, and water. Capitalism leads to imperialism and war. Saving ourselves and the planet depends on finding an alternative. Capitalism cannot regulate the catastrophic effects of climate change. We stand for climate justice, including the

concept of “just transition” for affected workers.

Workers’ power
Any alternative to capitalism must involve replacing the system from the bottom up through radical collective action. Central to that struggle is the workplace, where capitalism reaps its profits off our backs. Capitalist monopolies control the earth’s resources, but workers everywhere actually create the wealth. A new socialist society can only be constructed when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its

production and distribution to satisfy human needs, not corporate profits—to respect the environment, not pollute and destroy it.

Oppression
Within capitalist society different groups suffer from specific forms of oppression. Attacks on oppressed groups are used to divide workers and weaken solidarity. We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls. We support the right of people of colour and other oppressed groups to organize in their own defence. We are for real,

social, economic and political equality for women. We are for an end to all forms of discrimination and homophobia against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people.

Canada, Quebec, Indigenous Peoples
Canada is not a “colony” of the United States, but an imperialist country in its own right that participates in the exploitation of much of the world. The Canadian state was founded through the repression of Indigenous peoples and

the people of Quebec. We support the struggles for self-determination of Quebec and Indigenous peoples up to and including the right to independence. In particular, we recognize Indigenous peoples’ original and primary right to decide their fate and that of their lands, heritage, and traditions. Socialists in Quebec, and in all oppressed nations, work to give the struggle against national oppression an internationalist and working class content.

Read the full statement at: socialist.ca/ourstand

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What to watch during a pandemic

by **Faline Bobier**

The sheer amount of information (and mis-information, if you are listening to the orange monster) on Covid 19 can be overwhelming. Here are some suggestions for things worth watching to distract ourselves, at the same time as we are looking out for our neighbours, organizing against bosses forcing us to work in unsafe conditions and planning how we need to come out of this crisis on a fighting footing. As many people are saying, we can't simply go back to 'normal' when this is over because 'normal' under capitalism is what got us here in the first place.

End of the world watching

Contagion - Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion*, released in 2011, is now available on Netflix. It's a film which is eerily prescient of what's happening today, although there's



Contagion has become the most downloaded movie this month

not enough in it about ordinary people organizing collectively (of which we are seeing many examples around us) and tends to focus on the notion that ordinary people mostly revert to selfishness and a stance of each person for themselves, which fits nicely with the ruling class script.

Snowpiercer - If you liked Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite*, which took best film and best international film at this year's Oscars, this earlier film is also very much on the theme of the dystopic future of capitalism and is available on Netflix. The story centres on a train hurtling through a frozen dead earth where the only survivors are those on the train. Inside the train, all the class divisions that existed in the outside world are still there with a vengeance. Great over the top performances by John Hurt, Ed Harris, Tilda Swinton et al.

For feminist fun

Bridesmaids - You can't go wrong with this hilarious, side-splitting feminist comedy, co-written and starring Kristen Wiig, the brilliant Saturday Night Live alum. Although this is a mainstream Hollywood release it does touch on real issues that women face - recession, unemployment, having to go back and live with your parents and dealing with jerks, like Jon Hamm, playing Kristen's self-involved and sexist 'fuck-buddy'. The scene on the plane as Kristen's character's

best friend (played by Maya Rudolph) and her bridesmaids head to Las Vegas for the bachelorette party proves that women can do raunchy and hilarious, if there was ever any question. Melissa McCarthy is wonderful as usual in the role of the groom's sister - another reason to seek this movie out and watch it now if you need a humour injection.

Booksmart - Another great feminist comedy directed by Olivia Wilde, featuring millennials this time. Actors Beanie Feldstein (Molly) and Kaitlyn Dever (Amy) play best friends, about to graduate from high school. On the last day before their graduation ceremony Molly inadvertently learns what the other kids think of them - nerds who care only about studying and have no life outside of their books. So, on their last night of high school they decide to prove the other students wrong and set out to have the night of their lives. Great performances that give hope that the new generation will do things differently, as director Wilde discussed when promoting her movie: "The young generation are like: 'You've put us in a fucked-up political situation, the Earth is dying, there are maniacs in power, you've created this binary way of thinking about gender and sexuality, which we don't accept. We'd actually like to shift this paradigm - you're done!'"

Emma - Some recent mainstream Hollywood releases are now available to watch on your TV for a price. The most recent version of Jane Austen's *Emma*, which hit theatres just as the pandemic was taking flight, is one of them. It definitely belongs in this list of feminist fare.

The new film version of Jane Austen's *Emma*, directed by Autumn de Wilde, is a delight and will hopefully have the effect of taking people back to the original work, especially in these uncertain times, when we're all looking for diversions. Someone described the movie as like being inside a cupcake, because of the beautiful pastels and colours.

Emma was originally published in 1815 but like Jane Austen's other novels it has a lot to say to contemporary audiences about women's place in society, about love and romance and about human foibles. *Emma* (beautifully incarnated by Anya Taylor-Joy) learns through trial and error that her attempts at match-making may be well-intentioned but they go disastrously awry.

