

A libertarian socialist view of the capitalist and health crisis in the Americas

Americas Coordinator

June 1st, 2020

So far, this Coordinator is made up of the following libertarian political organizations: Acción Socialista Libertaria (Arg), Solidaridad (Ch) and the Black Rose / Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation (USA), who have been making visible, through an international communications campaign, that “capitalism is the pandemic,” and that “another world is possible”. Within this framework, the talk “The capitalist pandemic, organization and struggle from the Americas” was organized to expose and debate the current moment, how it affects our territories, and in what way, as organizations, we are thinking about this conjuncture and future projections. There was also a special invitation to Via Libre Grupo Libertario (Colombia), through comrade Luisa.

From the Coordinador, we are committed to working concretely in popular organizations in struggle. We believe that the task of uniting and organizing ourselves as peoples is urgent, to denounce this system that has historically made our lives precarious.

The panelists began by explaining the current situation in each of their territories, the state of the health system and the economy of these regions. For comrade María Paz of Solidaridad, the crisis generated by Covid-19 hits those countries hardest where the health system is highly segmented or privatized. “This occurs due to the principle of understanding health as a business under which private systems operate, privileging profits over the health of our peoples.” They added that in the first months of this year, Chile had its highest level of unemployment in the last ten years: it reached 8.2%.

The scenario for workers is complex. The design of the dictatorship’s plan for labor, the constant precariousness of work during the transition and the lack of strong union structures are factors that keep working people unprotected, noted the comrade. The Chilean government transferred the costs of the crisis to the workers, such as through the “employment protection law” in which companies are allowed to suspend contracts while maintaining the employment relationship but workers must cover their own costs. Thus they protect the profits of companies. Something similar happens in Argentina, with the government of Alberto Fernández, who launched a program to subsidize companies by paying half of their salaries, which exposes a large transfer of money from the public to the private sector, emphasized comrade Angela of Acción de Libertarian Socialist (ASL).

They added that for the sector of the population that ran out of income (or saw them drastically reduced), the government implemented an emergency income of 10,000 pesos, which does little to help survive with a very high cost of living. According to Angela, the government has not identified the precarious situation that almost half of the workers experience (there are approximately 42% informal workers); 12 million registered for said program while the government expected 3 million. Thus, the amount allocated to family assistance is much less than that provided to companies. And they continue to negotiate the implementation of an extraordinary contribution of 1% of the great fortunes.

In Argentina, from the beginning the discourse utilized by the government was very effective, guaranteeing "the care" of the population. However, in "many neighborhoods and popular settlements, it is impossible to comply with a quarantine: there is overcrowding in homes, lack of basic services such as drinking water, lack of hygiene items, bathrooms shared by many families, among other shortcomings. These neighborhoods have become important centers of transmission, and even increase deaths there." And, they pointed out: "it is a scenario where it is clearly seen how the most concentrated capital, the financial sector, the banks, the oligarchy, the multinationals, are taking advantage of this crisis to advance at the expense of our living conditions."

A similar situation is experienced in Colombia. "The situation of the female workers at this time of health crisis is critical due to the numerous dismissals that have occurred and that have forced them to abide by the quarantine without receiving income, endangering their lives and integrity and forcing them to go out and look for work, exposing their bodies to the virus," said comrade Luisa of Vía Libre.

In turn, she noted that in that region poverty facilitates the spread of endemic, preventable and curable diseases, such as Dengue, Malaria and Measles present in our continent before the arrival of SARS-CoV-2. "The new reactionary and neoliberal wave has further aggravated the structural problems of the region through policies of austerity and precarity, manifested in overcrowded and poorly equipped health services in which many public hospitals are falling apart and dozens of hospitals are found closed and broken. Thus, public health provision is of very low quality. "

In this scenario, they observe how the crisis made evident the cruelty of capitalist exploitation that in these times endangers the most vulnerable population in order to stay afloat and continue to benefit some through the efforts of others. A day before the mandatory quarantine, on March 19, there was a mobilization in the industrial zone of Bogotá due to massive layoffs, which have been deepening in recent weeks.

