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Covid-19 statement

Theses on the Left and the corona crisis

- Features - Covid-19 - Statements -

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1. The corona crisis is a crisis of unprecedented magnitude and will have dramatic consequences. It involves a global health crisis, a health care crisis and a financial and economic crisis. In a world that has long been characterized by a high degree of instability, by lack of international leadership and the rise of nationalism, racism and right-wing populism, as well as the weak level of organization of the working class, of social and left-wing movements.

2. Internationally, we are only at the beginning of the corona-pandemic. After China, the coronavirus mainly struck Western Europe, but its spread is rapid and as the infection reaches the refugee camps in the Middle East and Southern Europe, and the slums in Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America the consequences will be enormous. The health care system in these countries cannot cope with an explosive increase in infections, especially not in metropolises of ten to twenty million inhabitants, where people live in close proximity to each other.

3. The economic effects of this crisis are enormous. We will be facing not only the economic impact of the pandemic in itself, which will be considerable, but also the fact that the pandemic is acting as a trigger for a recession/crisis that has been lurking for some time. A global increase in inequality and growing impoverishment is on the horizon. The most vulnerable groups will be hit hardest.

4. It is no coincidence that new viruses such as MERS, SARS, H1N1, Zika, Ebola have been appearing with an ever-increasing frequency in recent years. This has everything to do with neoliberal globalisation, with a sick and sickening system of food production dominated by agro-industry and the destruction of natural ecosystems, particularly of primary forests.

5. The pharmaceutical industry, dominated by 'big pharma', is focused on making profit. It is therefore more interested in developing drugs for relatively small groups of wealthy patients than in developing preventive drugs against diseases that affect large groups of poor people. Major cuts have been made in fundamental independent research at universities, including in the Netherlands. Promising research programs have been discontinued. As long as there is no outbreak, research into viruses is hardly a priority for the pharmaceutical industry. Long-term planning is necessary - but the market is not able to provide this.

6. The spread of the virus and its development into a pandemic was made possible in part by the heavy cuts in curative and preventive healthcare and by the wave of privatizations of recent decades. As a result, there is a lack of sufficient stocks of basic public health services, such as intensive care beds, respiratory equipment, testing equipment and even of mouth caps. Due to the lack of testing in the Netherlands, the rest of Europe and the US, an approach based on sufficient test data such as was applied in South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore was impossible. This led to further proliferation.

7. In the event of such a serious crisis, rapid and decisive action by the government is necessary. After forty years of austerity measures, privatization, market forces and political arrogance, governments are insufficiently prepared and equipped for a crisis of this magnitude. In addition, the government mainly protects vested interests. Support for corporations and industries is given priority over support for those who are least able to defend themselves: the homeless, refugees, migrant workers, the elderly living alone, self-employed, and precarious workers. Especially women and people of colour working in care, in cleaning and in domestic work will bear the burden of the consequences of the epidemic and the measures taken.

8. Government intervention in crises like this is necessary. A government ought to protect the population by promulgating certain regulations and distributing scarce resources. But, apart from the fact that the measures taken are selective, they often came too late. This was the case in the Netherlands with the closure of schools, with the start of test programs and with the measures that make 'social distancing' possible. Nevertheless, we have to face the fact that authoritarian measures can in the long run fundamentally change the relationship between citizens and the state. A crisis of this magnitude is an ideal opportunity to press ahead with all kinds of measures that would be impossible under 'normal' circumstances - measures such as extreme forms of control, security and surveillance. This is what Naomi Klein calls 'shock therapy'. It is important to protect society, to protect democratic and social rights. This requires a critical attitude and massive initiatives 'from below' in order to make new forms of solidarity, resistance and democratic control possible.

