

RECTIFICATIONS: HOW TO GO ON^{*/}
(SOME POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY FOR PANDEMY TIMES)

What keeps mankind alive? The fact that millions
Are daily tortured, stifled, punished, silenced and
oppressed
Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance
At keeping its humanity repressed
For once you must try not to shirk the facts:
Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts

Lyrics Bertolt Brecht, music Kurt Weill, transl.
Tom Waits

Protests imply faith in the antagonist. This faith was
misplaced and it must be restored to the creativity of the
poor....[T]his pandemic is a symptom of the greater plague
which is the war on nature, on women, on the poor.... The
expropriators of air, water, food, shelter, energy, and
health — must be expropriated.

Quincy Saul

0. I am in this essay trying hard not to exaggerate. The ancient Greeks called this kind of exercise *parrhēsia*, or fearless speech, and the ancient Chinese *the rectification of names* (more on this in 1.2 below). Without it, there is no freedom and no life worth living. The dwindling of free expression in politics and epistemology is a decisive factor in mass killings today.

1. Where To Begin

1.1. Preconditions: On Life and Liberty vs. Capitalism

What is the main thing we may learn from Covid-19? It is to put life (and liberty) before profit, and solidarity with working, suffering, and loving people before individualism or limited identity – say national or gender identity, not to speak of the Nazi-type racism now being assiduously courted by most power-holders.

But it is also that all struggles with such a horizon – in this case, to minimise the effects of a global pandemic – can only have a chance of succeeding if some central preconditions are in place.

First, that an intolerable situation of pandemic proportions, a mortal illness of the body politic, can be clearly identified, insisted, and focused on. Pertinent biopolitical plagues today are:

--old but no less virulent: the protracted duration and cynical insistence of our rulers upon both *global warming* (that brings huge profits) and *global warfare* (that both brings huge profits and politically ensures them);

--now: most strikingly and swiftly, this *huge mass disease*;

--and looming ahead: *water wars* (already well-known from Amazonia and Palestine/Israel) as well as mass dying from a combination of ill health and undernourishment (cf. much more in Prashad et al.), again easily issuing in wars.

All four are caused by capitalist interventions into the biome and all our bodies either directly, as in reckless exploitation of living labour or, in the Covid-19 case, developing latent threats into mass and lethal actualities.

Second, that a critical mass of people, even if initially a small minority, can influence and bend the political power nationally and internationally in case it gains a chance of wide access to public opinion.

Third, that from all evidence in the last 150 years our only possible lever for radical change is an operative nucleus of committed people that can endure in time and space, a political and believing entity that acts following the best cognitive evidence available, historically tested, retested, and retestable at every step, and that it be internationally linked by solidarity with all working people and by central shared goals.

A deep regret: in this paper I cannot discuss further the central points 2 and 3 above, except to say that I hold we need a new form of well-organised and durable political association or party -- despite a real danger of corruption by power, which can however be counteracted^{1/} -- and that this must be left for separate treatment.

Fourth, that we reconsider the role of the States, both as concerns their absolutely indispensable intervention into and overall channelling of the national and international economies and as concerns their endangering personal freedoms, which is to be strictly monitored. Countries with strong State institutions – such as China – have been able to handle the pandemic much more efficiently. The failure of the “austerity” health-care, leading to shoddy if any care for the mass of the people plus excellent private medicine for the rich, is now clearly visible. The case that privatisation and mass immiseration are more efficient than State regulation, and where necessary its extraordinary

intervention, has been definitely refuted by mass history: a system of multiple institutions for well-being of people, underwritten by the whole national (and international) community is indispensable.

Yet life without the liberty of creative choice is only a repetitive, more or less animal cycle. We humans both are and are not animals: our bodies are subject to their needs of food and sex, also to decay and illness, but our personalities are different because we are shaped in and by social history. Closed cycles, however well they begin and however interesting they may be for the weary, soon turn inhuman. This holds for all the ages we know of, from Antique pharaohs to modern corporate bosses; the main innovation by capitalists is that they quite wrongly believe in an unending spiral of ever more profitable quantities that could transgress the entropy of a closed system – our planet Earth. Today we see how fake that “progress” was, for example in the grotesque mass spectacle of people in constant buzzing thrall of their communication (and brainwashing) devices – beginning with the clock, banned in Butler’s *Erewhon*. For in this way, and in many analogous ways, we are getting back to the cyclical time, to Benjamin’s mythical recurrence of the same (*das Immerwiedergleiche*) mendaciously disguised as fashionable novelty, that underlies all capitalism. Cycle in capitalism spurns all certainties except those of power and quantity in linear time: buy before the (stock) market closes or a wolfish competitor snatches the profitable prize from you! Back to zoology: “The strong man fights, but the weak man dies” (Kipling). At a time of great calamities to our bodies, such as a World War or the present pandemy, we can see how Social Darwinism, that stupid and lying materialism, leads straight to collective death. Capitalism is mass unnatural death, freedom is the life worth living. One excludes the other.

Therefore, successes of State centralisation, such as keeping a pandemy in bounds, should not lead to a plea for power either to monopoly capitalism or to State. On the contrary, repressive States centered on brute force, from ancient rulers to Hitler, Stalin, and all empires and their mini-imitators, have to be constantly guarded against. Today too, most existing political systems are, whatever they may claim, oligarchic – a small class block on the top rules. Not all systems are so overtly anti-democratic as the ruling castes of EU and China. But in all cases there is a huge absence of representing working people’s interests, a veritable dictatorship of capitalist interest blocks (banks, mega-corporations, armed forces, bureaucracies) that has to be counteracted both by a true direct and associative democracy and a truly representative, mandated and recallable, parliament as its peak. Here, only a critical Left can serve as orientation, as in its perennial debates on the pros and cons of the State (that for example in Russia included Kropotkin, Lenin, Serge, Bukharin, Rakovsky, and on).

Thus State intervention has its huge perils, and they can be seen in the present discourse pivoting on – and limited by – scientism in its medical variant that progresses

from the virus peril to the triumphant salvation by vaccine, and in between recurs to military discourse since it must necessarily (and for a while usefully) confine people. Such intervention tends to be manipulated by the ruling classes and their States, in places with the aid of well-financed Right-wing shock troops, into a state of siege for billions of people but not for the major sources of profit. It issues into an “ambiguous sanitary Leviathan” (Svampa), melding both beneficent and maleficent State intervention – such as Trump’s financial aid package, clearest in its help to fracking industries – with hypersurveillance.

I shall return to our rulers’ huge rush towards a complete surveillance State. The only answer to that is pressure from below, a strong plebeian democracy: for example, free access to mass media for citizen groups, and democratic vigilance including a major monitoring role by – say – those vitally concerned in health services in properly funded associations of producers (here: medical staff plus the enabling producers of medicaments and equipment) and “consumers” (patients). As James Joyce put it: “My consumers are they not my producers?” To hyper-technological militarization, the working people must oppose the horizon of a red-green New Deal.

1.2. The Capitalocene

Before going on, however, a step back is in order. For, how can we identify any situation so that it might be understood and changed? To my mind only if we *name it* in a way that situates it within a web of most probable, if complex, *causation*. My explanatory overarching category here is *the capitalocene*, and to introduce it I shall briefly mention some epistemological principles underlying any further useful debate – the semantic hygiene that is indispensable for any collective sociopolitical hygiene.

