

AW discussion on Covid, state measures and the protests Winter 2021/22

We read texts by [Mouvement Communiste](#) and [Sergio Bologna](#) on this topic, as well as had internal discussions about the [anti-Green Pass mobilisations](#) in other countries.

A summary of Sergio Bologna's article on the anti-vax/Green Pass movement: ['We can't leave the idea of freedom to the far right!', 2021](#)

The article describes the political character of USA & Italian anti-vax movements - and their sympathisers, as the pursuit of personal freedom and sovereignty of individuals cut off from civic social contracts and obligations; typified by the 2021 storming of Capitol hill (USA) and far-right/fascist attacks on CGIL (Italy). The text traces the origins of these politics in neoliberal transformations of public and working life, including mass privatisation of public services. novel forms are called for to understand/explain the current movements - the absence of class consciousness in anti-vax, and pursuit of individualism on a global scale, places them at odds with any politics of collectivity and solidarity – a form of social darwinism serving both the free market and untethered social relations made possible through “Big Tech” (Google/Amazon/Facebook etc). Against this backdrop, the author provokes counter-movements to recognise the social basis and political risks of these tendencies, and to defeat them by carrying forward collective movements for socialised public health.

Main points:

1. Trump and supporters have constantly stressed the need for individual freedom. situates USA liberty in its historic antagonism with communism - freedom as the essence of an economic order (freedom from communism, freedom of the market). Distinction between bourgeois freedom (instantiated by the 19C French revolution, and subaltern politics solidarity).
2. The situation in 2021 is different – the extreme right/Trump'd up notion of freedom amounts to freedom of the 'multitude', dislocated from class, and can be dated to end of western democracy vs the communist regime - an expression of dissolution of middle class and fragmentation and division within the working class.
3. Free from social, economic, or institutional ties, this notion freedom is 'a biological, "natural" substance of a humanity in search of pure wellbeing' – aka, the right of an individual to do whatever they want, for their individual benefit; beyond institutions and other-regarding behaviours or social contracts and obligations.
4. SB characterises this as a regression of european-liberal political organising principles: from civil society to social Darwinism and survival of the fittest, expressed through racist-colonialist and neoliberal-capitalisms. Later he also goes on to say this regression is 'the most radical way to negate all the values on which the labour movement, socialism, and "the left" are based. This notion of freedom negates solidarity, community, mutual aid, values on which the social fabric and social conflicts are based'.
5. Understood this way, the anti-vax movement (and groups/others tending towards affinity with it) is an expression of an extreme-right tendency to the value of absolute personal freedom, and freedom from interference – particularly from the state.

SB is clear at this point how the anti-vaccination movement and opposition to the Green Pass/vaccination passport should be kept separate, confusion around this is politically destructive.

6. At its core, anti-vax is a movement against the state. In the USA, the most 'accomplished' expression of this came with the storming of Capitol Hill 01/21. In Italy, it was with the attack on CGIL union headquarters and attempt to advance on Palazzo Chigi - ministers council building; a historic reminder of fascist attacks from 100 years prior.

7. (Again) anti-vax has nothing to do with class, but resonates with the dissolution of the middle and working class and transformation of working life. Its economic order is best characterised as being constitutive of, and of advancing neoliberalism - to be against the state is going against public services (healthcare, education, public transport, water supply, etc) ... privatise everything, those who can't pay are out of luck!

8. Novel concepts are needed to characterise this movement without complacency, eg. 'neo-nazism without Hitler' – (anti-vax-neoliberalism) inverts National Socialism in so far as individualism supersedes the pledge of collective identity/nationality etc. it's individualism on a global scale, a modern multitude of 'individuals without institutional ties, without institutional order, without regulating authority'.

9. SB thinks this is compatible with "Big Tech" and the kinds of social relations Google/Amazon/Facebook etc. make possible: *'...today, the natural inclination towards individualism is increased by the belief that access to the Internet can be access to the market and thus to survival, without the mediation of any institution through subordinated labour and the wage – in this sense, the freelancer is the symbolic figure of our time. Intermediary bodies such as unions are presented by companies as obstacles to self-realization, and perceived as such by workers'*.

10. Counter-movements need to get to the 'social roots' of these behaviours to understand why these ideas and tendencies are being adopted. They can also address the benefits of public, socialised healthcare; foregrounding principles of competence, education, and scientific inquiry.

11. 'Those who fanatically defend their individual freedom, who do not recognize any regulating institution and therefore not the social state, entrust themselves completely and unconsciously to the market, which crushes them and condemns them to an existence as the working poor'.

