



PANDEMIC RESPONSES

Discontent Voices Navigating the Unprecedented

**“Return to
normalcy?
Never again.”**

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Here, we have a compilation of revolutionary voices responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Ranging from the start, to its normalization.

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AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS AND THE OPPORTUNISM OF THE STATE

Anarchists in Italy Report on the Spread of the Virus and the Quarantine

Written at the Start: A Warning from Italy, March 2020



From one side, our lives are threatened by a new virus; from the other side, our freedom is menaced by nationalists and authoritarians intent on using this opportunity to set new precedents for state intervention and control. If we accept this dichotomy—between life and freedom—we will continue paying the price long after this particular pandemic has passed. In fact, each is bound up in the other, dependent upon the other. In the following report, our comrades in Italy describe the conditions prevailing there, the causes of the escalating crisis, and the ways that the Italian government has taken advantage of the situation to consolidate power in ways that will only exacerbate future crises.

At this point, the strategy of the authorities is not aimed at protecting people from the virus so much

as controlling the pace at which it spreads so that it doesn't overwhelm their infrastructure. As in so many other aspects of our lives, crisis management is the order of the day. Our rulers don't intend to preserve the lives of everyone affected by the virus—they already wrote off concern for the destitute long before this crisis began. Rather, they are determined to preserve the current structure of society and their perceived legitimacy within it.

In this context, we have to be able to distinguish between two different disasters: the disaster of the virus itself and the disaster wrought by the ways that the existing order responds—and does not respond—to the pandemic. It will be a grave mistake to throw ourselves at the mercy of the existing power structures, blindly trusting that they exist to save us. On

the contrary, when our rulers say “health,” they mean the health of the economy much more so than the health of our bodies. Case in point: the Federal Reserve just allocated \$1.5 trillion to prop up the stock market—\$500 billion for the banks—but most US citizens still can’t get tested for coronavirus.

Let’s be clear: though Trump and other nationalists worldwide intend to use this opportunity to impose new controls on our movements, this pandemic is not a consequence of globalization. Pandemics have always been global. The bubonic plague spread worldwide several hundred years ago. In introducing a ban on travel from Europe while continuing to try to preserve the health of the United States economy—rather than directing resources towards preserving the health of human beings within the US—Trump is giving us an explicit lesson in the ways that capitalism is fundamentally hazardous to our health.

Viruses don’t respect the invented borders of the state. This one is already inside the US, where health care is much less widely and evenly distributed than it is in most of Europe. All this time, as the virus spread, service industry workers have been forced to continue putting themselves at risk in order to pay their bills. To eliminate the pressures that coerce people into such dangerous decisions, we would have to do away with the system that creates such drastic inequality in the first place. The poor, the homeless, and others who live in unsanitary conditions or without access to decent health care are always the worst hit by any crisis—and the impact on them puts everyone else at greater risk, spreading the contagion further and faster. Not even the wealthiest of the wealthy can isolate themselves completely from a virus like this, as illustrated by the circulation of the virus in the upper echelons of the Republican Party. In short—the prevailing order is not in anyone’s best interest, not even those who benefit from it most.

This is the problem with what Michel Foucault called biopower, in which the same structures that sustain our lives also constrain them. When these systems cease to sustain us, we find ourselves trapped, dependent on the very thing that is endangering us. On a global scale, industrially produced climate change has already made this situation very familiar. Some have even hypothesized that, by reducing pollution and workplace accidents, the industrial slowdown that the virus has brought about in China is saving lives as well as taking them.

Liberals and leftists are responding by criticizing the failures of Trump’s government, effectively demanding more government intervention and centralized control—which Trump, or his successors, will surely wield for their own benefit, not only in response to pandemics, but also in response to everything else they perceive as a threat.

Fundamentally, the problem is that we lack a discourse about health that is not premised on centralized control. Across the political spectrum, every metaphor we have for safety and health is predicated on the exclusion of difference (for example, borders, segregation, isolation, protection) rather than the aim of developing a positive relationship with difference (for example, extending health-care resources to all, including those outside the borders of the US).

We need a way of conceiving of well-being that understands bodily health, social ties, human dignity, and freedom as all being interconnected. We need a way of responding to crisis based in mutual aid—that doesn’t grant even more power and legitimacy to tyrants.

Rather than placing blind faith in the state, we must focus on what we can do with our own agency, looking back to previous precedents for guidance. Let no one charge that anarchistic organizing is not “disciplined” or “coordinated” enough to address an issue like this. We have seen over and over that capitalist and state structures are at their most “disciplined” and “coordinated” precisely in the ways that they impose unnecessary crises on us—poverty, climate change, the prison-industrial complex. Anarchism, as we see it, is not a hypothetical blueprint for an alternate world, but the immediate necessity of acting outside and against the dictates of profit and authority in order to counteract their consequences. While the current models of “addressing the pandemic” that states are carrying out are based on top-down control that nevertheless fail to protect the most vulnerable, an anarchist approach would focus chiefly on shifting resources such as medical care toward all who require them, while empowering individuals and communities to be able to limit the amount of risk they choose to expose themselves to without tremendous negative consequences.

There are precedents for this. We recall Malatesta returning to Naples in 1884, despite a three-year pris-

on term over his head, to treat a cholera epidemic in his hometown. Surely our antecedents have theorized about this and taken actions that we could learn from today. Just a few years ago, some anarchists set themselves the challenge of analyzing how to respond to the ebola outbreak from an anarchist perspective. We entreat you to think and write and talk about how to generate a discourse about health that distinguishes it from state control—and what sort of actions we can take together to help each other survive this situation while preserving our autonomy.

In the meantime, we present the following report from our comrades in northern Italy who have been living through this crisis a few weeks longer than we in the United States have.

Pandemic Diary, Milan: Love in the Time of Corona

1918-1920: Already shaken by the First World War, the world faced a more insidious foe: Spanish flu, a catastrophic pandemic that infected 500 million people, killing as many as 50 million or more—twice the number of casualties as in the War.

2020: COVID-19, a new pandemic infection, is spreading all over the world. As of this writing, according to the World Health Organization, over 125,000 cases have been confirmed, with over 4,600 deaths. In Italy, there are 12,000 infections, with at least 827 deaths.

Here, we'll focus on Italy, asking a couple of questions about how to face COVID-19. The first step is to refuse to take the corporate media narrative for granted and—above all—not to give in to the prescriptions and impositions from above, all of which are getting more and more oppressive.

We begin from the most obvious facts. This outbreak highlights the need for international solidarity and cooperation so that people can join forces to cope with the difficulties and achieve common goals. But in the current system—in which every nation takes advantage of others' tragedies and every "crisis" paves the way for profiteering—that's not possible.

However we approach the question, we arrive at the same conclusion: capitalism and imperialism point out the need for a radical shift from the current state of things.

But let's step back and concentrate on Lombardy, going back to the day that the Italian government signed the first Decree attempting to control the spread of the infection.

Lombardy, February 16

On this day, the Italian government signed the first decree attempting to control the spread of the infection.

Milan, 7 pm: The worry that all schools and gathering places will be closed spreads quickly, along with a panic that takes hold among people, creating pseudo-apocalyptic moments. Supermarkets are stormed

as if we were on the brink of war, people buy huge quantities of breathing masks and hand sanitizer (thin paper masks have become a totem representing safety), we hear screams, we see people weeping, we experience mass panic.

Following the rumors about restrictions, Milan, the great Milan, the city that never stops, was paralyzed with fear. But it only took a few hours to return to liveliness.

In fact, the morning after the announcement, what was stirring all over the city wasn't fear of the virus but fear of not being able to live the "Milano da bere." Bars and pubs were closed from 6 pm to 6 am—clearly, the viruses clock in to work at night like proletarians on graveyard shift. Restaurants were not—apparently, you get ill if you drink, but if you eat, the virus, on the contrary, respects you. At the same time, we saw the closure of all schools, universities, and other gathering places.

Late February

A week passes and Milan, this provincial wannabe New York, doesn't stop. Likewise, the virus advances, causing further panic. There are more infections, more deaths—even if, granted, the victims include many older people suffering from existing cardio-

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vascular diseases. Once again, everything is locked down—schools, cinemas, theaters, kissing and hugging—but not bars, restaurants, malls, or public transit. Meanwhile, Beppe Sala, the city mayor, tries to give strength to the poor Milanese afflicted by this appalling virus that preys by night and only if you meet for drinks. Employing his beloved social networks, he posts a video with the hashtag #MilanoNonSiFerma (Milano Doesn't Stop).

Technically, the video is flawless—bird's-eye shots with bright colors, catchy tunes—yet it's as phony as a three dollar bill. No doubt about it, it has been promoted by the Unione dei Brand della Ristorazione Italiana (Union of Italian Catering Brands). Milan doesn't stop. But in this video, we don't really see Milan, the real Milan—the Milan I love not because it is the center of movida but because it is traversed by revolutionary shivers, even though they tried to bring her down through fascism and xenophobia, even though it has fallen asleep politically over the last twenty years. The video presented by Sala seems to step out of the 1980s when the advertisement for a very popular liqueur was broadcast: Amaro Ramazotti, the liqueur of the “Milano da bere.”

The real Milan isn't depicted in those images. The real Milan is the one expressed crudely but sincerely by Collective Zam in a video parroting the one of a Mayor that—within days—backs out of the statement he has asserted, resorting to a false narrative on the media; a false narrative where xenophobic class rhetoric is constantly and continuously served up, making this city living off precarious workers and outsiders that every day has to struggle against racism, patriarchy, gentrification, neglected suburbs and capitalism.