Comrade César of the Black Rose Anarchist Federation of the United States, the territory with the most cases and deaths from the coronavirus in the world, said that the migrant and African-American population are the hardest hit in this crisis. "The health system is privatized and linked to the work of each person," that is, whoever has a job could access a health plan, otherwise many from the south travel to Mexico to buy inhalers, some medicine or to see a specialist. Nor is it prepared to be able to provide basic needs, guarantee access to abortion, hormonal therapies for trans partners, and much less to face the pandemic," said Cesar. They also delved into the situation of women, lesbians, trans, transvestites and non-binary peoples in the context of isolation. "What we have seen in Chile is an increase in the number of calls received to make complaints (70% more calls) and that the number of femicides has increased considerably worldwide. The quarantine situation (confinement) leads to situations of violence and we are forced to stay in our homes, since many times the home itself is a place of risk for children, women and gender dissidents," said comrade María Paz. In Argentina the same situation occurs, the comrade Angela gave the

example of the struggle of workers from the telephone line 144 to attend to situations of violence and the constant denunciations of poor working conditions and the increase in violence.

Comrade María Paz added that a few weeks ago, in Chile, Macarena Santelices, the great-niece of the dictator Augusto Pinochet, who openly defends the dictatorship and all measures of state repression to protect “the nation,” was announced as the new Minister of Women and Gender Equity. In contrast, various self-managed initiatives have emerged at the local level; for example, carry out surveys and draw up emergency plans in situations of patriarchal violence. Also, the Feminist Coordinator 8M together with other feminist organizations have promoted the campaign “In Network We Take Care” to deliver various feminist tools and useful data to face patriarchal violence in quarantine.

In both territories of Chile and Argentina they agree that gender violence increased from the quarantine, “where we are forced to live with our aggressors and our abusers and those of our daughters,” said Angela of ASL. And she added that from the State, the policies that are promoted end up being basically propaganda, since they do not attack the underlying problems or give real help to people who are going through a situation of violence, such as offering some specific refuge resource, housing, financial support, childcare, etc. In this context, the role of justice and the heterocispatrilial binary view of the State on this sphere of our lives is also evident.

In Colombia the situation is similar to that in the south of South America: “the pandemic has managed to make more visible (or in certain cases simply visible) both the structural problems linked to the capitalist economic system and its contradictions, and the gender-based violence perpetrated by the patriarchy,” assuring that in part it increases male violence by forcing women to live with their aggressors. A structural axis of this system that is repeated in all territories. Comrade Luisa also recounted the situation that a large sector of the trans population is going through, living on precarious sex work that in these times has frozen, exposing them even more to situations of precariousness and exploitation of their lives. In turn, she mentioned the imprisoned women and sexual dissidents who have carried out different strikes in defense of their rights.

En tanto, Cesar manifestó que en EEUU las mujeres en su mayoría son trabajadoras esenciales, son las cajeras en los supermercados, las doctoras o enfermeras en los centros médicos, que sumado a su precarización también afecta esta situación a su psiquis. También denunció que las compañeras trans están sin acceso a terapia hormonales por lo que corren muchos riesgos su salud. “No es que no hay recursos sino que lo utilizan con la intención de controlar a la gente en todos lados”.

Then, in the talk, they turned to the actions and organizational experiences of the working class in this context, which have been carried out in the different territories. For Angela from ASL, concretely and in the heat of struggles and the conflicts that are taking place are aimed at sustaining the basic needs of the class. “Everything that could be guaranteed in the midst of this pandemic is thanks to the workers who continue to support the health system, education, energy, food, transportation and food in the neighborhoods,” said the comrade. And they added: “the employers attack us with layoffs, suspensions, salary cuts, while the union bureaucracies deliver all our rights without a minimum of discussion, and the State represses any attempt to defend our class.”

In this sense, she stated that “in ASL, in each territory where we are inserted, we try to promote solidarity among workers, organization, assemblies to be able to intervene wherever possible, in the discussion about our working conditions, elements of hygiene and care, supporting our conflicts, occupations, making community meals”.

Meanwhile, the comrade from Solidaridad said that for them the pandemic finds them in some way better prepared post October 18. “The process of recomposition of the social fabric that is strongly promoted from the revolt gives rise to different and new forms of organization. In this context, local and territorial organization is of key importance, and it is the different territorial assemblies or organizations of that type, generated in the heat of the revolt, who have taken on tasks to tackle the different areas of the reproduction of life that are problematized by the crisis,” she related.

She also highlighted the importance of the feminist movement, especially the 8M Coordinator, responding from the beginning of the health crisis with a “feminist emergency plan in the face of the coronavirus crisis,” concentrating on territorially organized collective care, the confrontation of patriarchal violence, a call for a strike for life and emergency measures that put the health of each and everyone above the profit of a few.