12. SB sees in this predicament a relationship where the sovereign individual is at odds with others who are an obstacle and antagonist to their freedom. Beyond the notion of public services, collectivity is foreign to the anti-vax movement.

13. SB expresses bewilderment as to why the movement attracts people who have very different politics to that of Trump – alternative tracks are available from recent histories - 'experiences, struggles, research and considerations'.

14. Article closes with a concrete example of where collective public health intervention has benefited workers to put current challenges in a historical lineage, with a provocation: *'...the struggle for healthcare for all and for prevention, based on a sense of responsibility towards others, is one of the struggles we have been fighting for half a century, not the business of sorcerer's apprentices'*.

Summary of Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivně proti Kapitálu article: [COVID-19, vaccines, vaccine passports and proletarian politics, \(2021\)](#)

The article considers the relationship between state mandated Covid-19 policies and proletariat/working class life & struggle, in a context of international capitalist development. As pandemic conditions have compounded pre-existing social and economic instabilities in many countries around the world, mobilisations have combined struggles for conditions for life and work with revolts against state policies. This is put forward as the context in which to locate political debates around vaccinations and state sanctioned health surveillance ... as demands for vaccines are getting underway in Tunisia and Cuba, in Europe and USA anti-vaccine and vaccine passport disputes are prolonging the pandemic, playing to inter-class divides and serving the ruling class by staying in the capitalist frame of reference. The case for vaccine uptake is made on evidence based and communised grounds, with some of the dangers (conceptually and politically) of defending individual freedoms in liberal terms described. The authors outline how a communist proletariat/working class movement should respond to these problems by rejecting state control and demanding vaccine equity on an international scale, prioritising the most impacted and organising for workplace and neighbourhood safety. The class-composition of anti-vax movements is also described.

Main points:

1. Emergency state mandated policies have made working class life worse during the pandemic ... states which have introduced vaccines have begun restructuring economic and social forms ... “health first” in the first wave of the pandemic is now “economy first”. Proletariat representation is limited to defensive struggles: ‘agitations and inter-classist rebellions under the sign of reaction and the demand for plebiscitary democracy flourish’.
2. In ‘so called emerging nations’, state responses have been minimal due to lack of means. Pandemic health crises have compounded pre-existing social and political instability, in ‘Colombia to Lebanon, from Algeria to Iran, from Tunisia to Cuba, from Thailand to Burma’. Political movements in these countries described as ‘the visible expression of accelerated class polarisation in a context where the proletariat does not impose its hegemony, because the proletariat itself is on the defensive and, consequently, has not managed to take up the fight for its own interests in the framework of the political class struggle’. These movements combine struggles for conditions for life and work with revolts against state policies.
3. This is the context in which to situate the debate on vaccination and state sanctioned health surveillance... whilst demand for vaccines is getting underway in Tunisia & Cuba, in Europe & the USA, ‘some sections of the population with disparate interests and class origins collectively flaunt the refusal of vaccination and/or vaccine passports’. These share a common calling into question of capitalist science, science generally, and express doubts about vaccine safety and efficacy, genetic manipulation carried out by Big Pharma, minimising covid intensity. The article refutes these on the grounds that the majority of Covid-19 hospitalisations in capitalist nations are with non-vaccinated people. A critical material analysis is missing from these expressions - capitalism needs a numerous, active, and sufficiently healthy workforce to perpetuate its social relations.
4. Revisits an earlier text, “Pandemics, nation-states and capital” to acknowledge the subjugating aspects of vaccine passports for workers, whilst cautioning a real danger of transmission between workers in real workplaces.

'Taking into account the desire of most wage earners to protect themselves with the only instrument which has shown itself to be effective against the pandemic is just as important for the partisans of the proletarian cause'.

5. Anti-authoritarian arguments around health-dictatorships serve to prolong the pandemic and hits the poor hardest of all. Vaccine obligation/certification is less intrusive than other identity verifying processes, and less invasive/pervasive than social control exercised by social media corps, credit card companies, CCTV and mobile phone companies. 'a proletarian policy on the details of the control of health certification must dissociate itself from identity control' – a major tool of social control. Vaccine equity on an international scale, priority for the most impacted, and workplace safety are communist obligations.

6. Vaccine refusal in defense of freedom is a conceptual error which is vulnerable to complicity with the Extreme Right -it calls for the right to infect others. Debates between vacc'ed and unvacc'ed are class divisive, which benefits the ruling class. Cites Marx 1843 On the Jewish Question – liberal freedom under state capitalism vs Schapper in Kommunistische Zeitschri 1847 –freedom in community.

