

Class Analysis: Serbia in 2020

The year behind us was marked by the pandemic of the COVID-19. It once again proved that those who hold the power and money use every crisis – including this one – for their own enrichment and to the detriment of everyone else.

In addition to the topics of corona and corona-crisis, in this [Class Analysis of Serbia in 2020](#), we want to single out two topics: the issue of enormous environmental pollution in the Balkan region and wider, as well as the growing abusive power of the bailiff mafia.

Corona: a crisis for the people, an opportunity for those in power

Over the past year the world underwent a [huge global redistribution of wealth](#). The victims of this will be poor countries and the poorest population in the countries of the capitalist centre. Thanks to the “[corona crisis](#)” fifty richest people in the United States now own as much as the poorer half of Americans. This is a good illustration of the logic underlying every economic crisis in capitalism: regardless of the causes, it is the poor who pay the price of the crisis, while billionaires always find ways to accrue money and make themselves wealthier than before the crisis.

All this is, of course, about taking advantage of the fact that most of us live from paycheck to paycheck and that the pandemic makes us particularly vulnerable. In Serbia, there has been a [breakdown of labor rights](#), a collapse of [family dynamics](#) due to the [work-from-home schemes](#) and the rule of “[constant availability](#)”. [Spying on employees](#) has been normalized, [intimidation and blackmailing](#) is what thousands of

[workers](#) face on a daily basis. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of people who [have already lost their jobs](#), a big [wave of layoffs](#) and soaring levels of [illegal work](#) are to be expected in 2021.

This situation is not specific for Serbian context; it is a state of affairs in the global “new corona reality”. In the US, managers of the American company “Tyson Foods”, in their largest pork processing plant, [organized betting](#) on how many of their workers would catch coronavirus, while in the midst of a pandemic they forced the employees to work close to each other in unhygienic conditions. About the same time, a scandal broke out in Belgium revealing that [the authorities deliberately let](#) thousands of helpless people in nursing homes become infected and die because protecting their lives was “not cost-effective”.

In Serbia, the election campaign in the spring of 2020 was disguised as a state of emergency, allegedly motivated by the concern for public health. It was accompanied by a systemic falsification and [forgery of data](#) regarding the number of sick and dead of coronavirus. Following [the elections organized in such circumstances](#), another tightening of anti-corona measures was announced which triggered spontaneous popular protests. These protests were quickly and [brutally suppressed](#) through intensive police violence. People are becoming increasingly aware of this situation and it is already over [50 percent of citizens](#) who believe that the police exclusively protect the interests of criminals and politicians.

Later in the year, the epidemic in Serbia escalated out of control which resulted in thousands of infected people and hundreds of dead, while the [healthcare](#) and [education systems collapsed](#). It was clear by then that nobody trusted the official data, even more so when every now and then you hear that someone you know has died.

Health systems around the world [are collapsing](#) or they are on

the verge of collapse. The mortality rate is on the rise as, over the past decades, the capitalist system devastated health systems in almost all countries of the world. Apart from the geopolitical race for the vaccine and in contrast to the restrictive measures from the early days of the epidemic, the dominant solution in many countries soon became the so called “herd immunity”. [Collective immunity](#), as a way of fighting a pandemic, simply means – let people get infected, knowing that some of them will die. As access to healthcare is limited mainly to those who have the financial means to pay for healthcare, and that the [mortality rate from coronavirus among the poor](#) is twice the mortality rate of the rich, it is clear that, just as in the case of the financial crisis, it will be the working class who will bear the brunt of the epidemic.

Capital radically denies the idea of society and demands that the healthy sacrifice the old and the sick in order to maintain the order of political oppression and economic exploitation.

Belgrade is the most polluted city in the world

According to official data, over 3,000 people have died of coronavirus in Serbia since the beginning of the epidemic.

In Serbia [7,000 people die prematurely](#) due to air pollution – every year.

