



## **FOR A DEMOCRATIC AND RADICALLY PROGRESSIVE WAY OUT OF THE HEALTH CRISIS**

Our country as well as the entire world are facing a threat of unprecedented proportions due to the presence and exponential spread of the coronavirus. It seems fair to say that the humanitarian, social, economic and political consequences of this crisis may be even greater than those of the 1929 crisis, with the aggravating circumstance that this crisis is global in scope and affects human health.

This bleak outlook is not due solely to the nature of the virus; it also results from the irresponsible management of the issue by governments that have given priority to rescuing the private economic sector's profits at the expense of a deteriorating public healthcare system. This contrasts with the measures which have been implemented in China, for instance, and which have produced encouraging results.

In view of the risks already existing and those to come, we believe that several radical measures are needed in order to strengthen the state's capacity for intervention. The first, as suggested by the Belgian Labour Party, consists in limiting the country's economic activity to those sectors that are essential to the needs of the population or directly involved in the fight against the epidemic; the shutdown of non-priority sectors must be done without prejudicing the remuneration of those who will thus be forced into unemployment. To put staff at risk for the companies' sole benefit seems indecent, to say the least. Workers who are essential to addressing the vital needs of the population, and in particular refuse collectors, prison officials, public transport staff, food store workers, etc., must be given means of protection and risk premiums with regard to a disease which is to be recognised as occupational.

Furthermore, the rapid increase in the number of patients and infected people is likely to lead to the saturation of beds in the country's hospital system. To address this problem, the state will have to requisition hotels without delay to accommodate patients and medical staff. These hotels should also be used to accommodate the homeless. This requisition is all the more viable as the flow of tourists is freefalling.

The financing of such measures, as well as others relating to medical capacity building, must be done through a rigorous taxation of the profits of large companies, especially pharmaceutical companies and the banking sector. During the 2008 crisis, our governments arranged for the public sector budget, i.e. taxpayers' money, to be used in order to save banks that were victims of their own speculative manoeuvres. Today, it is these banks that will have to help deal with the crisis.

To the same effect and at European level, our country must commit itself to the rapid and exemplary implementation of the Tobin tax and to the abandonment of the austerity measures imposed by the European Union, whose will is to serve the sole interests of employers and international finance. Multinational enterprises such as Amazon, which are profiting from the crisis, must be seriously drawn upon.

At international level, it seems urgent to call on the experience and scientific capabilities of China and Cuba. China has carried out large-scale testing, a practice that was generalised to other Asian countries. With its antiviral "Interféron Alfa 2B", Fidel's country has participated in the treatment campaign implemented in China, which also used the chloroquine that is so controversial in Europe. Furthermore, we must demand an end to the outrageous sanctions against the people of countries guilty of insubordination like Venezuela, Iran, Cuba and Syria.

This crisis must also be an opportunity to mobilise popular resources within the context of confinement. The shortage of masks, for instance, can be tackled with a twofold strategy: on the one hand, by requiring that the textile industry convert its production system in order to manufacture them and, on the other hand, by calling on the help of sewing professionals to participate in their production through an effort of organisation and qualified technical assistance.

In the same spirit, we could promote employment to deal with a major threat to our populations. We are advised to observe social distancing while at the same time inevitably meeting people in supermarkets and pharmacies. All large retailers should be required to implement an ordering and delivery system, including in their convenience stores. As for pharmacies, which are twice as vulnerable given the number of clients and their potential health problems, they should also favour online ordering systems and ensure the delivery whenever possible. Where appropriate, the procedures applied by the pharmacies when on duty should be generalised. Finally, all efforts must be made to minimise the use of cash; the cancellation of taxes on card payments could contribute to this effort.

All these suggestions and measures are not only of a pragmatic and/or technical nature; above all, they have a political content. It is true that we are experiencing a biological aggression, but it is taking place within a social and political system that is in itself aggressive against popular interests to the sole benefit of big business or, more accurately, its shareholders. We must unreservedly fight this system led by politicians who are more eager to shatter public services and spend billions for the benefit of American military industries and for the warmongering of NATO than to invest them in healthcare programmes. This crisis can be an opportunity to become aware of that fact and act accordingly.

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