The virus isn't the heart of the emergency. The real emergency, patient zero of this “cosmopolitan” city, is the economic precarity that inflicts despair upon the workers who are forced to fight against the rising cost of living and exploitation that, in the last weeks, has occurred in the new form of “smart working,” never used before in Italy and that, surely, will become next year's trend to further enslave through subcontracts and outsourcing. Many employers in Northern Italy's red zones are forcing their employees to take sick or administrative leave without taking into account that this will further destabilize an already precarious state system and, above all, hit all those precarious workers who have to fight every day to put food on the table, who keep their heads above water by taking low-paid

jobs, who endure awful work schedules in worksites without any sort of security measures. Just to give you an idea, from January 1 to February 6 this year, there have been 46 workplace deaths.

If we study the two videos, we notice that, not by chance, the media keep focusing responsibility for everything that happens on the individual, from work to the displacement of people and the movement of goods.

In short, there have been three stages, which we can summarize as follows. The first stage, now impossible to maintain, is to conceal the problem. The second stage is the so-called “media terrorism” that is still in progress, wavering and oscillating between mass panic and illusory calm. In the third stage, the current one, dramatic changes are imposed in society under the cover of a combination of panic and social consensus. Meanwhile, decrees are introduced that will have a considerable impact upon our future, denying us the right to protest, to go on strike, to gather on our own terms.

What will happen now that the decree signed by Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has appeared in the Official Journal? Additional restrictions and measures to contain the virus in Lombardy will be extended until April 3. We will need special permission to travel in and out of a region and also within it; people are urged to self-quarantine; all schools and universities are closed—we all know studying is not important, so why not seize the opportunity to drag parents and students, already exhausted from years and years of budgetary cuts, into the mess? Bars and restaurants can remain open from 6 am to 6 pm as long as customers can keep a distance of at least one meter between each other; theaters, gyms, ski resorts, and discotheques are shut down, but all major sporting events can take place behind closed doors (that's Italy—you can't live without football); all public gatherings are banned; no weddings and funerals; medium-sized and large malls are shut down, but only during weekends and bank holidays.

In short, fear of contagion is sparking mass panic and, in the name of a supposed security, these new restrictions dangerously restrict freedom, justifying the state of emergency regardless of the impact it will have on small retailers and on family-run business. But the real danger, the one we should really be concerned by, isn't so much about a contagion, but the one bound

to the ignorance of a government that has leaked a draft decree that, as underlined by the virologist Roberto Burioni, “panics people.” Basically, these drastic measures ban people from working and impose “smart working” for a large proportion of workers, limit freedom of motion in some areas, pressure people to stay at home, and ban all public “gatherings” (inside or outside). Every right is more and more restricted or denied. All of this, amid the consequent mass panic and social isolation of millions of people. And now, two of the biggest “social” issues appear on the horizon. The first, the sphere in which we Italians are undisputed sovereigns, is the “espertite” of many, resulting from information saturation, as a result of which everyone is “the greatest expert,” often ignoring issues such as how rapidly the virus spreads. This is clearly the result media and authority aims to achieve. The second issue is the consequence of the various specialists—doctors, virologists, biologists—raging on television, on the radio, in newspapers, and, especially, on the internet. These people are introduced, in bad or in good faith, as being able to provide some sort of resolution inasmuch as they are “neutral” experts—as if science were neutral and the experts analyzing it, doctors included, lack personal preconceptions. But that’s politics, anyway! If we don’t keep this aspect in mind, we will end up reaching erroneous conclusions even if we do our best.

What does the average Italian do to fight back against these controls and restrictions on his freedom? He doesn’t realize that he is already constrained by a wide range of restrictions imposed by control—via the media, surveillance cameras, and the like—and compelled to rush constantly to keep up with the wealthiest, even at the cost of taking out loans and starving just to buy an iPhone, paying loan shark rates for months just to be “worthy,” drooling after influencers who refuse to take a position when it’s time to shelter “outcasts,” but always ready to post a selfie wearing the latest model of shoes. He acts like Pulcinella, panicking because he can’t get back to the South; he rushes to board trains and buses; he couldn’t care less if this behavior could spread the virus to Puglia, Calabria, Sicily—all of the regions that were still considered “safe” as late as March 8—along with the quarantine in effect in Northern Italy. Tonight [March 9], hundreds of people stormed train stations and bus stations trying to escape from the red zone, compelling the railway police (POLFER) to intervene to keep people calm. Unable to understand how it was possible, Conte says: “The publication of

a rough draft has created uncertainty, insecurity, confusion, we can’t accept it.”

So why not give police special powers, enable them to stop people and demand to hear where they are going, while bars and restaurants still remain open? A cause leads to an effect; in this case, it’ll lead to the intensifying of pent-up anger and racism, obviously enough. And who knows—sooner or later, it wouldn’t be surprising to read that someone began shooting Chinese, Moroccan, or Romanian people, or whomever else, on the pretense of seeking to avenge the death via COVID-19 of his cousin or neighbor or acquaintance. There have already been assaults on some Eastern Europeans living in Italy.

The Italiot doesn’t think about others; he just focuses on feeling good, because what really counts is the pursuit of his own satisfaction. Who cares if the world around her falls apart? The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree; an excellent example of why the average Italian couldn’t give a damn is embodied by former Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini, the right-wing populist and anti-immigrant politician leading the Lega party. It seems only yesterday, but almost a month has passed since he was snarling, as always, that the government didn’t block boats loaded with migrants, wondering if the government had underestimated the coronavirus by “allowing the migrants to land.” Who cares that he wants to close Italian borders except to keep the borders open towards the United Kingdom. Just days before the decree was signed, he was able to go to London, challenging all common sense, spreading his nationalist and racist thoughts across Europe—the plague that precedes coronavirus. Now we must ask ourselves some other questions that may be hard to answer. The first one is how we should react to what’s happening, taking into account all the objective difficulties connected to the bans (for example, punishments for violators including up to three months in jail or fines of \$225), the continuous “media bombing,” the feeling of constant uncertainty. On one hand, we see an over-emphasis on individual responsibility, especially for those suffering from the coronavirus, and on the other hand, the state using the excuse of an emergency to impose new rules. They don’t talk about cuts to public hospitals (45,000 in the last ten years), about the situation of workers in the front line (especially, doctors, nurses, and the like), about the negative effects on the health sector—such as the interruption of regularly scheduled medical examinations including dialysis and the treatment of

diabetics and others with serious medical conditions, who have seen their minimal rights denied by the diversion of economic efforts towards this “emergency” without ever taking them into account. Hypocritically, Italian politicians—the same ones who attacked the public health sector and its workers—heap praise upon our public health system, never mentioning all the profit-driven privatization.

So what will happen now? What will be the historical consequences of these “emergencies?” In recent years, we can see clearly that a set of repressive rules has been created in Italy that didn’t disappear even when each “emergency” ended, whatever type of emergency it was.

In this country, the creation and exploitation of emergency has created serious problems for us. On the pretext of making war on the Mafia and so-called “terrorism,” the authorities passed “special laws” such as the one stipulating a maximum sentence of 30 years (because, even in formal bourgeois hypocrisy, punishment should be “re-educational” and aimed at social reintegration); but in 1992, they introduced life without parole. This is perhaps the most obvious example of the more and more aggressive authoritarian tendencies of bourgeois democracy. To broaden our analysis, we should study how, over the past few decades, it has been possible to criminalize and repress the poor, and the struggling, and all who try to oppose the status quo in any way. This has led to hard punishment, with exceptions only when we are able to repel the attacks of the state.

For example, earthquakes have served as an opportunity to introduce anti-social regional laws on the pretext of opposing “looting.” The earthquake in L’Aquila illustrates this—even if, in that case, they had to face a very combative grassroots response.

Likewise, the “anti-hooligan special laws” that, since 2006, started addressing the most “unpresentable” part of the movement (from the point of view of the police), the organization of youngsters from the poorest suburbs, often prone to fighting against the police and to breaking the rules they impose. Those laws were supposed to target “dangerous hooligans” from organized football clubs, but in the years since they were passed, they have been used to repress strikes, mobilizations, and pickets as well. We can see the consequence in political struggles that are targeted with fines and the well-known “daspo,” an order ban-

ning access to sports events that has also been imposed in a “preventative” form against other targets without even going through courts, with the pure arbitrariness of the police. Many organized football clubs’ efforts could be summarized as a form of protest against modern soccer (that is, against the deprivation of sociality in order to maximize profit) and as an organized mobilization that recognizes the danger that the “anti-hooligan special laws” pose to all organized movements. The anti-repression slogan “special laws: today for hooligans, tomorrow for the whole city!” is relevant here, too. First, they’ll target us, but eventually they’ll extend control to everyone.

This brings us back to the decree that has been passed almost in silence, the above-mentioned “Conte Decree” that has hurriedly implemented a law reducing employees’ rights regarding “smart working” while increasing the bosses’ leverage. Even in ways that are not clearly connected to the coronavirus emergency, they are laying their hands on the rights of millions of people by means of such decrees.

But this kind of repression can also generate revolt. In response to the government taking away a variety of prisoners’ rights (including visitation and recreation), prisoners rioted. As of March 9, more than 50 had escaped in the riots, though six more had been killed. Criminal trials were continuing even during the outbreak, though prisoners are prohibited from attending, supposedly out of fear they will contract the virus and spread it to those trapped in the prison system. Despite all the threats and risks, on the first day of the national lockdown, a few dozen protesters converged on the empty streets of central Rome outside the Ministry of Justice to elevate the demands of prisoners across the country in revolt.

March 11

New stricter measures have been imposed on those who falsify the self-certification to go out: you can be arrested in flagrante delicto and serve up to six years in jail. Furthermore, those who violate quarantine can be charged with “manslaughter against public health,” while those violating quarantine who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms such as fever and cough, causing the death of elderly people or subjects at risk, could be charged with “voluntary manslaughter” and jailed up to 21 years. The same applies to those having contacts with COVID-positive people and maintaining social relationships or working with them without

taking the necessary precautions or inform the others.