Belgrade has been generally considered a polluted city and the ratings from the early November 2020 have put Belgrade [on the throne](#) as the most polluted capital in the world. This information definitely deserves to be one of the “news of the year”. Thermal power plants “Nikola Tesla” are the ninth largest pollutant [on the planet](#). And let’s add the so-called [“coal mafia”](#), which controls the energy market in Serbia by dealing in extremely low-quality lignite coal. During the

state of emergency, when the urban traffic was significantly reduced, it became obvious that the traffic was not the main polluter, as the authorities used to claim. So, the state environment agency decided to “solve the problem of pollution” by [lowering the pollution criteria](#), and the air previously marked as “polluted” is now simply renamed as “acceptable”.

Residents of the village Krivelja in eastern Serbia are asking for the permanent relocation of their village due to unbearable [pollution](#) caused by the mine workings run by the Chinese company Zidjin. In the village of Stajićevo in northern Serbia, residents have [flammable drinking water](#) in their houses. Construction projects are the cause of mass [deforestation](#) which endangers [natural habitats](#) of autochthonous species [throughout the Balkans](#). During the whole year, authorities in the region acted to protect the interests of private companies or to stifle acts of [local residents](#) protesting against health and [environmental devastation](#).

The pandemic has stripped and accelerated all forms of devastation of nature. It facilitated the [blocking of watercourses](#) through mini hydropower plants, usurpation of public land and [harassment of locals](#), all in favor of private capital. Thanks to the pandemic it became easier and faster for the EU core states to transport their [waste to the periphery of Europe](#), where it can be disposed of through local political mafia. The pandemic is also a good opportunity to lobby in Brussels for [suspension of key environmental regulations](#) in order to improve “the business climate”.

No one pretends to care about public health anymore or to protect nature. It is considered to be backwards to constrain the capital for the sake of public health; instead, unscrupulous capitalist “development” is getting the upper hand. Chinese tire factory Linglong is allowed to [pollute the nature reserve](#) Carska bara without any penalties. Even more, the state has given [subsidies](#) to this factory, with the local municipality of Zrenjanin going so far as to naming a street

after the company – [The Linglong Avenue](#). What is the price of the strategic partnership of the steel factory in Smederevo, if the concentration of carcinogenic dust has increased and “[something resembling steel shavings](#)” flies in the air? It is known that many foreign-owned factories in Serbia do not provide workers with equipment and protection against the Covid-19. However, foreign capital is not the only contestant in the race to the ecological bottom. Among the usurpers is the Serbian Orthodox Church which, with God’s help and despite the [protests of environmental movements](#), cuts down trees and fences countless acres of land on the National park of Fruška Gora.

It is expected that by 2050 the global environmental crisis will result in mass displacements and over a [billion climate refugees](#). One percent of the richest are responsible for [twice as much air pollution](#) than 50 percent of the poorest people on the planet. That is why it is absolutely clear that [there is no such thing as “green capitalism”](#) or sustainable capitalist development.

The bailiff mafia is becoming ever more powerful

The bailiffs are obviously [private entrepreneurs](#), since they carry out executions of court orders even in the obviously unfounded cases. What is more, the one who decides on objections to the work of a bailiff is the bailiff himself.

Not even the pandemic prevented the bailiff mafia in Serbia from forcibly evicting people from their only homes, and then selling the houses for a fraction of its real price at rigged auctions. For example, the four-member family [Adamović](#) from Novi Sad received a notification that the apartment they lived in was sold, without being previously informed that their debt had been sold by the bank to a man who introduced himself to them as the buyer and new owner of their apartment.

The truth that “public” auctions are rigged became obvious when a bailiff filed criminal charges against the people who came to attend an auction. In fact, they obstructed the bailiff’s business of [rigging auctions](#) with pre-agreed buyers. This is just one of the blatant examples of how the bailiff mafia works.

