Ventilators versus missiles – the case for socialist planning.

by Pietro Mascetti

The resources of the world are limited. Whether they are natural, existing in the ground, the atmosphere, in the bodies of water or in life, they are finite and therefore their exploitation and use must be carefully planned and used in a sustainable and prioritised fashion.

Planning is the idea that decisions should be taken so that a priority to meet the most critical functions, is to be the first step in any allocation of resources. Remember that those natural and human resources are limited. This understanding is no doubt easily understood by many people right around the world. Its application today is of critical importance.

Ventilators are extremely important pieces of equipment. Today they are in increasing demand because of the pandemic; the exponential explosion of cases of COVID-19 sufferers and the destructive impact it has on the breathing and respiratory systems of human beings. Ventilators allow for oxygen to be delivered to those patients whose lungs are no longer able to obtain oxygen from the atmosphere, nor able to expire carbon dioxide from their lungs.
Medical workers wear protective suits to attend to people sickened by the novel coronavirus, in the intensive care unit of a designated hospital in Wuhan, China, on Feb. 6. (China Daily/Reuters)

These pieces of equipment combine several key elements that are manufactured. They use oxygen cylinders in which, gas is compressed. The compressors, or blowers are mechanical devices that project air outwards. Regulators are attached to the cylinders so that a healthy flow of oxygen is delivered to the patient in such a way that does not damage the patient’s lungs. Batteries are also needed to be able to power the ventilator. The modern-day ventilator is also attached to a computer processor, utilising electrical circuits, precious metals and silicon chips which perform the vital role of monitoring and regulating the mechanical apparatus.

All these resources, plus the expert human labour in extracting them, processing the manufactured parts and
combining and assembling a fully functional ventilator are limited and finite. However, they are all necessary.

And yet, the world is severely lacking in ventilators. Now reflect on those metallic cylinders which contain vital oxygen. Cylinders are also used in the manufacture of arms and weapons of war. Missiles, bullets, grenades, drones and rockets all contain parts which could be used in the manufacturing of ventilators. Digital processing devices which are used to spy on the world’s population could be applied to developing hardware and software systems for ventilation and breathing apparatus. The labour force involved in the production of weapons of mass destruction could be a vital resource for medical equipment manufacturing and the promotion of life rather than death and destruction.
a seeker that uses millimeter wave radar, uncooled imaging infrared guidance and semi-active laser guidance to find its targets.

The point I am trying to make is that capitalism is incapable of meeting the needs of society. Drenched in blood, with fortunes made from war and barbaric imperialism, and the lack of profit from addressing the poor and their urgent medical needs; all driven by market considerations, has exposed the impossibility of addressing human need within its limits. Socialism would plan the world economy according to human need, free from private property, profit and nation states. Production would be planned, organised and resourced so that human protection and not its destruction, sit at the summit of the economic world. And the flowering of human culture would further add to the ability of human society to discover, learn and contribute to our understanding and treatment of deadly diseases such as COVID-19.