The movie over all has an amazing cast, including the incomparable British actor Bill Nighy, playing *Emma*'s father, perpetually worried about drafts and catching cold, as well as Johnny Flynn in the role of Mr. Knightley, the heartthrob and wealthy friend of the family who watches *Emma*'s machinations with dismay and disapproval.

Just plain funny

Planes, trains, automobiles - Planes, trains and automobiles is a throwback to 1987, which is still very much worth watching. I've watched this movie a few times over the years but the story of Neal Page (Steve Martin), a high-strung marketing executive and Del Griffith (John Candy), a goodhearted but annoying shower curtain ring salesperson still delights. The two men share a three-day odyssey of misadventures as Neal wants desperately to get home to Chicago in time for Thanksgiving. The two actors play off each other to hilarious effect. It's a movie that's worth seeing for

the performance of the great John Candy alone, on the 25th anniversary of his death. His beautiful slapstick, wit and humanity make the movie a great watch for right now.

But don't forget the politics

Sorry We Missed You - British Marxist Ken Loach's most recent film, *Sorry We Missed You*, tells the fictional tale of Ricky, Abby and their family's attempts to get by in a precarious world of low paid jobs and the so-called "gig economy". Although it's not a documentary it well could be as it describes the working life of a growing number of people, especially, but not limited to, millennials. Luckily, we have seen recent fightbacks by those same workers, as in the successful organizing drive of Foodora workers in Toronto.

The Report (The Torture Report) - This movie, directed by Scott Z. Burns and starring Adam Driver and Annette Bening as US Senator Dianne Feinstein, reminds us how Western governments used torture as a means to justify illegal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The plot follows staffer Daniel Jones (played by Driver) and the Senate Intelligence Committee as they investigate the CIA's use of torture following the September 11 attacks. It's a harrowing and infuriating reminder of how much our governments lied to us during this whole decade and beyond, and in the course of it killed and tortured millions of people whose only crime was living in areas rich in oil, coveted by Western profiteers.

Dark Waters - This 2019 American legal thriller directed by Todd Haynes dramatizes the true story of Robert Bilott's case against the chemical manufacturing corporation DuPont after they contaminated a town with unregulated chemicals. Robert Bilott (played by Mark Ruffalo) is a corporate defense lawyer from Cincinnati, Ohio when



farmer Wilbur Tennant, who knows Robert's grandmother, asks Robert to investigate a number of unexplained deaths in Parkersburg, West Virginia. Tennant connects the deaths to the chemical manufacturing corporation DuPont, and gives Robert a large case of videotapes. The film exposes DuPont's criminal development of 'Teflon', used in non-stick pans, which they knew from

internal testing over a period of years, caused cancer and other birth defects, and also affected women workers on the line. Dupont dumped hundreds of gallons of toxic sludge upriver from Tennant's farm. PFOA and similar compounds used to make Teflon are forever chemicals, chemicals that do not leave the blood stream and slowly accumulate. Given the behaviour of CEOs during our current crisis, who are willing to see 'acceptable' numbers of older people die in order to keep the stock market strong, the behaviour of Dupont corporate murderers will come as no surprise.

Many of these films can be viewed on streaming services such as Amazon Prime and others. Most streaming services offer a 30-day free trial so that you don't actually have to put any money into the pockets of sleazy capitalists like Jeff Bezos.



Land and Freedom

And for inspiration

Land and Freedom - Another film by the brilliant Ken Loach. This is a movie that bears watching and re-watching, about the Spanish Civil War. It shows the way ordinary people were inspired to go to Spain from places like Britain and Canada because they realized what was at stake in the fight between the forces of fascism and the Spanish workers and peasants who wanted to found another kind of society. They didn't wait for their governments but began to collectivize land and take it away from the big land-owners, as well as building a people's militia to defend their gains.

Ken Loach has made most of his films available free of charge on youtube so you can watch this movie and his entire canon there.

Matewan - Director John Sayles is like an American version of Ken Loach. One of my favourite films from Sayles is *Matewan*, which dramatizes the events of the Battle of Matewan, a coal miners' strike in 1920 in Matewan, a small town in the hills of West Virginia. The movie has a lot to say about the determination of ordinary workers, the attempts of the coal bosses to pit workers against each other by using anti-immigrant and anti-Black racism and the courage of the miners and their families to withstand murderous attacks by the employer. This film is available from the Criterion Collection: <https://www.criterion.com/> and well worth the investment.

Most public libraries (which are closed to the public right now for obvious reasons) have online movies and TV shows available for free through services like Overdrive, Hoopla and Kanopy.

Suspend summer tuition!