The Great Ancestor of what we need here and now is to be found in the Confucian writings where these stress *zhengming* or “the rectification (proper use) of names,” in order to make terms correspond to reality and make them function as the foundation of a just State and society (possibly that part is due to Mo-zi or Me-ti, Brecht’s favourite Chinese philosopher). Names or terms establish publicly accessible standards and models of understanding, categories created in order to usefully intervene into practice: “names should be spoken appropriately, and what is spoken should be carried out appropriately” (*Analects* XIII.3, translation adjusted). Today it seems indispensable to add to this Mozian naming, traditionally used for obedience to rulers, elders, and males, much Hegel. If we call any object, property, event or relationship X, then -- as was later argued by Wittgenstein -- we never see X as a divinely given, fixed entity but always only X as A, and in Hegel any strategically important X is always a contradiction, both A and -A. In Marx this becomes materialist, ascending upwards from the human species need to subsist, and historical, based upon a political economy consubstantial with class

power. For an example we might take “work”: Marx saw it both as *labour* (and then he rectified the term into *labour power*) that produces in interaction with nature all the *goods* the human species needs (A), and as bent by class power into *exploitation* and particularly as *alienated* by capitalism into *commodities* for the sake of *profit* (-A).

The term of anthropocene was widely popularised from the beginning of the 21st Century by atmospheric scientists who proposed it as the name of our current geological time unit, beginning roughly with World War 2, based on the fact that human impact on ecosystems and climate on land, air, and the seas had by then grown so huge that its results in decades were equivalent to geological changes that took tens or hundreds of millennia: for example, the human species has significantly halted the growth of biodiversity by accelerated species extinction. The stratigraphic markers of anthropocene could include microplastics, heavy metals or the radioactive nuclei left by uses of nuclear weapons. Of course the onset of human impact is spread out over time, but we need a readily popularisable date for handbooks: I agree that the favourite is the first nuclear bombs in Summer 1945 – though I have a small fondness for the onset of class society X thousands of years ago (where X is still debatable, the supposedly neutral Wikipedia has no entry on it...) that should perhaps be taken as the enabling sparking point).

This use of anthropocene, still to be ratified by any international body, had the historically pioneering advantage of noticing that something quite major was afoot in the constitution of human habitat and that the responsibility lay with the humans. But here a huge problem surfaces: is an Indian slum-dweller or a Latin American landless *peon* or a lone intellectual in his working room as responsible as are the ruling classes and castes of our societies? Insofar as all humans profit from anthropocene by multiplying and living longer, perhaps. But insofar as they might be decisive for the coming about of microplastics, heavy metals or the nuclear bombs, of genocides and ecocides, no. My solution is to say that for the great majority of humans, “we are not guilty, but we are responsible.”^{2/}

Because of the species guilt, however small for most working people, I hope the term of anthropocene gets adopted by the powers that be in geological circles. But if we who fight for sociopolitical justice are centrally not guilty, we need a term more accurately pinpointing the causal guilt, and the cause is capitalist production, consumption, and circulation of commodities by profit-driven dirty technologies plus the power structures created by capitalism to bomb into the Stone Age any alternatives (for example, the unceasing war against Leninism, that made possible its corruption). The attendant destruction of wide health services for the working people is not the cause of the corona virus but it is the cause of the coronavirus pandemy. The virus of profit extraction from labour is more ancient and powerful but it can subsume secondary viruses. Therefore I use capitalocene for the dominant of our times. It is the mark, the

deep wound, that capitalism with its unceasing profit-mania and speed-ups imposes on all humans and on human metabolism with nature.

To vary and invert the *Communist Manifesto*: what are the slow building of the Great Chinese Wall, the Seven Wonders of Mediterranean Antiquity or the imperial States and Churches of five preceding millennia against the speed-of-light fake novums of the capitalocene? For these turn all the potentially wondrous novelties -- aeroplane and electricity, medicine and physics, even the yearning for community! – to mass murders for profit and power.

We cannot meet this maleficent hegemony without hurrying to undo the worst ravages. But we should never forget the dialectics that this is being done so that we may, as William Morris put it, have humanity enter an Epoch of Rest.

2. Some Central Traits of Capitalocene Economy of Life

The *WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard* on June 29 shows 10 million “confirmed cases” and 500,000 dead, that is, an average rate of 5% known infected are dying. But since only in India maybe 7.5 million ought to be added to the official report, and no doubts millions more from USA, Brasil, Russia and the whole South, to my mind it is probable the number of cases in the world at end of June can be globally estimated at least around 40-50 million, possibly much higher. This is not necessarily a key datum: the number of those admitted to hospital and those dead of Covid-19 would be a better indicator, though our knowledge is there as woefully inaccurate. But it indicates the scale of the matter.

As to the USA, a Columbia University study up to May 3 concluded that 36,000 out of 67,000 US deaths could have been prevented had social distancing policies been implemented one week sooner (Britt, “Covid-19’s Other”). Since the proportion is surely higher after May 3 and the de-implementations, in my conservative opinion more than half of the 125,000 US dead officially acknowledged by June 29 could have been prevented had Social Darwinism not been the reigning US ruling-class ideology.

2.1. Brief Overview, Focus on the USA

Capitalism has for decades been in a deep crisis of capital accumulation stemming from the insane impoverishment imposed upon billions of working people that disrupts circulation of goods. The proportion of people living in slums -- that is, in totally unhealthy conditions – was, officially for the UN, in the world as a whole ca. 1/3 and

in the 50+ poorest countries in Africa and Asia approaching 2/3 (“World” – no absolute numbers were to be found in this bureaucratic source). Even in the officially wealthiest world country, USA, a Federal Reserve study for 2018 found that 40% of US households cannot deal with unexpected expenses of around \$400 and 74% live from paycheck to paycheck; in the European Union, 33% of households cannot bear similar unexpected expenses (see *Report*, Martinchek, and Eurostat).

Not surprisingly – except to all our rulers, who follow the Chicago School ideological nonsense – the financial core of capitalism is in bad disarray, in an age of “secular stagnation” (Larry Summers, no less). Global debt is at ca. \$250 trillion, with corporate debt already enormous. On the other hand, there are trillions of dollars swirling around stock markets and in tax havens, and a tsunami of bankruptcies is under way.

The best expert guess at how many may be infected in the USA is between 1/3 and 2/3 of the population, which translates into 110-220 million people (see Dr Ribner’s interview). Let us optimistically assume that care for those isolated at home would be relatively well organised, as in China and Italy, and that ca. 5% will need at least brief hospitalising: even so, this translates into 5 to 11 million people seeking hospital care (and a minority of those need weeks’-long intensive care). Such an unimaginable mass could not be handled by the stunted and anti-democratic, indeed cannibalic, US health system.

I shall here focus only on the dire decline of its two basic facilities between 1975 and 2015 (and I doubt the situation was brilliant in 1975): hospital beds as a whole, and then beds in intensive care facilities.^{3/} *Hospital beds as a whole*: the USA declined from 7,156 hospitals with nearly 1.5 million beds to 5,564 hospitals and less than 900,000 beds — even as the total US population grew from 220 million to 331 million. The number of beds per head of population fell from 6.8 per thousand to 2.8, or the hospital capacity per head diminished by 58.8% in comparison to the end of the Welfare State in the mid-70s! *Beds in intensive care units* increased from 68 thousand in 1980 to 96.5 thousand in 2015, but this is not only a somewhat smaller number per head but also much smaller in view of the larger needs of the aging US population (and further, a significant number of ICU beds are rightly specialised for neonatal, pediatric, burn unit, and other critical care purposes and cannot be converted to urgent Covid purposes without urgent financing). This came about because an ICU bed-occupancy costs much more than a normal hospital one, and it simply does not pay to increase them further unless public expense for Medicare substantially grows. Finally, insufficiently funded hospitals became increasingly dependent on debt for borrowed capital over the last decades of the 20th century, and now face soaring interest payments. Thus, the only way to rapidly expand capacity is a practically universal health service with a qualitative jump of several times the present funding.

