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Chronicles from the state of emergency

Il Rovescio

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March 2020

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may not be so rare: the necessity to take what we need to live will be very clear to those who simply cannot pay anymore.

Viruses don't come from another planet

Illness always reflects the way of life (of producing, eating, moving, etc.) of a society. A medicine that does not start from this fact – which today presupposes a clear questioning of the industrial society – can only buffer the effects of diseases, without going back to their causes. It is no coincidence that the first outbreak of Coronavirus developed in an area of China of great urban concentration and heavy industrial pollution. It is not by chance that the first outbreaks in Italy developed in the most industrialized and polluted areas. If the harmfulness and environmental upheavals they cause are not removed, health emergencies will be repeated.

Healthcare

Healthcare workers who make protective suits out of garbage bags and use sheets to make masks; continuous alarm on limited resources for intensive care. How could this happen? This is what is not said in the daily chronicles of fear, so that there is no mention of responsibility. From 1978 onwards, between right-wing and left-wing governments, Healthcare has been subjected to the combined effects of cuts and privatizations. The progressive transformation of Healthcare into a Company has cut structures, personnel, departments and unprofitable therapies, cutting in particular all that was related to preventive medicine. For this reason, hospital beds have been reduced by half and emergency beds by less than half. While medical and political metaphors are increasingly explicitly military (the virus is the aggressor, the body is under siege, society is at war, the government deploys the army), the real enemy of individual and collective health disappears: the logic of profit.

Stopping the virus means liberating everybody

Beginning on Saturday, March 7 and for the entire following week, there were protests in around forty prisons throughout Italy. In at least thirty of these there were real riots. More than six thousand prisoners took part in the riots, with sections destroyed and set on fire, fire to prison cars, prisoners on the roofs, mass escapes, guards taken hostage and the Modena prison closed “de facto” thanks to the damage. The State shows its muscles: the rapid response and the special units of the penitentiary intervene, the guards surround the prisons with weapons in their hands, in Puglia the army is deployed to block the escaped prisoners, in Modena relatives report that they clearly heard shots. And then mass beatings and transfers. The result is very heavy: 15 prisoners dead. Their deaths are quickly covered up, there is talk of deaths caused “for the most part”... from overdosing on psychotropic drugs and methadone.

The spark that started the fire is the suspension of receiving visitors as a ridiculous measure to contain the contagion (relatives would be potentially infected... not the guards?) together with the awareness of being like mice in a trap in the face of the risk of an epidemic (there have already been cases in Brescia, Milan, Voghera, Pavia, Lecce, Modena and Bologna), but the powder keg is made up of inhumane living conditions: endemic overcrowding, violence by the guards, impossibility of access to alternative measures. Amnesty and pardon: the requests of the prisoners would at this time be nothing more than a public health measure, to limit the damage of the spread of contagion in overcrowded environments (up to 8 prisoners per cell). While in Iran, in order to stem the contagion, 70,000 prisoners with sentences under five years have been released from prison, in Italy, after protests, riots and a real massacre by the state, they have been given the possibility to go to home deten-

are: the cyber infrastructure and war. That is why all arms factories must remain open. That is why, while we are locked up in front of our screens, technological progress accelerates and new 5G antennas are being installed in secret. Confirming how digital infrastructure and war are increasingly interconnected, TIM¹ is “teaching” the army the potential of 5G and artificial intelligence for war in the “new world”. The question remains whether what we can’t see is not just a virus moving through the air, but the world they are establishing for us.

Some sensible proposals

They seem to be those suggested by the signs on the windows of several supermarkets in Trento and Rovereto between March 24 and 25: “General strike”, “Close factories”, “Lower prices”.

In the meantime...

On March 25, there was widespread participation in the general strike called in the logistics and factories sector. On March 26, in a supermarket in Palermo, some people filled the shopping cards and tried to get out without paying. The Carabinieri and riot cops intervened on the spot and in the following days they guarded the entrance of several supermarkets in the city.

There are more and more calls on social networks to stop paying. With the extension of the emergency, perhaps after months without pay, more and more people will face the problem of satisfying their needs. Situations like the one in Palermo

¹ **TIM S.p.A.**, also operating under the name **Telecom Italia**, is an Italian telecommunications company headquartered in Rome and Milan, which provides telephony services, mobile services, and DSL data services. It is the largest Italian telecommunications services provider in revenues and subscribers. en.wikipedia.org

certainly not to allow contacts in case of health emergencies, but to generalize industry, machines, cameras and smart sensors. Fear is an ideal feeling to push us even further towards a world where human beings would be governed by “intelligent objects” and by those who program them.