Graduate Students ask for summer tuition relief across Ontario, will Universities listen?

by Rohit Revi and Canan Sahin

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, universities across Canada have announced an indefinite closure of their on-site services and have shifted most operations, including courses, online. Most undergraduate students, except international students on study permits, have vacated their student residences and will now receive the remainder of their course instructions online. While these measures were necessary in the interest of public health, they have pushed graduate students to a more precarious position and in need of immediate financial support. Despite the closure of crucial on-site services – such as the physical libraries, laboratories and office spaces, and the inaccessibility of academic support from supervisory committees, universities still maintain that graduate students must pay summer tuition over what will be an incredibly stressful and precarious few months.

But now, graduate students in universities across Ontario have launched concurrent campaigns - and are writing to their administrations demanding a suspension of summer tuition. These campaigns, headed by graduate unions at Carleton, Queen's, Western and York, have received great support among the graduate student communities and have succeeded in bringing their popular voice to the table.

What summer tuition means for students, and what it means for the university

The annual revenues of public universities are drawn from various sources – student tuition, provincial operating grants, federal grants and investment income. Of these sources, student tuition makes up between 55% to 65% of the total revenue. But this is largely drawn from undergraduate tuition, especially the high rates paid by international students. Summer tuition paid by graduate students is a meagre 1-2% of the university's annual revenue. In the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, the operational expenses of the university for the summer term are likely to be reduced drastically (owing to the shift of operations online, and the subsequent layoffs of workers, especially in hospitality and maintenance sectors), rendering graduate summer tuition to be an entirely dispensable drop in the ocean of annual revenue.

For graduate students though, summer tuition is an incredibly overwhelming burden, more so now than ever. In the absence of em-

ployment opportunities both on and off campus this summer, and in the wake of the disruption of their research timelines with the closure of university services, they will struggle to pay rent, place food on the table and support their

international colleagues struggle even more, given the tuition disparity. It is cruel to demand tuition from us in this unprecedented crisis, and to push us further into indebtedness.”

This financial stress is all the more exac-

SUMMER TUITION AND CLOSURE OF UNIVERSITY why waiver ?



The physical library and recreational facilities are closed.



Office Spaces and laboratories are unsafe to work at.



No employment in summer



Access to supervisory committee is limited

SUSPEND SUMMER TUITION

pendants or spouses. One graduate student at Queen's describes this precarity clearly - "If we pay summer tuition, an average domestic graduate student would be left with virtually nothing to survive on, after paying rent. Our

erated by the fact that research timelines have been disrupted by travel restrictions and closures to laboratory services, rendering upper year graduate students worried about timely completion of their degrees.

Suspension of summer tuition is not only financially viable; it is the only responsible decision to make.

Graduate unions fight back across the province.

In light of these unjust expectations placed on graduate students, graduate worker unions have stepped up to demand a full suspension of summer tuition. Across the province, they have launched letter campaigns to their respective administrations, with an incredible popular support from graduate members. Within hours of launching the campaign, hundreds of graduate students signed up to make their voices heard. Although presently limited to 4 universities, it is likely that graduate students at more universities will join efforts and transform these local campaigns into a province-wide demand. Summer tuition is normally due in May, and as the pressure upon university administrations continues to build up, the response will demonstrate whether or not their verbal commitments to supporting graduate students through the crisis is just a hollow gesture.

The way forward.

In this period of crisis, it would be shameful if universities continue to insist on extracting profits from precarious academic workers. It is true that universities will have to transform their fiscal and pedagogical models in the coming months, but the cost of this shift cannot be borne by the already precarious strata of the education sector. As universities refuse to shift their priorities even in the midst of a pandemic, they have begun to further expose that their commitments lie in generating profits at the expense of researchers, rather than knowledge production and student welfare itself.

As this crisis deepens, it is likely that contract employees, adjunct faculties, food workers, library staff, cleaning workers will come under attack, so as to maintain status quo. In the campaign for summer tuition, graduate students are beginning to set the precedent for a grass-roots pushback against austerity. The amplified interests of investors and stakeholders in the sector might push administrations to attempt to conserve the status quo at the expense of our well-being, but an organized fightback from below is sure to determine what the university will look like after the pandemic. The university is us.

Upcoming events

Hamilton Socialist Reading Group on zoom

Next meeting:
Tuesday, April 7
7:00 pm
Readings will be posted online.
If you are interested message us at:
<https://www.facebook.com/socialistshamilton/>

Toronto East Revolutionary Reading Circle

Marxism, national liberation and Indigenous self determination
Sunday, April 12th at 2 pm
Speaker: Chantal Sunadaram
Readings: [Socialism and Indigenous sovereignty](#)
[Marxism and the national question](#)

Toronto west online Public forum

Capitalism, the environment and coronavirus
What Marx can teach us about the COVID crisis.
Wednesday, April 22, 6:30 pm on zoom
For more information please see: socialist.ca or email reports@socialist.ca

Vancouver weekly online meetings

Tuesday, 7PM
Each week we discuss Marxist theory, the latest government response to the pandemic and how to get involved in working class actions. Follow us on Facebook for more info:
[facebook.com/socialistsvancouver/](https://www.facebook.com/socialistsvancouver/)