March 12

Everything except malls, drugstores, and convenience stores are closed for two weeks. We are on lockdown and the quarantine isolates us from the world. Call me a catastrophist, but what comes to mind is the fate of Prince Prospero hiding in his fortified abbey:

“And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.”

—The Masque of the Red Death, Edgar Allan Poe).
But we will survive, despite the quarantine imposed upon us.

March 13

The whole of Italy, brought to its knees, finally seems to be moved by a rebellious spirit. We are not talking about the singing flashmob scheduled for today at 6 pm—the call to go out on your balcony to sing and play music, to let the world know that “we can do it” and that everything will be all right. This is something else. “Irresponsible strike,” say the masters. Safety measures are lacking in the workplaces, say the employees. “We are not expendable”—“We are not cannon fodder.” These are the chants coming from Italy’s factories. From north to south, unions and workers are making a show of force and stirring things up with spontaneous strikes calling for measures to safeguard health. That, at least, is something.

“We need a way of conceiving of well-being that understands bodily health, social ties, human dignity, and freedom as all being interconnected. We need a way of responding to crisis based in mutual aid—that doesn’t grant even more power and legitimacy to tyrants.”

All We Have Is Us:

For a Solidarity of Condition and Position

Written at the Start: Quarantined and Unemployed April 9, 2020



Written while in mandatory quarantine on April 9th, 2020, after escaping NYC following its declared lock down. The author has chosen to remain anonymous.

With all these calls coming out for solidarity among all humanity in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, I'd like to be specific about where my solidarity lies and to encourage others to do the same. While some of us are risking our lives, others are pulling the strings from above as they ride this pandemic out in comfort. While "we are all in this together," we are not all enduring the same conditions or facing the same risks.

The reality that we have been numb to for so long is coming into focus. It has become impossible to conceal the inconsistencies in the ways that our labor is valued, to ignore all the ways that we are at the mercy of those above us in the hierarchy. They have done

everything in their power to make us blame ourselves and each other for our situation, but it's no longer possible.

I am writing from a mandatory quarantine outside of the United States. I spent March in Manhattan working as a so-called "essential worker" delivering food to the rich as the pandemic spread through the city. Like so many people in my situation, I suspect that by now, I must have already been exposed to the virus. If I contracted it, I was fortunate enough to have no symptoms. As a lower-class resident of the United States, of course, I never had access to a test, so this is just speculation.

I'm not happy to be able to say "I told you so" about the situation we find ourselves in today. At the beginning of March, many people were still dismissing me as paranoid. It wasn't that I was afraid of getting

sick. For weeks, I was trying to explain to friends that they have to understand how the food they eat reaches their plates, where their medications are made, and how the division of a globalized world into consumer nations and producer nations could cause serious issues when it comes to us getting access to basic sustenance. Now everyone is talking about these things.

The first few weeks of March in New York City were like a roller coaster climbing to the top before a steep plunge. The tension just built and built. Every day, I agonized about whether I should flee to the countryside or try to return early to my home abroad. I had to weigh both of those options against the money I was making and the prospect of a future in which it might be much more difficult to obtain employment.

Biking across the boroughs, I could feel something strange building up. Most people who took the situation seriously expressed it by shopping or leaving the city. There was rampant panic buying and an exodus of those with second homes or families to stay with outside the city. Near the projects and poorer neighborhoods, I could still find toilet paper and disinfectant, since fewer people there could afford to hoard. Many distrusted the government; many didn't care; many had witnessed things even worse than a pandemic; and many felt helpless in the face of the confusion and fear that arrives with the unprecedented.

Those who wore masks and gloves were considered eccentric up until the third week of March. People were still promoting parties up to the very last day they could. Those who were able to work remotely were sent home first, while everyone else remained at work. Some of the more affluent private schools were cancelled shortly after that. Then the suburb of New Rochelle was put into lockdown, but everyone else went about their business as if nothing was happening. When Mayor de Blasio finally closed the schools and forced the restaurants and bars to shutter, the reality of the situation finally began to settle in. All the reasons for high rent, all the distractions from the stress, all the rationalizations were suddenly gone. Ignorance was no longer an option.

The weather fluctuated the way it has over the last few years, prompting cynical comments about climate change, but everything just seemed dreary to me. Hugs became more and more awkward. Soon, I reserved them only for people I wasn't sure that I'd see again. I was staying with a friend who tested positive for COVID-19 and has since recovered. I house-sat for another friend whose partner has died of the virus.

Manhattan became emptier and more and more frightening as the tension increased. In contrast to the September 11 attacks, or to Hurricane Sandy, when we saw a blackout of Manhattan on Halloween that I will never forget, the pandemic didn't hit all at once in an obvious way. It was an invisible impact in slow motion—it was hard to grasp what was coming or to what extent it was already underway. It was chilling to see friends who had recently dismissed my concerns as paranoia coming to me for advice. It made

my blood run cold to watch people who had always tried to calm me down slowly growing more fearful as their livelihoods were cut off. The biggest, busiest city in the United States was shut down by an unseen force. In the end, I escaped, leaving many of the people I love to wait for the unknown.

During my final weeks in New York City, I was deemed an “essential worker” because I brought food directly to rich people's doors in order to ease their risk of exposure. I see people posting

“stay at home” memes on Instagram, never pausing to acknowledge how the fusion meals they post photos of alongside them are still possible during this time.

It's hard not to scoff at the cheers of the rich I see in recent videos taken from Manhattan. Apparently, the ones who didn't escape to their summer homes take a moment each day to appreciate delivery people and other workers who have been taking the risks for them through this pandemic. I watch these clips and their petty gratitude leaves me unmoved. My memories of being disrespected, degraded, and underpaid are not dispelled by a moment of flattery from the comfort of Manhattan's luxury buildings. We deserve more than a little applause.

My memories of being disrespected, degraded, and underpaid are not dispelled by a moment of flattery from the comfort of Manhattan's luxury buildings. We deserve more than a little applause.

I worked delivery jobs up until the day I took what I feared was my last opportunity to return to my partner and a more affordable life abroad. I knew the risks of travel, but I was more concerned about what the future would bring and what my economic position would be in it. Most of my friends in New York work service and hospitality jobs—or used to. After every job I had intended to work was cancelled, the app-based delivery jobs I turned to as my last resort were pretty much all that remained for those of us who lacked the privilege to work remotely. I still get notifications informing me of one-off work opportunities. I wonder if each one I pass up is a meal I won't be able to eat in the future.

So I resent the applause of the wealthy. I wish I could publish the names and addresses of everyone I had to deliver to, along with the exact amounts of the tips they gave me. I wish I knew the net worth of each person I delivered to so I could calculate my anger precisely.

I delivered to skyscraper condominiums across Manhattan. At first, when I showed up, the doormen would greet me with a smile, assuming I was a visitor or resident because of my light skin. As soon as it came out that I was a delivery person, they would suddenly change tone. The transition was intense. You wonder how they choose these guys.

Other times, I was forced to enter through disgusting piss-covered “poor doors”—secondary entrances for service workers and low-income tenants. This doubled the time it took me to enter and leave buildings. It also forced me to come into contact with more building staff, increasing my risk of exposure.

Still other buildings wouldn't allow delivery people up at the request of tenants. I assume they considered us dirtier than the bags we delivered. While this was degrading, it was also a relief.

I delivered to penthouses as high as the 73rd floor only to receive no tip at all. Generally, the tips were shit. Maybe this was because the rich are nervous about what the future will bring for them. (The New York Post has since reported on customers pretending to offer big tips and then cancelling them afterwards.) The tips were so bad that I was afraid to ask for no-contact deliveries, as some customers scoffed at my requests. As a service worker, how dare I protect myself?

I won't forget one of my last nights delivering. I did my best to reject delivery requests to Walgreens and Duane Reade pharmacies, partly because it was just too degrading to take jobs in which my sole function was to reduce the risk that people wealthier than me had to face, but also because I knew that the products people were trying to order were already sold out.

These apps force you to be the one to bear the consequences when someone requests a product and it is sold out. They don't give you the option to cancel the job when the product is unavailable—you have to say you are unable to complete the order. Consequently, you not only forfeit travel compensation for biking to the location, you also can forfeit delivery consistency for the remainder of your shift.

That night, instead of thermometers and toilet paper, someone ordered 50 boxes of laxatives, a purchase of \$250. I bit the bullet and took the order.

I biked through the silent streets of Manhattan's upper West Side. Even in the eerie absence of traffic, I still had to obey the traffic lights, lest the police ticket me for delivering “essential” services. I miss the old school days of NYC before “quality of life” policing. In those days, riding a bicycle, you felt unstoppable.

I got to the pharmacy and went in. It felt like I was stepping into a giant petri dish teeming with COVID-19. Of course, as at all the pharmacies in Manhattan, everything was sold out, including this person's 50 boxes of laxatives. I called the customer to beg her to cancel the order—my only chance to keep the pathetic \$2.36 that I get for the “pick up” part of the delivery process. More importantly, it was also the only way to avoid having to cancel the order myself and risk losing my spot in the app's almighty algorithm.

“Of course they are out, ugh!” she answered when I informed her. She demanded that I be the one to cancel, because she knew she'd lose her \$2.36, reciting the standard “It's your job, it's not my fault.” She had used me to confirm what she already knew so she wouldn't have to enter a pharmacy in the epicenter of the epidemic, but she had the audacity to demand I cancel so she wouldn't have to give me any money. I ended up begging her, trying to explain that I had biked through a pandemic to check on the product for her. I offered to send her a photograph confirming that I went into the store and saw that the product was out. She replied that it wasn't her problem. I moved on to

the next job, obsessing about her selfishness and entitlement. After 30 minutes, she canceled.