7. Makes distinction between community as expression of dominant class' relations and communist freedom as "Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth" (Marx, Grundrisse).

8. Disputes between vaccinated and unvaccinated are internal to capitalist frames of reference, getting trapped in this abandons class terrain where communists situate themselves. A self-organised working class would protect itself by rejecting state control and applying all the measures which are necessary. This is missing from a current proletariat analysis and response -it's necessary to criticise the logic of anti-vaxers and rebels against the vaccine passports where these movements tend towards the rights of individuals. Not doing so is a sliding step towards authoritarianisms and fascisms. Vaccine fears are characterised as an expression of mistrust and doubt in collectivity and lack of faith that a working-class movement/policy for health could separate itself from that imposed by the state. closing comments characterise composition of anti-vax: *'petty bourgeoisie' and some sections of the proletariat, 'including healthworkers' ... 'the advanced guard of proto-fascism'.*

Some suggested lines of discussion for AW discussion:

* What are the biological and what are the social characteristics of an infectious disease like Covid19? What are the biological and what are the social characteristics of the current vaccination programmes? Why has mass vaccination always been a target for the social-Darwinist Right and Left? (What have been the historical responses by the organised working class?)

* What's the role of mandatory vaccination policies in the context of the pandemic counter-attacks? Can we make a distinction between the tool and the master? And can we accept that using the masters' tool (vaccination) does benefit both the capitalist AND the worker (in the same way as other mandatory but non-controversial health & safety regulations which are indeed mostly the outcomes of workers' struggles?)

* If we want in the intro to the (Hamburg) leaflet to pose such a massive question as "how the working class can become a force that provides 'humanity' with such a

global consciousness”, then we need to find in ourselves the honesty to ask ourselves if the working class can achieve this task alone, without the resources of the states. I think providing a moral and practical signpost is one thing and effectively fighting the mutating viruses is another thing. Unless we seriously believe that workers of the world can, almost overnight, take over the healthcare, public health and the researching, manufacturing and distributing of the vaccines, we have to build states’ actions into our own action plans.

* Finally, are we able to reformulate the communist workers’ proposal from the Green Pass-redux into something that defends the collective-health-benefit of the masters’ tool while at the same time builds on our experiences of the Spring 2020? For example, after discovering that cca 40% of total workforce was able to sustain the rest of the society, workers do not need to accept rising unemployment anymore. It’s in the very interest of workers to eliminate Covid19 for good (something no governments are pursuing), which means vaccination AND at the same time other direct health & safety measures AND, most importantly, a big REDUCTION of working time (something that we now know first-hand, is achievable!)’
questions on list:

*** General queries around the need to distinguish between anti-vax and No Green Pass mobilisations.

*** General queries about the limits of worker’s control/workers self-management, in view of vaccines, obligatory vaccinations and vaccination passports.

*** General questions around balancing individual/collective needs and differences in communised standpoints (if collective action assumes individual contributions, what are the costs of overlooking differences?) -free and self-governing individuals in-communism, body politics etc.

Related queries about a proposal for a proletarian universal message - ‘can the riot of the tribes bring the class back together?’

*** Questions/clarifications around vaccines and transmission – ‘if the vaccine didn’t reduce transmission at all, would vaccine passports make any sense?’

*** Whether obligatory vaccines are health and safety measures for health/care workers? -in workers interests, for their protection etc.

*** What obligatory vaccine adds to current measures?

*** Why this work? -what is it about health/care work that justifies this level of coercion?

*** Who does this work? -what’s the composition of the workforce most impacted?

*** What are some of the material consequences of endorsing more control/compliance measures for this workforce?

*** How have/are workers responding so far?

*** What does representation look like? what are its current limits?

*** What kinds of recuperation is going on by employers/government?

*** Without equivalence, what examples are there in other worker/workplace struggles involving regulation of communicable disease, infection, and obligatory treatment? -what are some of the points of affinity/difference between these and covid governance?

*** What are some important relationships/points of contact to have in this debate/discussion? -if not the far-right/anti-vax groups, who might left/lib-comm' groups want to be in coalition with?

*** 'The vaccines don't seem to prevent a rapid spread of Omicron, BUT have the vaccines contributed to the fact that the Omicron variant is less heavy on the body (whether you are vaccinated or not, which seems to be the case?)'