



# **WFTU | TRADE UNION INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC SERVICES & ALLIED**

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## **WFTU TUI-PS&A 2021 MAY DAY COMMEMORATION: HOPE LIES IN OUR STRUGGLES AS THE WORKING CLASS**

April 30, 2021

**“Workers of the world unite you have nothing to lose but your chains”**

WFTU-TUI-PS&A want to send fraternal greetings to millions of our members around the globe on this important celebration of struggles of workers and the working class in the world. We do this while the world is in complete or partial lockdown due to the COVID 19 pandemic. This is our second Mayday that we are commemorating under such conditions. This year is also a very important year for our union and our federation WFTU as we are preparing for the 18<sup>th</sup> congress which will take place in Vietnam in the month of October 2021.

The clarion call “workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains” is more relevant and urgent today than when it was first made by Marx in the Communist Manifesto. History and recent events have clearly demonstrated that workers and the working class will always be at the receiving end of capitalism; the poverty and misery of the working class under capitalism derives from the fact that they pay for the prosperity of the few in times of economic boom, and also pay for the economic recovery of the system in times of economic slump. The architects and beneficiaries of capitalism, the bourgeoisie, live off the sweat, toil, blood and suffering of the masses of the world.

As we celebrate May Day in 2021 in commemoration of the gallant 1886 struggles of a generation of workers that refused to submit to the ravages of capitalism, as the generation confronting capitalism in the twenty first century, the working class today embodies the best values and principles of humanity and human progress. The negative effects of capitalism on a disproportionately large segment of humanity outweighs its benefits that accrues to only a few in societies across the world. The COVID19 pandemic only served to exposed the already glaring limitations of capitalism that are reflected in the worsening poverty in the world, growing inequality, rising unemployment and the shrinking middle class that is a symptom of the pauperisation of the working class.

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Even before the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic in early 2020 the world had already entered yet another recession in 2019, so, the COVID19 crisis only served to exacerbate and already existing crisis. However, besides the adverse effects of these multiples crises, the problems arising from them were deepened further by the responses of capital that sought to profit further from the situation it has created while shifting the burden of economic recovery to the working class. It was in this context that we witnessed the hoarding of health supplies and the inflation of the prices of these supplies in the early stages of the COVID19 outbreak. This profiteering was, and is still, accompanied by attacks on workers and trade union rights under the pretext of 'COVID19 responses'.

So, it is not surprising to those who understand capitalism that in spite of the lessons learned earlier with regard to PPE supply chains, the development and rollout of COVID19 vaccines has also fallen victim to profiteering and geopolitical manoeuvres. The first instance of vaccine scepticism resulted from the irresponsible politicisation of vaccine development when the US and its allies sought to vilify the scientific work being done by countries such as Russia, China and Cuba in the development of COVID19 vaccines. Under the pretext of "health standards" and "health procedures", the Western imperialist powers have sought to cast doubts on COVID19 vaccines and medicines developed elsewhere in order to secure the COVID19 vaccine market for themselves. This is where the seeds of vaccine imperialism originate from.

Having prepaid millions more doses of COVID19 vaccines from a handful of pharmaceutical companies that produce vaccines, developed countries found themselves competing and fighting to be first in line to receive such vaccines. This situation resulted from the fact that the pharmaceutical companies that have taken billions of dollars in COVID19 vaccine pre-orders were unable to meet demand. The limited production capacity can be directly linked to the prevailing profit-driven Intellectual Property Rights regime of the World Trade Organisation which prevents the unlicensed production of these essential drugs. This despite the fact that governments pour billions into the research and development of these drugs that are later licensed and sold at huge costs to the same governments for private profit.

Rather than dealing with the underlying causes that hamper the worldwide production, distribution and rollout of COVID19 vaccines, the rich countries have chosen to engage in vaccine nationalism in order to secure vaccines only for their populations. This strategy leaves much of the world without vaccines and will allow the COVID19 virus to continue to spread and mutate, thus prolonging the global pandemic and the economic restrictions that are imposed to counter it. Only a global and not a country or continent specific strategy can bring the COVID19 pandemic under control; the triumph of solidarity over competition and human needs over profits should be the goal of all class conscious elements in the world in this struggle.

The impact of the COVID19 and the weak responses are also as a result of the fact that the pandemic struck at a time when public health institutions had been hollowed and weakened in many parts of the world. The global neoliberal policy that has been

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defined by the erosion of free state provided public services such as health in favor of for profit private healthcare has cost millions of poor people their lives and has endangered the livelihoods of millions public service workers. The COVID pandemic has also demonstrated the impotence of the so called "private healthcare" that is grossly ill equipped to meet the healthcare needs of all societies on the globe. Private healthcare is built on the premise of profiteering from the health needs of society, while free public healthcare is built on the premise of healthy productive citizens.

As the WFTU TUI-PS&A, we have noted that many employers are using the cover of COVID19 restrictions to undermine and reverse the historic gains of workers in the workplace. Collective bargaining, health and safety in the workplace, and trade union rights have all come under increasing pressure in different parts of the world. Many trade unionist face victimisation due to their unwavering struggles for fair treatment of workers and decent wages – and many strikes and pickets are not allowed in the name of fighting COVID19 in some parts of the world.

Given all the challenges confronting the workers in the public sector and those who rely on public services, the WFTU TUI-PS&A urges all its affiliates and regions to carry forward the slogan of WFTU "hope lies in our struggles". As a trade union international, we can only fulfil this slogan by continuing to raise and pursue the following practical demands:

- Free and affordable vaccines for all and call for an end to vaccine Nationalism
- Lifting patent right restrictions to allow poor countries to produce the own vaccines.
- Free public healthcare for all
- Respect of the health and safety of workers in the workplace.
- The protection of trade union and workers' rights and respect of all collective agreements reached by workers and employees
- End to Economic and financial blockade on Cuba by imperialist USA
- Freedom of Palestinian illegally jailed by Apartheid Israel
- End to economic and financial aggression on Venezuela by Imperialist USA.

The WFTU TUI-PS&A and the broader progressive trade union movement is waging struggles to attain these demands in different corners of the world under difficult conditions. Our demands need to be understood in the broader context of our opposition to imperialism and its policy of war mongering and domination. The rising tensions among imperialist countries and the proxy wars that accompany them affects workers the most. We therefore need to simultaneously continue our solidarity work in solidarity with the people of Cuba, Venezuela, Western Sahara, Syria, Palestine and Zimbabwe etc. as part of the broader working class struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

**Hope Lies in Our Struggles!!!**

**Satisfaction of Workers Contemporary Needs!!!**

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**Vaccines for All Now!!!**

*Issued by the Office of the General Secretary of WFTU TUI-PS&A*

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