She was placing a \$250 order and she demanded that I forfeit all dignity so she didn't have to "waste" \$2.36. I am certain that if I had not spoken good English, I would have received nothing at all for my pains. Of countless stories like this, this one remains fresh in my memory, as it took place the last night I was working in New York.

This is why, when the wealthy and powerful speak about solidarity, it leaves me cold. I reserve my love and appreciation for those who are not only afraid of getting sick at this time, but who are forced to risk being infected in order to survive—those who are struggling to figure out how to eat, how to keep a roof over their heads, how to prepare for an even more precarious life in the economic recession ahead. I reserve my love and appreciation for those who have always been underpaid and replaceable, who are on the front lines of the pandemic. Now we are essential? Now we are heroes? What were we before? What will we be when this ends?

It's shocking how people continue to rationalize the value of leaders and institutions that have utterly failed to do anything to help us survive this catastrophe.

How is it possible that police officers are still getting respect as "emergency workers" when they are running around without masks on, infecting people throughout the city, attacking children on the subway? How can anyone set them alongside nurses and grocery store workers, who are dying dozens at a time so we can eat? Hasn't the role of police in the spectacle of the end of the world shown their true purpose clearly enough, if it wasn't already obvious?

ICE agents have been hogging N-95 masks so they can protect themselves while they continue disappearing undocumented people, spreading the infection as they terrorize communities and separate children from their parents. Prison guards are spreading the virus to prisoners whose only means of protest is to stage revolts at great risk to themselves.

I saw police pulling over delivery workers for bicycle traffic violations in Manhattan when deliveries surged in response to the virus. This is a typical tactic via which the New York Police Department fulfills their monthly ticket quotas. Grocery workers, agricultural workers, those working in transportation, delivery people, EMTs, hospital staff helping to keep us alive under what amounts to martial law—all these people are all truly deserving of my gratitude. How can anyone place the police alongside these courageous individuals? What do they do to sustain and care for us?

The United States has passed a two trillion dollar stimulus plan. I don't even know if I am eligible for the check or for unemployment, thanks to my being poor and working gig to gig all these years. The website says those low-income taxpayers should wait—until the others have been paid first, I'm guessing. I read that only 30% of the stimulus goes to individuals (\$602.7 billion). The other 70% is split between large corporations (\$500 billion), small businesses (\$377 billion), state and local governments (\$339.8 billion), and public services (\$179.5 billion). As far as I see, considering that the airlines alone are getting over 10% of the corporate bailouts while I am still fighting them for a refund on the flights they cancelled on me, I see this as a big fuck you to me and everyone like me. Just one more reminder that in this society, my value is conditional at best, determined by the logic of the market and the priorities of the ruling class.

If the way that the stimulus package is distributed doesn't make their priorities clear enough, governments are simultaneously rushing to maintain, reconstruct, and usurp power.

In places like Russia and Israel, the authorities are exploring new opportunities in cyber-policing. In places like Hungary, the rulers have already used this opportunity to transition to outright dictatorship. In places like Kenya, India, and the USA, we see them containing slums, prisons, and refugee camps as acceptable death zones. In Greece, on International World Health Day, police attacked a gathering of doctors and nurses at Evaggelismos hospital in Athens who were calling for more safety resources. Experiments

It's shocking how people continue to rationalize the value of leaders and institutions that have utterly failed to do anything to help us survive this catastrophe.

in martial law are taking place everywhere under the guise of lockdown, supposedly for our protection—but those in power seek to protect their position, not to protect us. Nationalists and fascists are using this as an opportunity to advocate for bigger border walls and prisons. We've even seen some scientists calling on world governments to go to Africa or other populations that are less valuable to the global economy to carry out the experiments through which they hope to generate vaccines.

So I want to call for another solidarity. A solidarity between those who have a lot more to worry about than the virus alone. A solidarity among all who have to fear what governments and their police will do to us. A solidarity between everyone who is waiting in terror for even more precarious conditions to arrive as the rich scramble to enter the post-pandemic world still standing on the shoulders of us expendables. A solidarity that includes refugees and others who have lost their homes.

I want to share my gratitude with those who deserve it—those with whom I share condition and position.

When in our lifetimes has the mathematics of our value been more flagrantly displayed? Politicians, police, and billionaires are struggling to rationalize their comfort and privilege; in the United States, they are being more honest than ever before about what really matters to them.

We need a solidarity that has nothing to do with politicians and plutocrats, nor with the police who protect them. Let us look on those beside us with love and a mutual commitment to protect our humanity, just as we regard those above us as our enemies. Those who are looting in southern Italy are expressing the same passion for life as those who looted New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in order to feed their neighbors. These are the people who are setting a good example, not the police, not Governor Cuomo.

Today, my own quarantine period is about to end. But my mother is working in a grocery store at nearly 70 years of age, while my father, who is in a hospital with a compromised immune system, has tested positive for coronavirus. If concerns about the market had not been prioritized over concerns about life, I am certain my father would have been spared this virus, as he was isolated since the beginning of March in a nursing facility. My mother cannot distance. My

father couldn't distance. But many can afford to side-step these risks. They are not facing the same pandemic. They don't deserve my solidarity.

We are not all in this together—but most of us are.

Return to normalcy?
Never again.

**We are not all in this together—
but most of us are.**

THE GEORGE FLOYD UPRISING AND THE PANDEMIC

A brief statement on the connection by Abolitionists in NYC



Has the coronavirus played a role in the George Floyd uprising?

The coronavirus definitely played a role in the rebellion. There are several main factors here. The economic fallout has left millions of people helpless. There are millions without work in the US. Having a job in the US also does not mean escaping poverty. The unemployment rate does not truly reflect the percentage of people struggling to survive; those working jobs that do not cover their day to day expenses are considered to be employed. The level of precariousness is enormous. Then you have an entire country stuck inside and restless, particularly the youth.

Black people in the US have died of the coronavirus at a rate three times higher than white Americans due to a consistent lack of access to quality healthcare. There was a huge lack of testing in poor communities, but this is intentional. People have little access to healthcare in general, and quality medical assistance is reserved for more affluent communities. People in

working class communities continued working and taking public transportation during the pandemic in order to survive. This made the virus spread in more extreme ways, but particularly to marginalized communities.

Quarantine also highlighted divisions and privileges in society. The rich were able to escape dense cities and isolate in luxury. People who lost their jobs and were offered scraps by the government as huge companies and the rich received unprecedented bailouts. The richest few had their wealth increase by over half a trillion dollars, while everyone else was home wondering about the next week, the next bill, or the next meal.

Poor people, black and brown people, native people, and the excluded demographics of the United States took a massive hit from the virus. There was no pretending anymore about whose life matters and whose didn't as the state contained oppressed peoples inside petri-dish like virus-filled prisons and immigrant de-

tention centers — acceptable death zones populated by capitalism’s expendables. Furthermore, the workers who were deemed essential during the pandemic to keep society functioning were among the least rewarded and most exploited in society prior (Nurses, agricultural workers, grocery store workers, and so on). This allowed people to realize the absurd logic of capitalism and begin asking questions that many Americans have never even considered. Instead of raises and protection, these workers were only greeted with patronizing praise from the rich and powerful as “heroes”, while such petty appreciation is obviously insulting when someone is risking death and the spread of the virus to their loved ones. People’s eyes were open to a point that no deception offered by the supposed American dream could distract people from the nightmare that is most American’s everyday life. When the Trump administration also began noticing that non-white and lower class demographics were being affected by the coronavirus at much higher rates than his almost exclusively white fan base, he and his media apparatus began a blatantly racist push to reopen the economy and as Trump put it: “let the virus wash through”.