The de facto large reduction of Medicare in the 1980s shifted a growing proportion of care from the usually much better equipped hospitals to nursing homes and home health care. As Winant observes:

Dependent on Medicaid for most funding for its 2.5 million residents, with a preponderance of for-profit operators and a growing presence of private equity ownership, the nursing home industry has long been a time bomb. There is no way to squeeze profit out of these institutions except by cutting corners, particularly on staffing and training. Negligence and abuse are inherent in the enterprise under this funding structure, and in a pandemic environment there is a high risk of any such institution — but particularly one where beds have been financialized — becoming a lazaretto, if not a charnel house.... With 380,000 residents already dying annually from infections [in US nursing homes] before a lethal pandemic was on the loose, Trump's bureaucrats [who plan to loosen the requirement for nursing homes to employ specialists in infection prevention] bear reasonable comparison here to the commandants of concentration camps, liquidating the feeble.

A final case in point is that the US coronavirus bill, providing for free testing, was passed into law on March 18, 57 days after the first case was identified on January 21; up to then, the cost of one testing in the USA seems to have been between \$1,400 to \$4,000 (Liu). By contrast, in Germany testing was legally free, though practically very difficult to obtain before the authorities there too woke up.

In sum, the capitalocene trauma of Covid-19 pandemic will result in economic devastation. Financial losses in the present crisis will be in trillions of dollars, nobody knows how many: five? more? It is extremely dubious that the world economy could return to pre-crisis levels by 2023: all bets are off.^{4/} As in 2008 and always, corporations will line up for bailouts, which we should NOT give to them but to the increasingly starving, sick, homeless, and dying working people. Anyway, even the main world investment bodies concede that the 2008-09 financial recovery strategy -- pumping trillions of dollars into the banking sector -- is not going to work this time for various political and economic reasons.

2.2. Some Case Sketches (cahiers des doléances)

2.21. The Emarginated Poor Majority

This might be a good moment to reassess both the huge discrimination in capitalism against all the emarginated groups, such as gender, ethnic or “racial,” and other minorities, as well as the political traps into which many of them have fallen, well

indicated by the terms they also use. First, scientifically, there are no races within the *Homo sapiens sapiens* species, so this term should be shunned; second, all these “minorities” together are in fact the overwhelming majority of people everywhere, bereft of power, dignity, and means of reasonably healthy survival. The central snare into which many of them were caught and contained is *divide et impera*: rule by dividing your ruled. The imperial rulers’ cynical but efficient approach aims to infect the potentially insurgent minorities with the ruling-class separatist egotism and contain them as an isolated pressure group within the system, with a corrupt hegemonic mini-set on top of each accorded some privileges in exchange for their help in neutralising radical opposition.

- *On Gender Discrimination in Care Work:*

The prevailing global gender norms and roles allot mainly to women the invisible and unpaid work in the household, including disease prevention as well as care of children and sick relatives. “This feminized care economy ... subsidizes care services ... [and increases the] exposure and susceptibility of women to diseases. Globally women perform three-quarters of unpaid care work....” (Neetu et al., cf. also Razavi and Staab eds.) This general crisis of care is rightly identified by Nancy Fraser as part of a broader crisis of social reproduction. Current capitalism promotes public disinvestment from social welfare, which means pushing women into the paid workforce while shifting unpaid care work onto smaller communities such as households yet reducing their ability to cope with it. This has led to a dual system of social reproduction in which women from the lower classes and/or minority groups migrate to richer countries and within the poorer States of the world, to sell their care work to privileged women and wealthier families. Their original household responsibilities have then to be left to poorer, younger or older, family members. Thus the burden of unpaid care work falls, on a mass scale, on the poorest and female sections of society. From China through South Africa to the USA, all early reports on the Covid-19 pandemic show an increase in stress and violence, particularly domestic violence against women (and probably children too). As opposed to the WHO 2019 definition of essential services to be provided during any emergency, which should be prioritised at the earliest stage of the crisis to minimise risk to women and girls (see WHO), this is paired with strong or full suspension of sexual and reproductive health services.

- *On Refugees and “Internal Migrant” Labourers:*

The statistics of UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), never quite adjusted to the latest disasters, count currently over 25 million refugees in the world, 80% of which in countries with poor health and sanitation systems; nobody quite knows how many live in overcrowded and unhealthy camps, on the border of survival. Many more millions have been internally displaced. The crassest known example now is India, where the government gave just four hours’ notice of a Covid-19 lockdown: public transport

ceased, millions of young people who had travelled from their villages for seasonal employment were trapped in the cities without work or money or hope:

Many driven out by their employers and landlords, millions of impoverished, hungry, thirsty people, young and old, men, women, children, sick people, blind people, disabled people, with nowhere else to go, with no public transport in sight, began a long march home to their villages [hundreds of kilometres away]. They walked for days.... Some died on the way..., some were beaten brutally and humiliated by the police (Roy)

A few days later, the government sealed India's constituent state borders even for walkers. Possibly 17 million "migrants and informal workers" or more were forced to return to camps in the cities they had just been forced to leave. I have seen no statistics of how many died in this proletarian exodus, but the most trustworthy estimates put the number of India's infected at 7.5 millions: if one assumes 5% might die, this would be 375,000, in overwhelming part poor and poorest people. Since US research has concluded that more than 2 billion people in poorer countries of the South – say Africa and Latin America -- lack access to soap and clean water (Costley), this seems a fair guess.

It is clear that groups like these, plentiful also in other, smaller and less well-known, places, are extremely propitious breeding grounds for mass dying from sheer hunger and exhaustion, least likely to be included in a vaccination, and sure hotbeds of potential epidemic resurgence. As will be the camps where they are forcibly detained. Brutality against this legally invisible one third of humankind, forced to undergo either hunger or sickness or both (see Bouissou), is, as in the prisons, intertwined with the rulers' mindlessness.

- *On US "Minorities" (and the Poor Majority) at Disproportionate Risk:*

As to *black and Latino US denizens*, "CDC data on Covid-19 hospitalization [show that] during the month of March, 33% of hospitalized patients were black despite only being 18% of the surveyed population. And a recent preprint study from Yale School of Medicine found that blacks had a 3.57 times higher risk of dying from Covid-19 than whites. For Latinos, the risk was 1.88 times higher." (Stallings) It is obvious that the proportion of Black Americans infected by Covid-19 is everywhere larger than their population. Black Americans are dying at drastically higher rates, in some articles estimated at about 3 times more than their population share, but in some states 5-7 times more (cf. also Kendi, Zamudio & Ramos, and Costley for a late May update).

Blacks and Latinos are more likely to be "essential workers," at a higher risk for exposure to infection. But much of the disparity in Covid-19 infections and deaths can be traced to pre-existing group inequalities enforced by capitalocene society, the "social

determinants of health” (Stallings) such as level of education, employment, ability to earn a living wage or for example the lack of parks and proliferation of fast-food restaurants instead of accessible supermarkets.