9. The coronavirus makes no distinction according to skin colour. Anyone can be infected by it. The severity of the disease depends on several factors: age, but also social class and individual condition and health. The corona virus is colour blind, but the societies which it afflicts are not. The virus hits people of colour especially hard because they are proportionally poorer, live in worse conditions, have fewer opportunities to distance themselves from others, and have less access to health care. With this crisis we are facing the reinforcement of racism and of xenophobia. The description of corona as 'a foreign virus' (Trump) and discrimination and violence against people with an Asian background are expressions of this. For right-wing populists and post-fascists, this crisis situation - with the fear and frustration that come with it - is an ideal breeding ground for their poisonous ideas about 'us' and 'the other', about the need for authoritarian leadership and for closing borders.

10. The left makes a mistake if it would think that all this is going to end sometime soon and that it can stick to its usual priorities and ways of working. The left must carefully analyse the specific links between this crisis and the DNA of the capitalist system. Both the direct causes - namely the profit-driven global agro-industry and the role of multinational and agro-industrial companies - and the causes of the spread of the epidemic, namely the breakdown of health systems and the role of 'big pharma'. The government's crisis policy must also be critically examined. It is clear that the danger of this virus has been underestimated and that measures came too late or were half-hearted. To face the crisis, insufficient medical and other capacity was freed up.

11. In the fight against the crisis, the left has to start from the interests of the afflicted and the most vulnerable - and not from safeguarding the political and economical interests of the rich. This implies the immediate transfer into community hands of the entire health infrastructure, the socialisation of private clinics, of medical supplies and of all facilities and services and personnel that can be deployed to provide assistance to the victims and prevent a further spread of the virus.

12. For the most vulnerable groups: refugees, homeless people, migrant workers, people with psychiatric problems, people (in particular women and children) who are victims of or at risk of (domestic) violence - and vulnerable people from LGBTIQ communities - safe accommodation should be arranged, for example in vacant hotels, business premises and in other suitable places. Evictions or sanctions for rent arrears and the closure of facilities for non-payment must be prohibited. Irrespective of their health insurance, everyone should have free access to all necessary medical facilities, medicines and protective equipment. For people in prison and captivity, specific measures must be taken to protect their health.

13. All workers must be provided with sufficient protective means and be enabled to take the necessary precautions against contamination, as demanded by Dutch trade-union central FNV. Any workplace where this is not the case must be closed by the workers themselves, with their full wages being paid. The strike by Italian workers in the car industry is an example of such necessary social struggle. All workers in non-essential production and services should have the right to cease work without losing full pay.

14. Anyone who, as a result of the crisis or measures taken in the context of the crisis, becomes wholly or partially unemployed or loses income must be fully compensated in order to protect purchasing power. Salaries in vital sectors such as health and education must be drastically increased. This applies first and foremost to salaries of cleaners, nurses and ambulance staff and of other underpaid work.

15. Partly due to the need to keep a distance from each other, all kinds of socio-cultural institutions and even food banks have closed down and people are becoming isolated. We see the emergence of initiatives to help and support victims of the virus, to help people in isolation and care workers. By running errands, looking after children, taking over certain tasks or simply by maintaining contact. Such initiatives deserve all our praise and support. Civil society organizations, trade unions and social movements must work to defend society and to support and develop forms of self-organization that are consistent with the necessary precautions. Solidarity is our main weapon in this crisis.

16. There are similarities between the corona crisis and the climate crisis. The causes lie in an economic system driven by the hunger for profit and characterized by exploitation of labour and nature. It is a global economic system that produces a break between economy and ecology. A number of measures that should have been taken earlier are now being taken in an improvised fashion. Examples are restricting air traffic and commuting between home and work as well as the cancelling of spectacles that waste money and energy, such as Formula 1 races. At the same time, many of the measures necessary for the transition to a carbon-free and green economy have not yet been taken. We have to fight for a society in which such measures become systematic and structural, to make sure that - when the corona crisis is over - capitalism will not simply return to normal.

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Translated by Alex De Jong for **International Viewpoint** from [Grenzeloos](#).

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