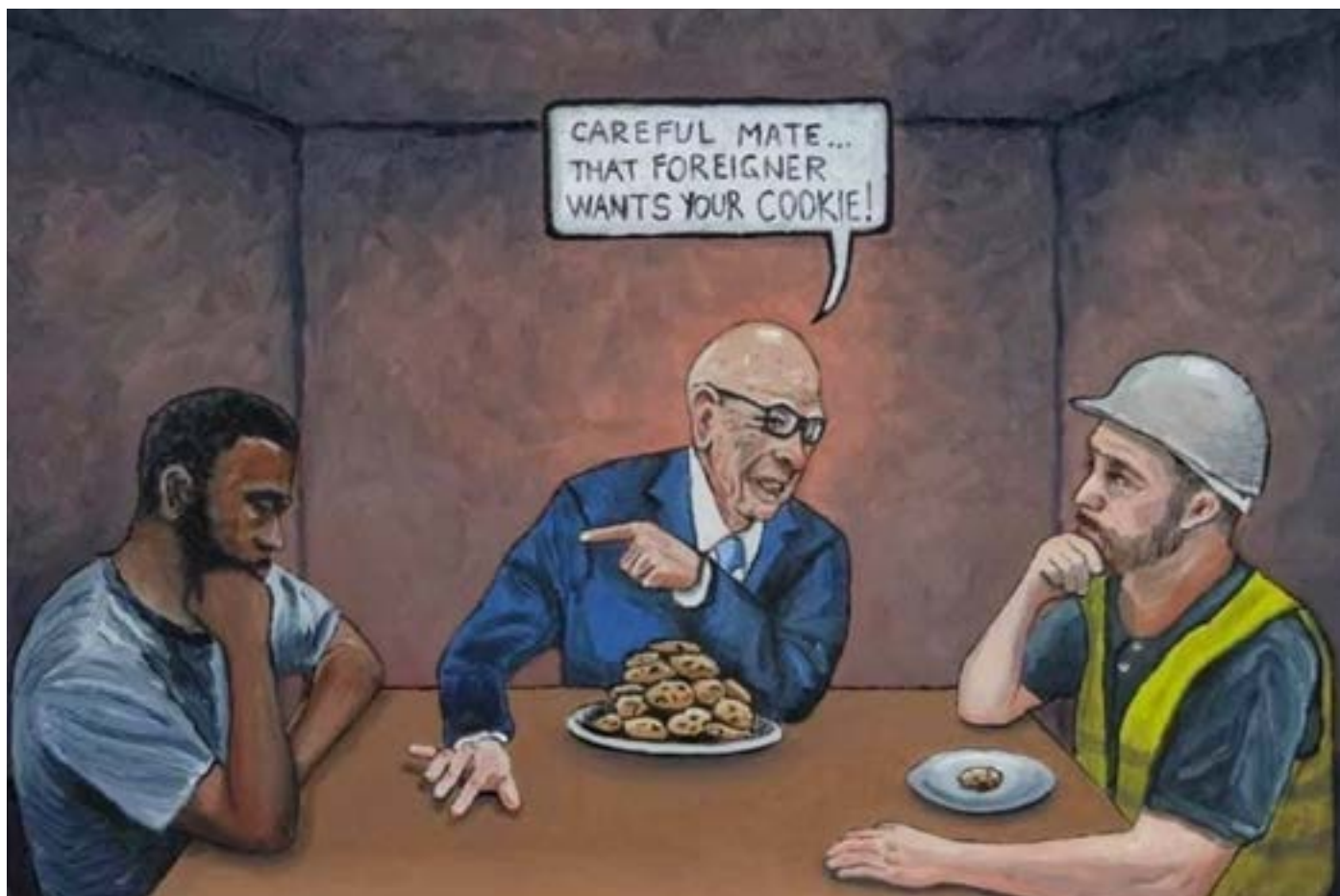
So due to these systemic, structural reasons the black community was by far one of the most affected by the coronavirus in the country. On top of all that, when the state demanded people begin social distancing the police immediately began terrorizing black communities for not following orders. Even as the country was in lock-down, police found a way to keep the numbers of people murdered by them as high as they were in recent years. And with people being home, many had all day to view videos of police murder and torture in the streets as they happened.

The coronavirus became a formula that helped to turn the country into a powder keg.

The coronavirus became a formula that helped to turn the country into a powder keg.

THE "REAL" COVID CONSPIRACIES

November 2021: An analysis of the mainstream worldwide "anti-vax" movement and the conspiracies that animate it — as well as a survey of some REAL conspiracies brought about during the pandemic.



First let me say: I do not blindly support science as it is known in the world today. Science has been used repeatedly throughout history to rationalize genocide and oppression. I also do not blindly support state mandates regarding the coronavirus.

Having said that, there is only one excuse I can understand when it comes to vaccine hesitancy: fear of the unknown. Anything unprecedented can trigger fear, including the pandemic as a whole. I have complete sympathy with such fear; it's understandable. However I want to confront the conspiracy theories driving the right-wing element of the global anti-vax movement, as well as the opportunistic ways right wing and/or fascist groups are using this fear.

There are many evident and real "conspiratorial" events that governments and economies have conducted across the world under the cover of this pandemic. This article will name a few. What is interest-

ing to me though is that rather than recognizing these real conspiratorial events, events tragically predictable under broader systems already in place, many on the right prefer to fabricate absurd theories to defend the free market, dismiss the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on certain communities, and push conspiracies intended to further their heinous antisemitic/racist ideologies.

If we look at the right's approach to the vaccine and pandemic-related mandates we can identify why their approach is catching on primarily with religious fundamentalists, police, and New Age types.

There are theories about Bill Gates and microchips, some about testicles and or nipples, and many about George Soros. Let your mind dwell on these for a moment and you'll likely be able to come up with a few more.

All these theories are absurd and designed to play on fear of the unknown. More notably, they also avoid questioning the very institutions and systems that have introduced this pandemic into global society— the institutions and systems that have used this pandemic to consolidate power even further within class society and, although it hardly seems possible, increasing the wealth for the already disgustingly rich.

Fascists, religious fundamentalists, and new agers are coming together around these theories. These demographics, at least in the west, have generally experienced privileged lives within the existent, or at least felt personal contentment was possible amidst such an awful society. Based on that, these groups coming together to challenge a vaccine mandate is not such a surprise.

The anti-vax movement has been strong for some time around the world, but I think it is an interesting coincidence that at least in the USA it seemed to coalesce once Trump realized that the virus disproportionately affected poor people and people of color, demographics who lack easy access to health care and are more likely to live in conditions that make social distancing difficult or impossible. I might peg April 2020, when Trump asked Fauci if the virus could just “wash through” the country, to be the dawn for this wider joke of a movement.

This “movement” is really just another instance of America’s ridiculous culture wars gone global; it’s uniquely American in the sense that it is bitter and rancorous without being tangibly political. Maybe this is a continuance of historically protestant narratives designed to keep people distracted fighting one another while refusing to look up at those benefiting from all the suffering. If they can’t blame Jews, however, the right-wing anti-vax movement doesn’t seem interested in such a framework.

What’s clear is that the main thrust of the anti-vax movement originates from a worldview that seeks to defend the free market regardless of loss of life, and its strongest voices willfully refuse to understand what constitutes systematic or targeted oppression.

What is also clear is that while it does make me laugh at times, it is not a fucking joke.

Regarding the anti-vax movement’s conspiracy theories, why is it that with obvious opportunism by governments and economies to use the pandemic to further consolidate power or restructure society, most anti-vaxers fabricate absurd theories rather than confront the rampant tragedies that are already happening?

Simply put, I think these people don’t want to accept that their precious state and capitalism have and continue to use the pandemic to preserve the status quo, increase the wealth of the richest, and further consolidate power amidst one of the most intense global crises in generations. To recognize such truths would require introspection and a real, material critique of society as it’s currently constituted, which are not

common traits of those on the right or who are drawn to the right as a result of this unprecedented moment. To the contrary, most reactionaries desperately defend and believe in their deeply unjust society, which they think is “#1.”

The right-wing’s notion of “body liberty” applies only to themselves and is full of disgusting contradictions. Most of these right-wing bastards, with few exceptions, couldn’t give a shit if a woman died during a botched abortion after being forced to seek underground medical care. It’s also why

the same police who refuse to give tickets over violations of Covid lockdown mandates don’t hesitate to chase and even murder someone for shoplifting food when they’re starving.

Don’t get me wrong, I fucking hate the government telling me what to do; this is a vital element of my perspective on the world. Yet every time I leave the grocery store with less money in my pocket, it is because I am being told by the government if I don’t comply I will be put in jail. Even if I am starving, the government is telling me that there is an unwritten contract, and that without their money I must continue to starve.

I also would like to do many things everyday I cannot

What’s clear is that the main thrust of the anti-vax movement originates from a worldview that seeks to defend the free market regardless of loss of life, and its strongest voices willfully refuse to understand what constitutes systematic or targeted oppression. What is also clear is that while it does make me laugh at times, it is not a fucking joke.

because the government threatens me with prison. So to suddenly and only take issue with something like a vaccine (when most have been vaccinated as children for various other illnesses) you are really picking and choosing your battles in a fairly superficial and limited way.

In response to the New age folks concerned about the vaccine, let us speak of cancer– the disease, not the astrological sign. Cancer, just like the coronavirus, is a product of this ratchet industrial society. Cancer kills more around the world than Covid, trailing only heart disease. Chemotherapy, a form of nuclear radiation, has been one of the only treatments for terminal cancer, and emerges from the same sciences responsible for cancer in the first place. As with the mass-produced (in the USA, often prison-produced) toothbrushes we use to scrape the scraps of shitty food out of our mouths, we have to understand that this society of coercion is, in some cases, both the perpetrator of ills and the means of surviving them.

As said before, I do sympathize with those who are struggling with the fear of the unknown. I sympathize with those who potentially suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder, for example, and who cite this as their reason for vaccine hesitation. I myself was very nervous when I went for the jab.

If you look at demonstrations in places like the Netherlands or Italy, however, many of those protesting mandates from a right-wing position are literally wearing Jewish stars to resemble those worn by Jews during the holocaust.

They directly compare the so-called “struggle of the unvaccinated” with those whom faced systematic genocide. Here I draw a line. This is a false oppression I cannot sympathize with. Ignoring the annoying first-world factor of such a grossly exaggerated claim, this approach has also been used by the right to claim a new type of oppression that does not require recognizing racism, sexism, homophobia, or any of the other social inequities that are inherent in the society they wish to defend. Those taking this approach are literally doing everything they can to demean the struggles of truly oppressed people and demograph-

ics– very much in line with those who deny the holocaust or downplay slavery and its legacy in the USA. Having said these few things, and humbly admitting that I likely am missing many important points, I want to list a few “conspiracy theories” that are not fucking theories, real things the pandemic has brought about. According to the internet, the term conspiracy means two things, “a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful” as well as “the action of plotting or conspiring.” A conspiracy theory is defined as “a belief that some covert but influential organization is responsible for a circumstance or event.”

These three referenced definitions are without a doubt up to interpretation, but I want to survey some Covid-related conspiratorial events that have happened and for some reason are of no concern to the right wing base of the anti-vax movement. I am doing this both to give awareness to the events cited, but also point out how this joke movement fabricates

conspiracy theories in order to re-enforce unrelated bigotries rather than have a true concern for the social impacts of the corona virus. With regards to the following, ask yourself: why does the “anti-vax” movement predominately take no issue with these real conspiracies, and only concern themselves with the unproven?