As to *undocumented immigrants*, ca. 11 million people “live mainly in California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois — the very states that have some of the worst known outbreaks. But tracking and arrests by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers have not let up during the pandemic.” Yet the migrants are, now obviously, everywhere a core component of indispensable workers. As to *the incarcerated* (and *the homeless*, often incarcerated as vagrants): ca. 40% are black, triple their share of the US population, but generally US prisons -- as all of them worldwide -- are hotspots for getting Covid-19. The number of infected prison inmates doubled in the month after mid-May, while deaths rose by 3/4 (“Latest”). “[B]rown and black people comprise 56% of the prison population,” twice their share of the US adult population (both quotes from Kendi). On the other hand, all resources could be available, for example:

[The USA] has empty hotels while people sleep in parking lots. We are destroying food while people go hungry. We are allowing individuals to endure the physiological stresses of financial catastrophe while bailing out corporations. With the coronavirus, we do not have vulnerable populations so much as we have vulnerabilities as a population. (Hamblin)

For the *elderly white people*, who comprise ca. 80% in nursing homes, no overall statistic exists because of poor reporting by those in charge, but scattered data indicate that the ratio of dead in them to the population at large is more than double, possibly 3-4 times. By June 17, over 45,000 Covid-19 deaths out of a total of perhaps 106,000 were from long-term care facilities (“Latest” and “statista”).

And what about the *newly unemployed* in the USA, which at end of May comprised over 40 million people, or ca. one quarter of the labour force? As a rule they have no other income or health care; more than half of them were women. Let’s charitably assume many of them might come back to work -- but first, when, and second, how many won’t? Surely millions... Their prospect is most grim: millions are faced with eviction from their homes.

For this whole sub-section on “minorities” extra caution is due because we lack a statistically valid basis for generalising: first, there are for ideological reasons, as everywhere, *NO* data by income group; second, the USA has probably the worst statistical overview among rich countries, where you cannot see the wood among the profusion of trees, so that already the mid-March estimate of ca. 1 million infected was totally ridiculous (cf. Ribner). Given the unparalleled US technical resources for speedy data gathering, cynics might allot the obvious neglect of enforcing data clarity and

unification to the President's -- and all other politicians' (governors etc.) -- reluctance of swelling the already awful numbers of Covid-19 victims. Also, since the yearly ca. 39,000 dead and 4,400,000 seriously injured victims of US car crashes (data of 2019, see NSC) have never been considered a serious reason to, say, lower the maximum speed and risk selling less cars, one might suspect that until the number of covidisation deaths becomes sensational in some way – say by officially rising clearly above the very probable 250,000 -- it will cause no undue worry among mainstream politicians and ideologists: life is cheap and profit is dear.

Nonetheless, even from these partial data, and factoring in that “[t]he jobs that haven’t disappeared are often in high-risk environments, such as hospitals, nursing homes, and supermarkets (El-Erian & Spence), it is proper to conclude that we have to do in the USA, as well as in most other States, with an enormous rainbow army of the poor and marginalised exposed to mass dying. This is in good part due to previous unhealthy living, itself enforced by poverty and poor schooling, which results in obesity, diabetes, heart diseases, and similar, as well as to the deficient facilities of public mass health treatment, considered above: the shortage of primary care physicians in the majority Black American zip codes (Stallings) may be extended to all the immiserated groups, subsisting near or below the living wage. I would be much surprised if this huge mass were not over half of the 331 million US population. Statistics based on income have been systematically excluded by most press and internet media I managed to see, organised only by “age, sex, ethnicity,” for they would reveal a naked class warfare tilted toward letting the poor die. One example: the “New York City” epidemic was more truthfully one of the poor boroughs, centered in the Bronx -- and then parts of Queens and Staten Island -- where the ratio of dead to population was double that of Manhattan (cf. the rather obfuscatory NYC Health site). The average income of 1.4 million Bronx inhabitants seems to be \$21,000, and of 1.6 million in Manhattan \$111,000; the ratio of Bronx dead per 100,000 of population near to double... The point was precisely put by a Bronx sufferer from poverty who was also a writer:

[...] it’s become the catchphrase and sentiment of our moment, a reminder that the coronavirus is a great equalizer, a symbol of our shared humanity: *We’re all in this together*.

Only we’re not.

The coronavirus has been [...] the great revealer, pulling the curtain back on the class divide, exposing how deeply unequal this country is and how deep the fissures are. Rather than trying to cover it all up with pithy sayings — rather than trying to sweep these divides under the rug with platitudes like “we’re all in this together” — we should use this moment as an opportunity to take a hard look at the broken systems that perpetuate inequality: education, health coverage, distribution of opportunity and wealth, to name a few. (Guarnieri).

No vaccine can wave a magic wand here: elementary societal justice allowing for every denizen's healthy life is the needed vaccine.^{5/}

2.22. The Political Economy of Vaccines

Pharmaceutic corporations are big, rich, and powerful: sales in 2018 were nearing US\$42 billion (half of it in North America) and projected even before Covid-19 to increase 225% in the next 8 years (www.cdc.gov/lyme/stats/humancases.html). Since the genus of coronavirus was well known for the SARS and MERS outbreaks in 2003 and 2012-13, why didn't they have one or more vaccines for it ready? Simple: because developing safe and effective vaccines is very expensive, it can take years of research and trials that often fail, plus a commitment to prepare for mass production. And at the end, some efficient vaccines might perhaps need to be administered one time and protect an individual for an entire life. What a horrifying prospect for a profiteer (capitalist businessman): you don't have captive consumers for a whole lifetime! Better switch to a drug taken daily for years on end! Therefore, rich corporations have often distrusted vaccines – the ideal is something like Bayer's Aspirin, selling from 1899 to the present and therefore hotly litigated about. As Charles Fourier told us two centuries ago, we live in a world turned inside out, in which the physician has to hope for “good fevers,” the builder for “good fires,” and the priest for “the good dead” (more in Suvin, *Metamorphoses* 140-41). In this world, it is reasonable that Big Pharma wants to profit from diseases and sees no reason to prepare for one of unknown severity -- where they might sell too small a number of vaccines. So researchers, warning again and again that the next bout might result in “the loss of many lives” (Dr. Hotez in 2014, cited in Smith; Webster & Walker 2003), got the cold shoulder, and humanity lost 6, if not 17 years of preparation. In brief, only those vaccines that can be confidently expected to be profitable will be invested into, the rest are “bad business.”

Thus, it is most probable that a proper mass vaccine is between one and two years away from February 2020, if not more; and when it will be available, the USA alone could need about 300 million doses plus syringes — or 600 million if two shots are required (cf. McNeil).^{6/} Globally, billions of doses would have to be produced and made freely available to everyone, particularly those in poorer countries. In sum: “vaccines must be recognised as global public goods. Neither domestic agendas nor profit can be allowed to drive the effort for the largest vaccine deployment in history. Governments, pharmaceutical companies, and multilateral organizations must work together to develop, produce, and deliver the vaccine.” (Okonjo-Iweala) This also entails removing the barriers created by intellectual property and technology transfer laws. Since we are speaking here at the moment of goods worth upwards from \$8 billion, it remains doubtful that capitalism might manage to bridle its profit lust, and the

rich countries their power lust, for this task (see data in Blume, “Get”). Historically – for example, in the 2009 H1N1 pandemic -- the rich have always hoarded scarce vaccines for themselves.