Mass layoffs and non-payment are also experienced in Colombia. Comrade María Luisa recounted various conflicts that occurred, such as on April 7 (in the midst of quarantine) there were marches and blockades by construction workers, and more at the end of the month, workers from the multinational Tenaris carried out a massive “cacerolazo” in Cartagena, denouncing layoffs and late payment. “The situation leads us to think of the urgency of unionizing this precarious sector which has been hit hard by the crisis.”

In turn, they also mentioned the protests of social sectors demanding food aid in this context of crisis, receiving repression from the State. And they highlighted: the struggle of health workers becomes more important than ever, since their lives, as well as the lives of people who now suffer from COVID-19, depend on an improvement in working conditions, increase in salaries and equipment, staff and protective resources against the virus.”

Meanwhile, according to Cesar in the US, the working class is organizing. In some cases they are asking for the factories to be closed due to increased transmission of the virus, and in others, when they are out of work, many of them can no longer pay their rent, which is where their highest percentage of salary goes. In the latter sector, they are organizing Tenant Unions, looking for ways to organize to resist evictions and they intend to expand to reach a national strike.

After several exchanges between the panelists on the repressive advance in the territories, the authoritarian turn and the current role of the State, they finished with future projections to face this world economic crisis. For the comrade Luisa, “the future is somewhat uncertain” although she affirmed that a serious blow is coming to the working class and to various oppressed social groups in the effort of Capital to get out of the economic crisis it is facing now and which will become more acute in the coming years. Grupo Vía Libre highlights the value of solidarity and mutual aid initiatives that are being carried out at the moment; they listed a series of self-managed solidarity actions and affirmed that “these spontaneous signs of brotherhood among workers, reaffirm the idea and practice that an alternative society is possible, since the Coronavirus pandemic has crudely exposed the injustice and inequality of the capitalist system . The ties between the members of the working class are strengthened, to achieve the construction of a strong people that will become imperative in this new phase of struggle against Capitalism and the State.”

For his part, Cesar of the Black Rose Anarchist Federation expressed that higher levels of politicization are being generated among workers, the situation has changed a great deal, mass dismissals in certain places have generated greater organization in labor unions. “The important

thing is that there are grassroots organizations that exist right now and many people who have never been involved in anything begin to look favorably on those organizations.”

Meanwhile, Angela from Argentina stated that this situation presents a long and difficult road ahead, “it is really essential to work on unity from below and stop all attempts to further subvert our living and working conditions. It seems to us that the only way to get out of this crisis is by generating ties between employed and unemployed workers, with solidarity, mutual aid, unity in the struggles and accompaniment in the conflicts. Being aware of any advance against our class, reacting firmly to stop it, occupying the street if necessary. ” In turn, they highlighted the importance of ”being present in the organizations of our class and to fight from there,” and the urgency of debating with sister organizations to achieve higher levels of unity. And they highlighted the need to ”generate spaces of direct power of the people, organizing ourselves in our neighborhoods, in factories, in schools, in homes, in health centers, in every place where we are.”

While comrade María Paz said that at the local level, Solidaridad has the conviction to “promote a social political front that is capable of unifying living organizations of the working class and peoples in struggle to face the crisis under the same platform . A platform that allows consolidating the fabric of revolt with its feminist, anti-capitalist and libertarian spirit, in an organizational platform that coordinates from the ‘ollas comunes’ to the general strike ”. At the same time, she pointed out that they identify that there is no way out without regional and global coordination. “The crisis is global in an unprecedented way and therefore we have a historic opportunity to strengthen ties of solidarity and international debate to build an anti-capitalist, feminist and libertarian program that crosses borders, in the same way that the working class crosses borders, despite of all the restrictions that the states seek to impose”.

The Americas Coordinator will continue to mount virtual talks in the coming weeks to delve into different axes, and weave real networks at the regional and global levels from a libertarian perspective, within the framework of the international campaign ”Capitalism is the pandemic: another world is possible”. We have to create the foundations of that new world that we carry in our hearts.

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The Americas Coordinator held a virtual talk on May 9 on the current situation in America, particularly in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and the United States from a libertarian socialist perspective. During the discussion, the different analyses and future projections that each organization builds on this moment of world economic crisis were expressed. The Covid-19 pandemic deepened the miseries generated by this capitalist system in all territories.

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