The Billionaires

The unprecedented economic crisis that was created by the pandemic and continues to unfold has deeply impacted much of humanity. Across the world, extreme precarity among the lower classes of society has been more normalized than ever before while inflation appears unrelenting. Central banks injected at least 9 trillion dollars to keep the economy afloat, ushering in record inflation and years of austerity to come for most of humanity. At the same time in the first year of the pandemic the total wealth of world billionaires rose from 5 trillion US dollars to 13 trillion US dollars, and it continues to soar.

The number of billionaires in the world population grew by 700. This is by far the most dramatic surge of both individual billionaires and overall billionaire wealth in human history, all while one of the most dramatic and confusing economic crises unfolded in our lives. Did these banks simply inject money into

Those taking this approach are literally doing everything they can to demean the struggles of truly oppressed people and demographics– very much in line with those who deny the holocaust or downplay slavery and its legacy in the USA.

the markets to reassure the super rich of their future homes in space? Or is that even in crisis, capitalism will do everything possible to preserve the status quo and those whom benefit from it most?

Surveillance

From Israel to South Korea to Greece to China, contact tracing, digital certificates, and various other unprecedented surveillance methods have been rationalized in order to “contain the virus.” The use of crisis in order to rationalize what typically would be shocking government interference, historically seen in instances such as the Patriot Act in the USA, is now in full effect across the world. We now must show our personal medical records in order to leave the home. Especially in places such as Greece, where investment in police, military, and surveillance technology far outweighed investment in hospital and medical expansion, one could see this as simply an attempt to further a long-term “Big Brother” apparatus under the guise of short-term emergency protocols.

These techniques will likely become normalized, opening the doors for various other forms of invasive surveillance previously rejected or legally banned in European countries specifically. This type of opportunistic use of the pandemic to increase and normalize surveillance is setting the framework for an even more coercive world.

Why Covid and not heart disease or cancer?

The coronavirus is still the number three killer in the world of humans, lagging far behind heart disease and cancer. So why is it that healthy food is not subsidized or at least more affordable? Why are some communities still subject to the waste of mining and chemical facilities injecting cancerous toxins into their air and drinking water? Why don't governments take the same extreme actions they've taken in response to COVID-19 to address the two biggest killers of humanity?

It may very well be that heart disease and cancer bring about slow deaths, and disproportionately kill poor people who can't afford healthy diets or homes distant from carcinogenic environments. Note that with the slow deaths brought on from cancer and heart disease workers still go to work, and likely experience in many cases the terminal period of these diseases far later in their lives when much of their

“labor value” has already been used up. Is it possible that world governments and economies are concerned only with losing workers en masse due to the swift death accompanying severe Covid cases, rather than being concerned with the actual health and safety of humanity?

Vaccine “Nationalism”

The vaccine rollout itself could be considered a conspiracy, one to kill off much of the so-called third world and the poor. “Vaccine nationalism,” which is really just rich countries and people claiming their positions in the front of the global line, is undoubtedly an act of classist passive genocide. Ironically the anti-vax people may be so wrapped up in their bubbles of first-world entitled “struggle” that they may not even be able to wrap their heads around this. Looking at vaccine scarcity in India or Haiti, or much of the continent of Africa, we have to wonder: are the ruthless bureaucratic obstacles by major world powers to prevent vaccine information sharing a conspiracy to kill off large numbers of the “undeveloped” world? Is this even a conspiracy, or simply a description of what is actually happening?

A smaller-scale example of this took place when the first vaccines were approved in Israel. Israel at one point had the highest vaccination rate in the world, while Palestinians were deliberately denied access to the vaccine. The disproportionate rates of vaccinated Israelis vs. Palestinians constitutes a deliberate medical assault on a targeted community by the Israeli state.

We see this also in Brazil under their fascist leader Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro is currently facing allegations of genocide by various indigenous rights groups, and even some official courts. Upon his ascent to power, ranchers and fascists immediately seized swaths of the Amazon and waged war on its defenders and those whose survival depended on it. Those looking to raze the Amazon at first took to direct violence and simultaneously set endless fires to clear land for development and ranching. Once Covid came about, however, Bolsonaro realized the potential of its effects on indigenous populations who were more susceptible to such illnesses and also lacked sufficient access to conventional health care.

Like his brother Trump, Bolsonaro embraced the realization that the virus disproportionately affected ex-

cluded and marginalized demographics. Preventing adequate vaccine distribution and expansion of medical support in the Amazon became and continues to be a new method of Bolsonaro's war on indigenous communities and the Amazon itself. It's a modern manifestation of the classic colonialist genocide tactic of spreading diseases to Native communities. So, while the anti-vax movement is crying about the vaccine, maybe it could be said the lack of access to the vaccine is itself a conspiracy.

Quelling Unrest

Both Thailand and Greece used the pandemic to restrict people's right to assembly. Various reports expose Greece's use of the pandemic to assault social movements and quell unrest. Thailand has one of the biggest gaps between rich and poor of any country in the world, and has experienced huge student uprisings against the status quo and monarchy the last few years. The Thai government, like many around the world, found in the pandemic a pretext to restrict and punish all assembly, using the excuse of a medical emergency to do so. This was and still is a trick used by many of the world's authoritarian regimes. The anti-vax movement tends to place focus on their gyms not being open due to government "oppression," but it actually is quite true that many governments in political crisis were delighted to welcome the virus as an opportunity to mask their repression of dissent.

The 4th Industrial Revolution

With billions of humans staying home and not being able to work, some industrial and automated societies have still been able to put food on plates. Is it possible this showed industrialists, capitalists, and technocrats the potential for an even more automated world? Is it possible that automation is being accelerated due to the coronavirus, at the expense of people's livelihoods, and setting a precedent for an even more dystopian and feudal future for most of humanity?

We saw a huge increase in algorithm-based delivery apps and streaming services recycling outdated sitcoms. The world has become more isolated and alienated than ever before... but somehow still a world. Did the rulers of this world discover new potentials in the threshold of misery that society can endure? Did the coronavirus set a trajectory for our humanity that lowers expected standards of living, a trajectory favorable to preserving the power of those pulling the

strings? Historically, plagues were the basis for various developments in industrialization; what is different today?

Conclusion

So, there we have just five conspiracies. There are so many state-sanctioned conspiratorial events that have happened, and continue to happen around the world, but fascist, new age, or religious fundamentalist anti-vaxers seem to only want to complain about the Illuminati seen in memes rather than the real elite holding positions of power.

The "covert or influential" organization mentioned in the dictionary definitions of conspiracy could be the existing governments and global capitalist economy that is institutionalized, in place, and systematic—rather than one or two specific individuals or a "Jewish conspiracy." The right will fixate on a face and ignore the heart in order to preserve the misery of the entire body's being. The anti-vax movement we confront here is as superficial as it is racist, and simply cannot come to terms with the fact that the real conspiratorial acts taking place due to the pandemic are a direct result of the existing societies they cherish. They will scream about the virus originating in China because it enables their racism, yet they don't mind unsustainable human exploitation over the earth or industrial animal agriculture, the true origins of all this mess.

Anarchists have responded to the pandemic by supporting rent strikes, creating mutual aid projects in order to help those affected by job losses and crumbling economies, or started mental health projects in order to support people during these troubling, isolating, and scary times. We have also questioned mandates that do not make sense such as those in Greece, Israel and Hungary.

While showing important respect and consideration for the health and safety of society's most vulnerable, anarchists are forced to constantly find a balanced analysis of state behavior and safety during the pandemic.

While we attempt this, the right is punching and threatening flight attendants, teachers, and doctors. The liberal establishment is shaming anyone frustrated with mandates without considering the elements of how such things affect people differently in terms of

class or other privileges. Anarchists reject the shameful submission to state mandates by the liberal and left establishments on one side of this culture war, but also militantly reject the racist death cult on the other. Finding and reifying this balance as a movement is essential as life under pandemic becomes a persistent and ongoing new reality.

We saw this pandemic help expose class divisions and the absurdity of how our labor value is determined. The pandemic helped fuel uprisings around the world, from the USA to Thailand, where finally people understood the absurdities we are forced to accept in this stratified society. As anarchists, our response has to be to support each other, both mentally and physically. Governments around the world continue to cynically use the pandemic as cover for their agendas of control, simultaneously gaslighting their populations over government failures. We must be there to recognize this and prevent the right, new-age hippie scum, and religious fundamentalists from playing on the fears of society and distracting the discontent from the root causes of both this pandemic and its consequences.

Let us reject the entire theatre of politics, both the liberal establishment's garbage defence of all mandates and the right wing's cowardly opportunism.

Let us reject the entire theatre of politics, both the liberal establishment's garbage defence of all mandates and the right wing's cowardly opportunism.

ON THE NOV. 19 RIOTS IN ROTTERDAM, NL



“Revolts can only be understood by those who have the same needs as the rebels, that is to say by those who feel they are part of the revolt.” – Filippo Argenti

I don't know where to start writing about this. On the one hand I'm overtaken by emotion, still processing the things I witnessed last night. On the other hand I'm trying to make sense of what has happened from the perspective of someone who believes in social revolution. I don't think the latter will be something that I can fit into this short, emotionally laden piece of text, but some things need to be said about this right now. What happened last night was so much more than the supposed “fascist riot” many are dismissing it as.

Last night a protest against the (renewed) Coronavirus measures was called. This protest was clearly initiated by people that should, for the most part, be called fascist. These protests draw a crowd much more diverse than just fascists, however, and the discontent is broadening, especially now that the state is imposing more and stricter repression to control the spread of the virus.