Telesurveillance

It made a bit of a stir that forty percent of the Milanese were found far from their homes through the control of cell phones activated by means of mobile communication. What’s the news? The fact that the cell phone companies carry out mass data collection on a daily basis is a well-known fact (although few people draw the consequences). What is new is that they are taking the opportunity of a health emergency to openly justify something that exists well beyond the emergency and that raises, or should raise, not just a few ethical and social questions. But it is not enough. For days we have been subjected to a hammering propaganda aimed at introducing “Korean-style measures” in Italy as well, i.e. the registration of contacts between people starting from the cross-checking of smartphones, wi-fi and Bluetooth (to locate the “users” not in a particular neighborhood, but home by home, shop by shop). The “public” data would be stored and analyzed by the authorities, the “hidden” data (which every application on smartphones creates, even when you deactivate it) would power the “smart machines” with which they control our behavior and study our “purchase intentions”. Happy government, happy digital capitalism. What about us?

What is “essential”?

What cannot be stopped during an epidemic shows us, indirectly, what the foundations of the society in which we live

tion centres (house arrest, *Enough 14*) for those with sentences under six months, and to home detention centres with electronic bracelets for those who have to serve sentences under eighteen months. In reality, the situation is worsening rather than improving (the law in force already provides the possibility of house arrest) of going home for those with sentences of less than three years and without an electronic bracelet, subject to the approval of the supervisory magistrate. Not to mention that 34.5% of prisoners in Italy are awaiting trial and have no sentence to serve. These weak measures would not have been obtained without a decisive and courageous test of power by the prisoners, aware that reality leaves them no escape: either imprisonment and death, or revolt and live.

General strike!

Although it is proclaimed at institutional level that all non-essential activities must stop, many factories are still open: even those with a very high concentration of workers, in close contact both during production and in the canteen. (And in the meantime, the forces of law and order patrol with sirens, deployed on bicycle paths, parks and woods in search of the “quacksalvers”. And in the meantime, mobile phone companies produce mass filings to “track” movements of individuals). Also in Trentino, as in the rest of Italy, strikes have been reported in several factories (Dana, Pama, Fly, Siemens44, Mariani, Sapes, Tecnoclima, Ebara...), to which are added the many workers who have decided to stay at home even in the absence of strike. This is not only an understandable reaction of fear in the face of the virus, but a contribution to everyone’s health. These strikes must be supported and extended to all production sectors that are not strictly necessary. If health is not compatible with profit, let it be bad for profit.

All in the same boat?

We are witnessing a massive injection of unified networks of nationalist rhetoric these days: “All together against the common enemy”. In this tricolor (The Italian national flag has 3 colours, *Enough 14*) narrative the material conditions of life that are not at all the same for everyone disappear by magic (to stay at home, I have to have a home and be able to maintain it...). But let’s look a little further on. If it is impossible to make precise predictions about what happens afterwards, one thing is certain. The economic effects of this “health crisis” will have a well differentiated weight in society. Millions of people will face the practical problem of having something to live from. The same loans from the European Central Bank will not be free of charge at all, but will impose new austerity measures that will affect particularly the poorest. The boat will be pushed by those who are already half under water. Let us remember this when the music of the Mameli hymn disappears.

The reversed responsibilities

The daily chronicles of fear cancel the general and specific responsibilities of the current epidemic, to overturn them entirely on those who are not locked in their homes, “Quacksalber” against whom they ask for increasingly repressive measures (military with police functions, tracking of the population, calls for denunciation, authorization to use drones ...). Who has dismantled Healthcare for profit, thus worsening a situation that can be tackled in a very different way? Who kept the factories open? Who closed the schools on February 20 and the shopping centres only on March 12? Who was it? Perhaps those who walk on the streets or walk on cycle ways and paths? And again: is it individual “jackals” or a system that has increased the price of hospital masks by up to 600%?

What security?

They’ve been drilling into our eardrums for decades with the cry “Security!” More cameras, more controls, more police, more prisons! Then comes a virus epidemic and emerges between the wrinkles of conscience and the unspoken words of television that, if they stopped the road haulage and logistics, within a few days there would be nothing left to eat in the supermarkets. What security can human beings who depend on a technological and productive system of which they have no control? You don’t live from telework! Let’s take advantage of this “pause” to reflect. Without taking back the land and managing the sources of our food supplies ourselves, we will also lose, together with our freedom and autonomy, our security.

Teleworking

One of the ongoing experiments, in addition to police and military control, concerns work: how much and how can the economy go on without people leaving home? What is “work” today? Those who take advantage of all forms of telework (whether they are imposed on employees or teachers) are first and foremost the multinationals that own the computer platforms and various applications. From every online activity – free or paid for little money – the “giants of the web” get an impressive amount of personal data that they analyze and sell. Everything are ” data” that can be processed and transformed into merchandise: tastes, opinions, tone of voice, facial expression, the book quoted by the teacher, health-related news, fears, reaction to certain news, the level of attention of students, etc.. In the best of all possible worlds, even an epidemic – i.e. millions of people locked indoors but always connected – becomes a great deal. And an opportunity to justify the introduction of the 5G network, whose function is