Nothing in this sub-section implies vaccines are a fix for any disease. It is well known diseases may return and have returned again and again (cf. Blume, *Immunization*). Strengthening societal solidarity, primarily by helping the poor to have regular income and pushing the authorities to mandate a tax basis for an all-encompassing health service, are the only lasting fixes.

2.3. Upper-class Encroachments on Civil Liberties

We are witnessing a stronger fusion of monopoly capital with the State violence and we better know it.

Digital privacy has actually never fully existed, witness the mutual accusations about hacking by powerful states as well as the information extortion from users of Amazon and other capitalist “providers.” “Net neutrality” was always largely porous and hypocritical. But now, governments around the world, in cahoots with corporations that already hold vast stores of consumers’ personal data, are enthusiastically jumping at the chance of using the Covid pandemy by making permanent the extraordinary (and supposedly momentary) new surveillance powers. Most of what they want to write into granite would invade our privacy, deter our free speech, and disproportionately burden poorer and already marginalised groups of people, not to speak of dissenters proclaimed subversive.

This connects seamlessly with the national surveillance programs that emerged after the 2001 attacks and persist two decades later, though terrorists have scarcely been a major threat to the imperial metropolises even after the imperial warfare in West Asia and elsewhere augmented the pool of their potential adherents. The US Patriot Act gave its executive sweeping powers to spy on all people at home and in the whole world. Now, for example, contact tracing tools with the attendant testing and interviews would allow further surveillance measures applied to all, but uniquely impacting poor people, already subject to large amounts of data collection through public-benefits and welfare programs. The next step would be to extend to them DNA sampling, as practiced for immigrants at the US border (cf. for all these Emerson, also the Electronic Frontier Foundation at www.eff.org/).

The unholy alliance of capitalist internet mega-companies and governments now seems to be undergoing a qualitative jump with the introduction and probable obligatoriness of new instruments (apps) running on all mobile internet devices for tracing people, beginning with the infected but logically expanding to those potentially

infected -- that is, everybody. Even using only the lowly cellular phone, the instant, reliable, and universal tracing of one and all was approaching the wet dream of every tyranny and oligarchy. This model proved its worth in “ethnic Chinese” territories (PR China, Singapore, Taiwan) and its cultural neighbour, South Korea. It can be boosted to infinite chain links by new apps for “contact tracing,” that not only lead to much information but also to the horizon of personalised (but where necessary mass) lockdowns for all the indesirables the authorities want to isolate: today the coronised, tomorrow all the protesters, opponents, and dangerous scare-mongers that cannot be allowed to jeopardise “our” efforts (medical, military or whatever). Large US private companies and State agencies are racing to integrate useful telemedicine possibilities with apps that monitor and analyze geospatial, behavioral, and physiological data in large populations in real time. Do physicians have a role in regulating massive surveillance programs for public health? Do patients have an input? During a true or indeed a manufactured crisis, should some tools be opt-in, opt-out or mandatory? What are the criteria for a just monitoring, who defines them, and how do we balance the rights to personal privacy of the individual with the public good?

Both States and employers are licking the chops at the prospect of using this for total capillary tyranny. State example: President Trump, who already calls all that he dislikes “fake news”, has initiated a strong push to curb them by using wherever possible official sources only, and You Tube or Facebook are toeing the line. Company examples: not only are Amazon and Walmart planning to use contact tracing (i.e. whom do you meet) for employees, but employers in USA, that paradise of tyranny at work, have started using various "tattlewares." One downloads videos of employees' screens and takes a webcam picture of the employee every 10 minutes; an employee reported: "If you go to the bathroom or whatever, a pop-up will come up and it'll say, 'You have 60 seconds to start working again or we're going to pause your time'" (cut her pay). Another program for managers keeps a record of every task employees are doing on their computers, and points on the worker's “productivity score” are detracted for logging onto YouTube or Facebook. Some managers ask the at-home employees “to stay on video all day long so they can watch over them every minute of the day” (all quotes from Allyn).

If this meddling were to persist beyond the direct emergencies of infection, it would reduce the metropolitan North too to the condition of the tyrannies from Indonesia and most of Latin America to much of east-central Europe (e.g. Hungary, Poland, and Serbia). It would be reasonable to demand as a minimum three initial safeguards. First, that all legal and executive acts during the Covid pandemic contain a “guillotine” clause specifying a measurable set of thresholds – say of newly infected people -- below which they could no longer be used. Second, that the EU norms foreseeing for such apps *individual consent* be applied worldwide and bolstered by financing ombudsman civil

groups to watch it (apparently the apps need around 60% of adherents in a given population to work well). Third, that public financing be found for civic discussion as to who owns this data (physicians, governments, secret services, ad agencies?), and to what purposes can they be financially and politically exploited.

We should be particularly wary of huge plans, such as the Apple plus Google application programming interfaces (API) available to public health “authorities” -- with the government deciding who they are -- to develop contact tracing apps for systems that run on nearly every phone in the world; in a second proposed phase of the plan, Apple and Google will bake this feature into their underlying platforms (see Emerson). In the usual high-handedly arrogant wont of all PC software developers from Microsoft on, there will then be no possibility for users to opt in or out.

2.4. To Revolt Is Healthy

What is then to be done?

I shall enter upon detailed proposals in Section 3. But there is a precondition for all of them: that the working people, an overwhelming majority everywhere in the world, begin to claim power for themselves. This was so far defensive, say in the USA where it is best reported, in widespread demands for the equipment and sanitary conditions they need to stay safe, walking off the job to resist endangerment by bosses and up to street protests; New York teachers and Philadelphia librarians forced their systems to shut down; Detroit bus drivers and riders won free fares and safety of the drivers. Auto workers have launched wildcat strikes to stop production completely while maintaining full wages. Verizon and McDonald’s workers at some locations secured paid sick leave. Housing movement activists have won either moratoriums on evictions and/or utility shut-offs from New York City to San Francisco (compiled from Isser and Winant). In many countries, such as India, South Africa, and some Latin American ones, food riots are on the rise (see more in *Salvage* 33 and 218-19). As Winant summarises:

This means an end to financialized hospitals and nursing homes stripped to the bone of staff and capacity, and the rapid emergence, instead, of full-capacity integrated care systems: behind the fully-staffed and expandable ICU, the hospital with pandemic-scale emergency capacity, there must be publicly available childcare, communal food delivery, and the provision of companionship and entertainment for isolated elders. It means safe food and stable housing for all — including the homeless.... It means putting money in the pockets of the millions of new unemployed and shielding them from the predations of landlords and bill collectors. It means freeing the prisoners, whether on the border or in the gulags operated by every

city, state, and county—as well as by the federal government. It means building up international trust and cooperation, without which the global coordination necessary to fight the pandemic will be impossible...

The Salvage collective rightly calls this “[a] baseline communism [that] is the condition for a society” (28).