A lot of the potential for this movement is fueled by the Dutch government's totally random and irresponsible approach to the whole pandemic crisis. Frustration with the pandemic measures is increasing and diverse. It includes people who believe the pandemic is serious and should be dealt with as well as those who believe the lies of the anti-vax movement and fall for their easy answers. You'd be hard-pressed to find people supportive of the government's approach to the pandemic: a policy based on letting the virus spread as long as the hospitals can handle the intake of people at intensive-care wards, as opposed to preventing its spread and focusing on vaccination and providing sufficient testing facilities.

Infection cases are soaring to a record high after the government decided to randomly drop all pandemic measures last September. Even the bare minimums like wearing a face mask and keeping social distance were abandoned from one day to the next.

Protests against the government response have been happening since the start of the pandemic and have definitely been dominated by fascists; let there be no mistake about that. But it would be a mistake to

discredit the wider, growing social tendency of frustration with the neoliberal government as the same thing. Anyone who isn't pissed about what is happening is not paying attention. The fascists are abusing these frustrations, and that should not be a surprise to anyone, but discrediting all participants as "fascist" is a cheap approach that prevents serious analysis. Yesterday's happenings were much more than a pandemic protest. It was a widespread revolt against the police that was joined by masses of youth coming out, youth who had little to do with the protests but had every reason to seize the moment and fight back. To claim that last night happenings were "a fascist riot" is simply a lie.

At the beginning of this year when new government measures got introduced, riots kicked off in the south of the city. Parallel to the antivax protests, youth started rioting as a response to the measures.

Last night I heard there were riots happening again and decided I should take a look, but had no clue what I was in for. As I arrived on the scene there were no police to be seen. A police van stood in the middle of the road, abandoned and smashed up. As I walked on I saw a police car in flames around the corner. Masses of people had gathered and were in the streets. Most of them seemed to have little or nothing to do with the initial protest; the crowds were mostly composed of youth hanging around in the city centre. Here and there small groups of hooligans were active, clearly more organized than most of the people there. What I did not know was that the police had already been firing shots.

I was confused by the seemingly calm situation; it turns out the police had retreated just before I arrived. I decided to walk around a bit to see what was happening down the road. I couldn't tell if most people were actually there spectating or participating in anything but roughly a thousand people were in the streets in this area. Further down the street burning barricades were erected, mostly using the superfluous and abundant electric rental scooters.

A group of riot cops appeared from a side street and started forming a line in front of the burning cop car. As they attempted closing the line they were attacked by large parts of the crowd with stones, fireworks, traffic signs and so on. The police instantly pulled out their guns again and began shooting on the spot. Despite the heavy attacks from one direction, the police actually

shot in another direction at someone who, from what I could see, was actually not attacking them at all. This person fell to the ground as he was hit by a bullet and was eventually dragged away by the riot cops once many people backed off, realizing what had just happened. Within minutes after my arrival dozens of shots had been fired, some in the air, some into the crowds.

After that the still heavily outnumbered police started using their riot vans as weapons, driving at high speeds, chasing down whomever they could get in front of their van. This resulted in an hour of chases in which the police drove their vans into the crowds. The people fought against them with whatever they could find. The groups became more diffuse but the overall crowd seemed to grow as well.

Skirmishes with the cops were taking place not only in the long boulevard where everything started, but also in the side streets. Everywhere I went youngsters were standing around, seemingly doing nothing, but as the cops passed by the youth would attack them again and again. In all this time I had not seen a single sign related to the protest, not heard a single slogan, not seen a single banner. This was about a collective and widespread hate for the police. Something you could taste, smell and feel on every single corner of that street that night.

Nothing much changed for an hour or so as the police attempted to regroup and gather backup. Once they finally had gathered themselves, they attacked with water cannons and hundreds of riot cops, and things turned into a night-long chase spreading through the city centre. I decided to call it a day, still not having quite registered everything that had just unfolded in front of me.

I have seen protests, riots and street fights more intense than what happened last night. I've seen cops using their cars as weapons before. I've seen cops pulling out their guns before... But all of this was in other countries where the cops will first react with teargas, water cannons, rubber bullets and so on.

I have always thought that if such riots occurred in the Netherlands police would start shooting quickly. However, I still would have never predicted this level of eagerness to use deadly violence. I would have never predicted the scale in which it was used last night, often indiscriminately. Later that night the Mayor unironically stated that "Permission was asked to use tear gas. It was granted, but not needed." And

as much as I'm overwhelmed by what happened, I also feel naive that I'm surprised by it.

Also I have never before witnessed such a widespread revolt against the police here. The police in Rotterdam have build a legacy of violent and racist behaviour and are openly and publicly backed in this by our Mayor and a big part of the local Council. As we've had to endure an increasingly corrupt and shameless government, more and more people are coming to the realization that the state does not care for them. They are realizing that the police and all the state's other institutions only fight for the most privileged. They aren't there for us, they never were and never will be. To further analyze what had happened we should be looking at the London riots of 2011, Paris riots of 2005 and all the other anti-police uprisings that have happened in this part of the world over the past decade. These riots are spontaneous, chaotic and destructive and often embody some of the most toxic tendencies that modern life has created. There is a tendency from anarchists to romanticise "the riot" and forget about its ugliness. It is ugly, always, but it carries something within it we should embrace, and if we do not actively work as anarchists within it then we cannot claim to fight alongside the less privileged.

I remember us asking ourselves questions about our positions regarding these previous riots. These questions are hard to answer. They don't have just a single answer to begin with. But, most importantly, these questions force us to reflect on our own position as anarchists as opposed to making up excuses about how the situation does not concern us... because it does.

There are a million things still missing from this report but I feel the subject has an urgency that does not allow for a long period of reflection before publishing this small text. It is intended to counter the false narrative of this being a "fascist riot" and to make us think about how we relate to revolts in general. The amount of self-proclaimed leftists cheering on the police violence from last night is repulsive and utterly hypocritical. While they were out cheering on police violence on the internet I saw youth, mostly migrant youth who are harassed by the racist police every day, being beaten and shot at. Here there should be no discussion whose side we are on.

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AN ANARCHIST REJECTION OF THE COVID CULTURE WAR

An anarchist analysis of the so-called “Covid Culture War”.



At the beginning of the pandemic the state claimed masks were futile, but this was due to shortage and the government’s refusal to regulate the free market to ease the pain of the pandemic. Once companies managed to catch up with demand, the narrative changed. Many people likely died unnecessarily as a result of this.

Wearing masks can help save lives, but it is not a political statement in and of itself as some seem to think. Wearing your mask is not meaningfully countering the death-cult voices on the openly right-wing side of this culture war, it is simply common decency. On a larger level, it serves the state’s agenda to be louder about wearing masks than about the failing medical infrastructure around the world, or how the global medical establishment only serves the rich. I cringe when I see a liberal wearing a mask as if it is a symbolic virtue signal for BLM and organic farm-

ing. Supporting masks, encouraging vaccines, and not wanting vulnerable demographics of people to die is something we may have in common with someone on the liberal side of this culture war– a culture war that has been fabricated by state media and the worst of the internet– but it does not mean we can align ourselves with the liberals.

As Omicron predictably swept the earth in light of a vaccine rollout hobbled by the interests of capitalists, the pandemic that has plagued our lives is showing signs that it may be here to stay. Denmark has already acknowledged this: taking into account its privileged vaccine status, the country has already dropped all covid restrictions. Hong Kong, a country with some of the toughest restrictions in the world, is struggling with the futility of their own covid mandates in light of Omicron and may wave the white flag soon. Still many are dying across the world, as

many also die from cancer, heart disease, famine, and war— although capitalism seems to consider these the cost of doing business. So much has happened since March 2020 when this boring apocalypse began.

I am not excited to be writing another piece on covid, but it is a truly unprecedented event. Even beyond the scale of death it has caused, its ripple effects and political implications are essential to discuss, no matter if we're all tired of it. The pandemic continues to dominate our lives despite a looming and ongoing climate catastrophe, a global refugee crisis, the hyper-resurgence of fascism, and an increasingly stratified world. The world will never be the same. As anarchists, however, we must also evaluate our own behavior to grow and strengthen our communities of resistance in light of the world to come.

You can read my last article regarding the anti-vax and anti-lockdown right-wing movements that seized on the fear of those overwhelmed by this unprecedented event. I do not subscribe to this rubbish thinking. I am vaccinated; the first time to help others, the second time to be able to travel and enter a damn bar. I find the narrative of much of the anti-vax and anti-lockdown movements to still be dominated by double standards, inconsistencies, and the heinous influences of right-wing and anti-Semitic opportunism, but governments pretending the pandemic is the fault of the unvaccinated doesn't work on me, because I know who is to blame. Omicron is a direct result of vaccine companies blocking patent sharing and the capitalistic practices of the "first world."

I am uninterested in playing into the games of the governments of the world, governments that have proven they exist solely to preserve the comforts of the wealthy and maintain the existing social order of misery for most of us. Covid has made this even more obvious. After the arguments of state-defenders that murders and rapists are inherent to humanity (rather than a result of poverty and a patriarchal society), plagues and unprecedented global events are probably the next things to be used to defend and rationalize the horrors of government. Covid has shown, however, that the government really serves no purpose apart from its own interests, and will cravenly blame those it rules over if it can not manage what it supposedly exists to manage.

I am pro-vaccine the same way I am pro-chemotherapy. Both are a method of dealing with a horrible

thing produced by the same horrible society responsible for the problem's creation. I am cautious and concerned about who I come in contact with because I realize that the excluded and exploited are more likely to be affected by this pandemic, but I also believe many are suffering through this pandemic beyond the medical element of covid itself. If you don't see this, you probably have a comfortable job or secure existence, because for myself at least, I wonder if the stress from this plague is going to kill me before the plague does.

I encourage people to be vaccinated as well as take precautions to 'stop the spread'; but the implications of mandatory vaccinations concern me. I am concerned consistently with every opportunity the state may see in the fear caused by the pandemic or generally confusing times; this new precedent of mandatory vaccination worries me as does every crazy-ass thing governments do when people are afraid. It is ok to say this because it is an anarchist position.