However, the actual source of profit for members of the bailiff mafia is the [process of blocking debtors’ accounts](#). That is why the miserable 100 euros of state aid, distributed after the Covid-19 state of emergency, was automatically withdrawn from a debtor’s account as part of the debt-collection process.

In November 2020, the judiciary transferred to bailiffs utility debts of a [million debtors](#). These debts are over 15 or 20 years old, and many of them are “forgotten” debts that consisted of very small sums. In the hands of the bailiffs, a twenty years old debt of 1,000 RSD (approx. 8 EUR) will easily increase to 20,000 or 30,000 RSD (150-250 EUR). These debts include phantom debts for TV subscription amounting to over [50 billion dinars](#) (total of 420 millions EUR).

One million debtors in a country of seven million people? That means every one of us. So, we can be sure that 2020 was the year when the bailiffs in Serbia confirmed their status as the real enemies of the people. The consequences of their destructive “work” are to be witnessed in the years to come.

Serbia: colony on the periphery

The coronavirus epidemic has exposed Serbia’s position as a peripheral country of capitalism and an economic colony of Europe and US.

Dozens of foreign companies which were [subsidized](#) by millions of euros of our money [stopped their production](#) overnight. Not because they care about their workers’ health, but because it

was more profitable for them to stop production. Soon afterwards we could hear on [the news](#) that [hundreds of workers in these companies were laid off](#) on a daily basis. Many foreign companies went so far as to fire the entire workforce [overnight](#) without any notice. Meanwhile, the state continues to [subsidize new foreign investors](#) in order to maintain Serbia's image of an "investor's paradise". Those who most benefit from this are the members of the political mafia who get fat bribes in exchange for subsidize contracts. The money is then transferred to off-shore accounts and invested in further enrichment schemes at the expense of the people of Serbia.

Simultaneously with subsidizing corporations and claiming that our economy has never been better, the state remains on its colonial masters' payroll, [further borrowing money](#) and pushing the country deeper in debt. Serbia's public debt has exceeded 27 billion euros out of which a [12 billion debt](#) was made by the current government.

The state has shown complete negligence for the workers in the factories (i.e. [the infamous factory Jura](#)) which continued to operate despite the mass corona infestation.. The same happened when the national airline [laid off hundreds](#) of people – the state stepped in [to cover the airline company's debts](#), not to help the workers.

As the corona virus epidemic in Serbia is not calming down and thousands of people are losing their jobs, the role of Aleksandar Vučić as the colonial administrator of Serbia is becoming more than obvious. This crisis, like any other, has shown that the state serves first and foremost the economic interests of the ruling class. In the case of Serbia, it is the local comprador bourgeoisie working for the interests of the Western economic elite, tirelessly draining Serbia's natural wealth and working class.

Crisis at the centre of the world system

The disregard for human lives by the ruling class became apparent in the spring of 2020, at the very centre of the world capitalist system – in the United States. At the end of April, [22 million Americans](#) were filling in for unemployment benefits, compared to 5 million Americans at the beginning of that month. The total number of people who lost their jobs in US is [at least 45 million](#). All this due to the crisis triggered by Covid-19, the virus that Donald Trump's government pretended not to exist at all in the first weeks of the outbreak.

The negligence of the authorities and the capitalist cruelty have led to the [highest unemployment rate](#) in the United States since the Great Depression. To make matters worse, the Trump administration – as part of its politics of conflict with China – withdrew the US from membership in the [World Health Organization](#). As China is the country where international financial capital has been moving to for years, it is considered to be the pretendent for the future centre of the capitalist world system.

The year 2020 was also marked by the police [murder of George Floyd, an African American man](#), which is just one of over a [thousand similar murders](#) committed each year. The murder led to mass unrest across the US, at the height of the pandemic. It was obvious that the myth about [media freedom in America](#) went by the board, as the journalists were under constant physical attacks and pressure. As icing on the cake, the coronavirus pandemic in the US has led to [the largest budget deficit in history](#) of as much as 864 billion dollars.