3. A First (Improvable) Sketch of a Minimum and Maximum Program Today

3.1. *Programs*

“Covidisation” is a sociopolitical matter of how to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. To counteract the worst blights of late capitalist trends revealed and hugely accelerated by it, and to oppose the most repressive and super-monopolistic outcomes in the offing we need a minimum and immediate plus a maximum but not too distant program. Their division is strictly pragmatic, based on what is or will be possible: both programs are based on *care* as against *violence*. In all these planks violence against humanity and against our survival through knowledge flows from the central idol of capitalism, the *profit principle*, which must be first bridled and then extinguished. Let us press for the minimum to be adopted right now, while clamouring for the horizon of maximum! Yet the division might have its own wit: for the officially imaginable and sometimes partly practiced maximums are our “minimums.”

A/ MINIMUM (bridling the profit principle)

- Suspend all work during the pandemic’s climb and plateau, and including ca. 15-20 days of a falling curve, except essential medical and logistical personnel and those required to produce and distribute food and other basic goods. The State must assume the cost of the wages for those suspended, paid at 80-100% for the period of the quarantine. Production and circulation of basic goods such as food, medicines, and knowledge must go on, but we cannot allow profits to re-ignite the infection.
- Socialise de facto (*not* nationalise!) all hospitals and medical centres under the control of the national and international health authorities, of their staffs, and of the users’ associations (to be fostered), also in view of the threatening future. Guarantee their income and work regardless of profit. Rush supplies to and increase the incomes of medical staff, teachers doing internet programmes, and other indispensable personnel.
- Put all big pharmaceutical companies under strict international control, authorise and enforce immediate international cooperation to find a vaccine and easier testing devices.

If they sabotage this, expropriate them. Abolish intellectual property in the medical field beyond reasonable return of expenses and remuneration.

- Speed up production for sanitary materials for this crisis (testing kits, masks, respirators). Organise testing for maximum possible amount of people.
- Just as for health, there is a basic need to ensure food supply, clean water, and public safety. Emergency grain stocks and other staple food supplies must be immediately released for distribution. Preferences should go to the disproportionately stricken poor. A strong ombudsman or similar system should be established for monitoring possible “security” encroachment on basic human rights and existing legal safeguards, funded by the State but at arm’s length from it (see 2.21).
- Suspend immediately all schools, from elementary to universities. Organise safe activities for students via internet, supply free basic PCs to all concerned, bought wholesale by communities and PTAs at production price. Maintain teachers’ pay, prolong for one or two years all part-time and limited contracts, all of them at a rate adjusted for extra work and extra expenses during the emergency. Assign authorial copyright for new internet programs to their authors.
- Suspend immediately all rent and mortgage payments for those not working, also non-corporate debts and evictions. Ask for maximum extinction of all debts and mortgages, say when 150% of the initial sum has been paid.
- Break the stranglehold of financial capitalism on all the above, or none of them will happen. Begin with new legislation on banks (see below) and a financial transactions tax.
- Finally: “covidisation” reveals clearly that denying even health help to other “races” or ethnic groups and especially if immigrants, an imperative of racism or better nationalist chauvinism in the US and Europe as well as in Asia quickly redounds on all denizens of an area, even when slave pens are reintroduced (now called temporary camps). It is indispensable that all States pass and enforce laws against “racial” or ethnic discrimination and, as in gender affairs, affirm equal pay for equal work with strong penalties for its breach.

B/ MAXIMUM (abolishing the profit principle)

B1. Introductory

The following planks are simply a first provisional proposal to implement the radical demands of peoples in all great revolutions (say the American, French, Russian and Chinese ones, as formulated in the terms of Jefferson, Robespierre with Saint-Just, and Lenin) for LIFE, LIBERTY, and a chance at PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. Some weak excuse for not implementing these demands for all might be found in the insufficient production forces before the Industrial Revolution. But as of then, there is absolutely

none. Those who think that guarded gate communities or orbital weightless stations might save the rich and powerful, should learn from Covid-19 and all other “natural” disasters – rising oceans, spreading deserts, dying species, polluted air, water, and food -- that humans are indeed members of one another, as well as of Terran ecosystems with all living beings. This fragile oasis of negentropy and life amid the merciless desert of the universe should be preserved!

The Jeffersonian trinity is really triune: we are talking here of mutually enhancing and indispensable aspects of FREEDOM. Freedom is like the air we breathe, or food and clear water, or light and knowledge: it is best noticed in its absence. Freedom without a guaranteed and enforced right to the material needs of life is fake and leads to mass murders happening now daily and globally.

The opposite of freedom is reduction of the quantity and quality of life through political subjection and economic exploitation. Patrick Henry’s formulation is still our alternative: we shall have liberty or we shall have (speedier and much less dignified) death.

B2. Planks

Their gist is: ban crimes against humanity (the term was rightly used by the editor-in-chief of the prestigious UK medical periodical *The Lancet* for measures favouring the spread of Covid-19 pandemy). The capitalist dilemma of saving lives OR saving livelihoods, its hold-up maxim of “your money or your life,” is false and pernicious. Financial intervention of all levels of the social community, accompanied by speedy possibilities of democratic control from below, is needed to step out of this double bind.

- Adopt basic “defence of life” measures in each country: for example, in US terms, \$15 minimum wage per hour law, improved Medicare for All, Universal Basic Income (see third item below), cheap and in many cases free public transit, an end to fracking, oil drilling, and oil pipelines, no private prospecting in National Parks, and public works with the goal of achieving ecological conversion -- a Green New Deal (see Wallis).

- Charge the UN to reorganise so as to enforce ending all armed warfare except for immediate defense of a directly threatened population. Drastically reduce all State armed forces in favour of universal civic service, the Swiss (and Fourierist and Jamesonian) model extended from armed to unarmed readiness to defend life. End sanctions and economic blockades that prevent entire populations from importing necessary medical or other basic supplies (e.g. against Cuba, Iran, Venezuela or North Korea). Insist on total ban of and dismantlement of nuclear, bacteriological, and chemical weapons.

- Provide a Universal Basic Income as a human right in every country for all denizens that ensures food, also other survival needs such as basic access to clean air and water, electricity, heating or other climate control, and internet access; it should be accompanied by obligation to communal work. The cost of providing these utilities can

be covered by an at least 50% reduction of all world military budgets, plus normal tax payments by major corporations (that as a rule pay nothing or very little), annuities from a national wealth fund benefitting from redistribution from richer nations, and royalty payments from tech companies like Amazon for mining our personal data.

This can only work if paired with redrawing the tax laws in direction of the Welfare State: tax the rich on a sliding scale centered on 50% (I paid that much in Canada for 25 years, as all “middle classes” did, and did not begrudge it; the rich will, but must be curbed). If necessary, increase the percentage for the multimillionaires and higher. Abolish all offshore tax havens. Draw up strict laws for banks, mainly returning to the pre-1970 rules: the banks exist to facilitate producing more and better life, not billionaires and death.