Being an anarchist means rejecting the theater of politics. I am part of a movement that in its most sincere form cannot be trapped by the culture wars fabricated to divide us, because such wars are fought on faith that the systems in play will determine who wins. I can never welcome the decisions of the state without questioning them. However, some of us, whether through fear of a never-before-experienced pandemic, or more sadly, the fear of judgment by the liberal establishment, have made these kinds of compromises in position and rhetoric.

In my last article I mostly attacked the right's use of the pandemic to distract from broader issues such as the hyper-profiteering of the rich during the pandemic, state opportunism in repression and authoritarianism made possible during the pandemic, and rampant inconsistencies exposed by the pandemic when it comes to government regulation. At the same time, as we have learned from governments around the world, lockdowns cannot be a cut-and-dry debate, and the authoritarian opportunism the pandemic has allowed governments around the world is something we should have seen and challenged in the process of breaking away from right-wing counter-revolutionary analysis. We cannot fear the judgment of the liberal and left-wing establishments around the world that have blindly accepted government decisions and who attempt to smear anyone who challenges the government's decisions as being in league with white su-

premacists and Christian fundamentalists.

We are anarchists, not a political party looking to appease those whose analysis and ideas only exist within the framework of the existing power structures. We are anarchists meaning we are anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-so on, and so on, because our defining characteristic is being opposed to all facets of domination and exploitation.

Blind support of lockdowns is inherently classist, and not consistent with an anti-authoritarian position. I don't like to use the term classist, because the mainstream use of this word tends to focus on incidents of class bigotry rather than class society as a whole, and is directed towards achieving "class peace," rather than pushing for the elimination of class society. With that said, and in order to confront a specific tendency, realizing it or not, there were some fairly offensive classist approaches and tendencies coming from those fetishizing the state's pandemic procedures.

Take for example people staying at home and posting TikTok videos of fusion meals (prepared magically), pompously letting everyone know they were staying in to help others without acknowledging that this is only possible on the backs of cooks, delivery workers etc. unable to do the same. It's almost in line with the disrespect shown to workers by the bosses and fascists who wish to challenge the existence of the pandemic sheerly to preserve their sacred free market.

It assumes that others can get through even a week of not working without financial aid, while millions of migrant workers across the world, documented and undocumented, have not been eligible for the emergency pandemic financial resolutions or stimulus packages made by nation-states and banks.

It ignores the labor and suffering that is necessary for such a meal to be made during these times— the "heroic essential worker" praise at the beginning of the pandemic was temporary and conditional. It reflects the worst of the liberal establishment, both in the USA and copy-cat centrist movements around the world.

Even the liberal establishment's distasteful promotion of the vaccine as a moral choice, despite the majority of the world still waiting for any access to it, continues this classism. From early on, Americans and eventually Europeans were flaunting their vaccine status as the rest of the world was beseeching the WTO to make generic versions because they couldn't afford Big Pharma's price tag. You saw many declaring that the pandemic will soon be over because "we did it," despite "we" not including much of humanity!

Now, as the western world begins to acknowledge that its approach to the crisis failed, recognition of the possibilities of "a permanent pandemic" only takes into account the conditions faced in the West, not the increases in deaths and looming variants that will continue to spread in the so-called third world, most of which is still waiting on the first world to share patents or non-expired vaccine surpluses.

The inconsistencies and mismanagement of the pandemic shine a light on the inherent flaws of the state. Unfortunately, giving too much consideration to the coercive talking points of the liberal establishment prevents us from countering the fascists who have dominated the narrative around covid.

The inconsistencies and mismanagement of the pandemic shine a light on the inherent flaws of the state. Unfortunately, giving too much consideration to the coercive talking points of the liberal establishment prevents us from countering the fascists who have dominated the narrative around covid. That is why we must find a balance, never allowing ourselves to place faith in the mandates of the state or expect the state to share the interests of anarchists with regards to managing the pandemic.

Drawing lines takes courage, especially on sensitive subjects, but as anarchists we are familiar with controversial approaches. Many who claimed to be interested in saving lives in the USA are now silent as Biden sends people back to work, obeying the demands of the bosses and capitalism. It's a decision followed by countries around the world due to the pressures covid mandates have put on air travel, the transfer of goods, etc. Saving lives will always come second to saving capitalism on both the left and right side of the power games, no matter if one side minces their words or is willing to budge a bit.

Many who couldn't "hunker down" and had their livelihoods sacrificed by state mandates are now

turning to the right. As I write, truckers are blocking borders and cities in Canada and the USA over vaccine mandates. Blocked borders and occupied cities are typically something I would be excited about, but police and state forces haven't obliterated these truckers the way they have indigenous land blockades and occupations against pipelines in Canada. The trucker protest crowds are generally of the included, not the excluded. They don't challenge the broader system of capitalism, and are a generally confusing phenomenon for the status quo since they resemble its base. The convoys in Canada and the USA are quite troubling in light of the political associations and motivations of their founders. Solidarity blockades are also catching on in France, New Zealand, and more countries around the world. We are in conflict with the broader conspiracy theories and fascist narratives that have helped to form these blockades, but we must counter them on our terms without resembling the voices of the liberal establishment. An excerpt from a recent on-the-ground review of the convoy in Ottawa and some of the liberal counter-protesters complaining against it helps paint a real-life example of why we need to challenge ourselves to counter these fascist events from an anarchist position that has no consideration for liberal approaches:

“In the afternoon we check out a counter-demonstration organized primarily, it seems, by residents of downtown Ottawa who are sick of the noise, traffic, and acts of hateful speech, harassment and bullying on the part of some of the protestors. Countering the trucker protest before it becomes a full-blown neo-fascist revolutionary movement is so, so important but I honestly felt zero affinity with this counter-protest in particular. Most of the signs were either calling for more police, complaining about inconveniences like sound and traffic, or making fun of the demonstrators for being unvaccinated and/or stupid. “Honk if you failed civics,” “Self-driving trucks can't spread covid,” “Ottawa police act now,” “Make Ottawa boring again.” A lady with a wordy sign about how vaccine mandates save lives mistakes me for a member of convoy protest and chastises me for apparently being illiterate, “Did it take you a few minutes to read that one, honey?” I have a graduate degree and no business being this personally offended but I feel a surge of rage at downtown liberal elites who think the problem is that these people just didn't go to school long enough. We leave before it's over, just as some of the protestors are engaged in a verbal standoff – antis chanting “Go home dipshits” while convoy protestors

chant back “We still love you! Love! Love!” and the police form a stronger line between the two crowds.”

The emphasis on appropriate and educated semantics and aesthetics that has invaded anarchist movements for years tends to come out of privileged university circles where issues are discussed instead of systems. As a result, we are discovering people on the fringes of our movements who feel connected not by experience and discontent but rather by a shallow connection of superficial identity. While fascists of all backgrounds deserve not a millimeter of space, we should admit allowing liberal mindsets “within” anarchy is a potential reason so many continue to get recruited by the right without even knowing it. Out of fear of resembling the right, we are allowing ourselves to be censored by the liberal establishment.

There are increasing riots worldwide related to lockdown restrictions. In the Netherlands for example, (<https://itsgoingdown.org/reflections-and-report-on-the-nov-19-riots-in-rotterdam-nl/>) on two occasions since the pandemic began there was some of the most intense rioting the Netherlands has seen in its modern history, mostly by unemployed and marginalized youth struggling in the most unequal country in the European Union. Many liberals, leftists, and even some anarchists dismissed these riots solely due to the ugly spark that may have helped trigger them.

On the days these riots happened, there were disgusting protests. The worst of the worst coming together: new agers, religious fundamentalists, right-wing politicians and neo-nazi/fascists protesting peacefully in their grossly white parades against the vaccines and lockdown mandates. Maybe some of the hooligans stuck around for the riots that followed, but those attending the pre-riot protests events are generally of the included, white, and privileged in the Netherlands, and could be seen denouncing the “hooligans” and “thugs” who came out when the sun set.

Lockdowns were the last straw for huge demographics of youth in the Netherlands who face constant racist violence by police and a second-class livelihood. Many pissed off, unemployed, and disenfranchised youth saw these events as an opportunity to manifest their rage. However, the liberal bourgeoisie and academic folks who dismissed these riots grouped fascists and politicians with unemployed youth of a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds simply because of the timing. How could some of us succumb to such a superficial and elitist approach to understanding a

manifestations of social war that should be of interest to anarchists? It is a blurry time for humanity, myself included, but we have got to keep our analysis honed. Anarchists consider looting the destruction of the sacred commodity, as well as reflecting poverty the looter faces. End of story, this is an anarchist response. However, those who tend to dismiss from the ivory towers of the academic and privileged world may not have the intellect or sincere desire for revolt to even appreciate such a thing. One may not manifest rage in the precisely opportune time or among the prettiest of circumstances, but it is our responsibility as anarchists to see these moments where such ruptures and tensions manifest and, regardless of the judgments of the liberal establishment, demonstrate our solidarity and support.

As anarchists we have to continue to assert our position unconditionally, heightening our voices and communicating our position clearly in order to make it clear to both sides of this culture war that we are not falling for the distractions. We want social war towards liberation.

We have learned a lot since March 2020. Just because we militantly reject the right's death cult doesn't mean as anarchists we should give in to the moderate right, centrist, or leftist establishments either. Whether civil wars in history, or Black Lives Matter, Occupy, the anti-globalization movement, or the pandemic of today, we hope the anarchist movement will always remember that "On the one hand there is the path that leads to the institutions, on the other, the way to the streets. These paths cannot co-exist."

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