- Institute urgent support for the agricultural producers to increase the production of healthy food and supply it to the population at fair but accessible prices; abolish stranglehold of middlemen distributors in favour of competition; use markets but monitor and where necessary control prices.
- Organise widest possible civic debates, financed by territorial communities on all levels, to increase radically the financing of national health services, obligatory and available to all in feedback with the WHO^{7/}, with the rich paying extra.
- Establish constitutional provisions for adequate -- decent if modest -- housing as a basic human right guaranteed to all denizens. Organise widest possible civic debates, financed by territorial communities on all levels, to establish provision of adequate housing as a basic human right and maximum extinction of debts and mortgages, say by the time the initial sum has been paid 150%. This means eradicating the horrendous slums capitalism has multiplied ever since the Industrial Revolution.
- Establish constitutional provisions for increasing teaching and research, available to all working people and based on a legally fixed percentage of real national income, probably a two-digit one. Organise widest possible civic debates, financed by territorial communities on all levels, on how should teaching and research be guided by people’s well-being. Organise strict monitoring against conflict of interest in research as well as in government.
- Resist and reverse the drift to omnipresent surveillance and the Leviathan State-cum-corporations. The State has no place in personal apartments, nor should we allow such surveillance in offices, on internet or on personal communication units; a camera on every street intersection is a sign of dire tyranny. Abolish all sale by Amazon, Google, and all other provider companies of personal preferences and usages. Enact safeguard measures against the surveillance State or Company (I propose some in 2.3 above) and finance independent civil society groups to participate in watching this.
- In particular, resist and reverse the huge push to “smart working” -- a propaganda term for working tasks performed at one’s private home and over the internet, usually

badly paid. It not only unduly favours faceless relationships and renders impossible all performance art, including live music, and all true teaching as opposed to info dumps. It is also subject to most virulent neo-taylorism of time-and-motion control for everybody so “smart.”

- Abolish private property over ideas and words. Turn Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Apple, and TV emitters into public utilities overseen by combinations of local, regional, and international user groups; allow modest charges for internet and other communicational uses, depending on amount of usage and income of user. Finance main use of all such “social media” for social enlightenment, including learning and research, develop the electromagnetic infrastructure accessible to all. Open up societal development of computer programs and other software, with real respect for privacy (cf. Moglen).

3.2. Upshot

Dismantling structural capitalism may today look highly unrealistic. But what happens if and when we are faced by: first, mass dying -- not only of Covid but also of hunger and other diseases, and then of the huge “climate” upheavals to come -- met only too often by callous pressures for “back to work” regardless of intensified exploitation and oppression; and second, a total surveillance State as near to Fascism as no matter? I believe we should steal back Mrs. Thatcher’s stolen slogan (from Marxists such as Lenin) and proclaim: There Is No Alternative!

I cannot put it better than David Harvey:

do we want to come out of this crisis by simply saying that there’s 26 million people who need to get back to work, in some of those pretty awful jobs they may have been doing before? ... Or do we want to ask: Is there some way to organise the production of basic goods and services so that everybody has something to eat, everybody has a decent place to live, and we can put a moratorium on evictions, and everybody can live rent free? Isn’t this moment one where we could actually think seriously about the creation of an alternative society?

4. The Grim Alternative: Paupericide, Fascism...

Just a few bits about the probable mass loss of life in the structural violence of the capitalocene:

- According to epidemiology professor Michael Mina at Harvard, it is “completely unknown” how many people are actually infected. Instead of more than one million world cases in the first week of April, “there could be anywhere from 10 million to perhaps 100 million” (Britt, “The Covid-18 Pandemic”). A UK Crick Institute research opts for a “reasonable worst case” of 70 to 165 million world deaths (Salvage 11). But if the US health system is overwhelmed, never mind the poorer countries, this upper limit could be breached.
- The UK Office for National Statistics showed that those living in the poorest parts of England and Wales were dying at twice the rate of those in the richest areas (“Calls”). The Los Angeles county health office, as cited in the Italian press, reported that low-income people had a three times larger probability of dying from Covid than the average LA denizen (NOT than the rich!). We are here in a cheap kind of biological warfare, where you don’t even have to pay for killer agents, say like the Agent Orange herbicide, containing deadly dioxine and used to devastate Vietnam.
- The insufficient lockdown and foolhardy reopening of most US places, now beginning in Europe too, puts most working people, as well as small business owners, in an impossible bind: risk death at work or risk death by destitution -- financial ruin -- at home (cf. Mull). Globally, I would estimate perhaps three-quarters if not more of the 2 billion “informal” workers and their suffering families have been made totally destitute by capitalocene covidisation, most clearly in the millions (or is it tens of millions?) dismissed in India. The pressure on politicians to reopen comes everywhere -- most successfully in the USA, UK, Sweden, and Lombardy, and coupled with obviously dictatorial rule in Latin America and Russia -- from the richest businessmen, themselves seemingly sheltered from the risk. In particular,
this pandemic served as a mask off moment for the [USA...]. With tens of thousands dead and more getting sick each day, watching our politicians and corporations slowly begin to pressure us to get back to work and in essence become sacrificial lambs for the stock market has been as surreal and barbaric as it is predictable. (Martinchek).

The worst choice of all is plutocratic denialism, most staunch in the USA, Russia, and Brasil. It should be hampered in the future, to begin with by strict election contribution laws, and then by more basis democracy -- clearly lacking in Hubei too.

In brief, the noble but illusory dreams of the original liberals, say of J.S. Mill, that free markets will lead to existential freedom is dead and buried in an age of unceasing imperialist wars, paupericide (genocide of the poor), and ecocide. The careless extrapolation of the need for a strong dictatorial State in the face of dire threats was carried over from the capitalist World Wars of the last 110 years to various “wars” -- against drugs or terrorists or the present pandemy. The wrong labelling is a sign of evading and obfuscating reality: that all these (very real) emergencies are inner societal

contradictions and have to be faced by enlightening and help, not murder. Our alternatives are: *either* some version of intelligent socialist/communist/anarchist human solidarity *or*, as in all capitalist crises, a massive aggrandisement of huge technological and power monopolies with the middle and small capitalists being pauperised alongside the huge majority; the last solution historically favours Fascism 2.0, the legitimate child of overstressed dead-end capitalism. We are halfway there in much of Latin America, Asia, and eastern Europe, certainly moving towards it almost everywhere, prominently including the USA: for, “[a] key feature of a fascist society is indifference to mass death. Which is precisely what America has felt towards 125,000 needlessly dead and counting.” (haque, “America Is Losing”)

An awful warning may be the case of India. Rampant super-capitalism for the rich and its ruling class has a second pillar there in caste, still deeply intertwined with class, so that 'social distancing' sounds especially weird when the government lockdown falls heavily on the lowest castes of India, “the footloose millions who keep India's farms, workshops and factories running, toil on roads and construction sites, service the homes of the rich and middle classes, care for their babies, and clear city streets and sewage lines.” Many Indian constituent states “are extending the legal workday to 12 hours, and rolling back worker safety regulations, collective bargaining rights, and minimum wage protections won over a century of struggles” a shining exception being communist-led Kerala. The words of an Indian worker abandoned in an industrial park with thousands of others: "It feels like we have been locked up in a jail" (quotes in this paragraph from Choudhury & Aga), may be an ominous pointer for the future of the world.

The conclusions of two rich articles I much learned from should be heeded. First by Gabriel Winant:

we now know, with absolute certainty, ... that capital will not [secure food, shelter, schooling, and of course care for a population in lockdown] Trusting the profit motive to deliver already left us a world of homelessness, hunger, debt, imprisonment, exploitation, addiction, racism, premature death, international strife, and rising temperatures before the pandemic struck.

Second by Andrew Liu, who notes how, unlike an earthquake or famine, the coronavirus outbreak has resulted in perhaps the greatest ever accumulation of oil and steel (and we should add unused food being destroyed for want of capitalist circulation while millions hunger), while personal savings of the workers have been exhausted:

[Given this irrational social system of organizing wealth and value, instead of enriching us and relieving us of natural wants, this glut of goods

is only making us poorer.... Containing the spread of the coronavirus, then, is about more than practicing good hygiene. On trial is a whole global system of profiteering and its structural laws and incentives ... [as well as] our unprecedented degree of global interdependence in the year 2020.

The masters of our corrupt cognition and fake novelty will label the horizon propounded here, and shared I daresay by hundreds of millions of labouring people, as utopian. As usual, the masters don't know what they are saying. Since to their minds utopian simply means the impossible, a *Hirngespinnst* (cobweb of the brain), I answer that all the proposals are not only materially or economically possible but also the only way to reduce the sweeping paupericide. If they would more properly realise that utopian means a non-existing (*ou*) yet radically better (*eu*) spacetime or common place (*topos*), they would still do all they could to obstruct it.

Obfuscations, and if need be, guns and drones: we may fail in key points of our minimum programme. Even for it, we need a convergence of redistributive political reforms like a financial-transactions tax and a new wave of working people militancy. If their convergence does not come about, the Covid pandemic will become one of the largest capitalist restructuring depressions, on the scale of the 1929-33 one, "annihilating huge chunks of small and medium-sized business... [and] offering mega-monopoly the economy on a platter. All those 'distressed assets' — whether storefronts or, well, unemployed people? Mega-monopolies can now buy them up on the cheap." (haque, "The American Economy") These monopolies are in good part rentiers, subsisting by paying low or no taxes -- as different from the middle classes and a reasonably full employment, created by the Welfare State and destroyed in its rollback by capitalism effective from the mid-1970s on.

This prospect is memorably summed up by haque's evoking

[a complete] transformation of a once entrepreneurial economy which, even if it lacked public goods, still offered people some semblance of mobility, stability, middle class life — into a kind of caste economy of new poor and ultra-rich, without much in the middle. At the top, a tiny number of owners of capital — Bezos, Zuck, today's CEO of Goldman Sachs. Below them, a small 1% of their lieutenants. And then everyone else, trying to scrape together a living, whatever gig or low-wage service job comes their way today.

In such an economy, education doesn't count much — see how today's PhDs already face mass unemployment. Neither does hard work, because there's nowhere to go, really. What counts is being a certain kind of person. Brutal, selfish, greedy, avaricious, thoughtless, ignorant, foolish. Like a member of the Trump family, essentially. Such people will rise.

In that case, the state of siege – a capitalist war economy -- will persist for one or more years, and the political fall-out of the resulting economic collapse will be, as suggested above, some form of Fascism 2.0 (I approach it far too briefly in “Explain”). The rotting supermonopoly and surveillance capitalism will rule over a tottering blend of oligopoly markets, feudal rent, and outright slavery. Superadded to the real enough whip of hunger and misery for the “free contract” workers, there will be overt shackles and bodily lesions -- electronic, of course -- for lower classes, a huge misery and death toll, plus racist ideology against the poor. Capitalocene’s ends and organisation have as of the World Wars grown into a shackle on both science (such as medicine, perverted by Big Pharma entrepreneurs) and minimally acceptable life for billions.

Or we may fail, even more probably, in key points of our maximum programme. Then we shall have, for a century or more, an equally fascist version of Jack London’s Iron Heel, updated with the newest AI and nanophysical surveillance and killing devices, until it collapses for bio-ecological reasons. However, as I concluded in my preceding “Thoughts within the Coronising Siege”: the price would be many times lower if it happened through revolts by working people. We are now all in this together, literally for life or death. We shall either organise or be ground down into a new slavery plus eco-catastrophe.

Notes

*/ My warmest thanx go to the repeated help by encouragement, discussion, and correction, first of all to Jodi Dean, Tom Moylan, Stuart Blume, and Victor Wallis, but also Mladen Lazić, Doug Lummis, Trish MacManus, Jelena Vesić and her mother, the WHW women comrades represented by Nataša Ilić, Toby Widdicombe. Though all responsibility for formulations here is mine, without them, and the patience of Nena, this essay might well have been impossible.

The bulk of the article was written during the March-to-May lockdown in Italy, using what was available. It may suggest the richness of ongoing debates but insufficiently counteracts the categorial confusions of those pressured months.

1/ I’ve devoted much attention to the key political mediation on the Left in previous works, such as *Splendour*, „Archeology,” “Prescience,” *Lessons*, and *Communism* (in particular its essay “What Is To Be Done” of 2015), where large bibliographies with many splendid works can be found. This should be updated for present pressing purposes.

2/ I take this from Rastko Močnik’s phrase about the guilt of people (or perhaps only intellectuals) for the downfall of SFR Yugoslavia around 1990.

3/ I take my raw numbers from Winant but the calculation of proportions and comments are mine. I have in this case not taken into account the fact that the 2019 US population has grown to 331 million.

4/ Cf. https://peoplesdispatch.org/2020/03/22/the-cost-of-this-pandemic-must-not-bankrupt-the-people/?utm_source=Tricontinental). I acknowledge the stimulation of various recent newsletters sent by Vijay Prashad in the name of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, and in particular of their attempt at a program in points. I agree with their slogan "We Won't Go Back to Normal, Because Normal Was the Problem" (www.thetricontinental.org/newsletterissue/newsletter-13-2020-new-world-order). I have re-checked and used some of their data, also cannibalised some formulations. I do not share their uncritical admiration of the Chinese State, efficacious as its ruthlessness against the local profit-making collusion and foot-dragging (see note 6) might have in this case been.

5/ Two mini-facts must not escape chronicling:

--"A Colorado man was billed more than \$840,000 after he spent two weeks fighting Covid-19 in an intensive care unit, and he had insurance." (Sifferlin)

--"Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos is apparently on track to potentially become the world's first trillionaire. While even in normal times he is making more each second than a minimum wage worker can hope to earn in a month, his ex wife is worth 37 billion dollars simply for owning a 4 percent stake in the company." (Martinchek)

6/ *On the Chinese*: To the contrary, the Chinese-majority territories of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan responded aggressively in January by screening arrivals from Wuhan, implementing travel restrictions, and mandating society-wide restrictions on activity and stringent assessments of hospitals, so that up to end of March their success – due to large-scale testing and self-quarantining -- was impeccable (cf. Liu; though Singapore has lately blotted the book, grasping for profits, by reopening activities too early and leaving immigrants to die). They profited from seeing events in Mainland PR China, which finally also responded well: though bureaucratic foot-dragging and suppression by Hubei authorities possibly lasted into the beginning of mass travel in Chinese New Year, a mass spread outside Hubei was avoided. Not so in non-Chinese countries. In any case, it is silly chauvinism to give viruses national names: the nearest analogy, the "Spanish flu" of 1918-19 with more than 50 million dead out of a world population of 1,800 million, in fact originated in the USA.

7/ We should not regard the WHO as a perfect body, since it is by now four-fifths privately funded. But it at least gives a voice to almost all existing States and its mandate is wonderful: to advocate universal healthcare, coordinate responses to health emergencies, provide technical assistance to countries, set international health standards and guidelines, and collect data on global health issues -- no wonder Trump hates it! On the other hand, it is subject to the usual UN pressures by the richer countries, but also by corruptible experts with ties to Big Pharma and bureaucratic turf wars. Cases in point may be its hasty designation of the 2009 H1N1 swine flu epidemic as a pandemic, which opened the floodgate for public financing and rejoicing by prominent research entrepreneurs (see Lal), as well as the opposite extreme of waiting a bit long at the beginning of Covid-19.

Some Useful Works Mentioned

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