Anonymous
The Difference Between “Just Coping” & “Not Coping At All”
2020

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*[ed. – Come the capacity, come the crisis. Whatever else can be said about the world-wide restrictions that a huge part of the global population has been subject to for as much as a year now, it seems clear that such restrictions can only be viable due to the extensive system of cybernetics (see the supplement to **Return Fire vol.3; Caught in the Net**) that the current form of capitalism has been shifting its weight upon. The nexus of techno-sciences and research projects bringing life to the supposed Fourth (and even Fifth) Industrial Revolutions is being announced, by both its advocates and its critics, as seizing the greatest leap forward imaginable under the guise of problem-solving for a population terrified by the invisible virus. But where does the hype over the dystopian surveillence, profit-harvesting and stupefication capacities actually meet with their ability to solve the problems facing the system?*

Here we publish words received in late autumn from a correspondent, revising their predictions that they made in the grip of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic as it was announced here in Britain in early spring. To be clear, this does not attempt to brush such con-

cerns aside: though elites don't seem seriously worried about revolution, the most intelligent capitalists see the need for what's described below as a "new Fordism" to save their murderous system (and for those who associate the automobile magnate who gave that era its name with a more benign and socially-inclusive phase, let's remember he wasn't a saviour but efficient exploiter and Nazi sympathiser whose improved productivity gave rise to some of the more famous atrocities of the 20th century – see ***Return Fire vol.5 pg98****). However, this piece reminds us of the nuanced relation between capitalists and the State; though clearly entities joined at the hip since capitalism was first widely adopted – as a State-subsidised activity on terrains and populations captured by the State – they do not always move as a unified block.*

We're tired of being treated like 'conspiracy theorists' (even by those who we once thought understood that the State does not exist to keep us safe…) when we decry the unprecedented sociocidal policies of the lockdown regime, but we're also tired of premature claims that what we are facing is already a unified totalitarianism or fascism in the outmoded 20th century sense. Certain States – the US, for example – clearly passed up opportunities to seize more centralised executive power during the outbreak but instead allowed systematically-oppressed parts of the population to sicken and die off, compared to the centralised deployment of National Guard and other federal agencies during the uprising later in 2020 (see ***The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis****). Clearly there are more complicated dynamics and histories at play. Our reading of this piece highlights the drastic need to intensify existing networks of mutual aid (decontaminated of the political appropriation of the term that the last 12 months have seen rise to) so as to rely on each other and not the system as – in symphony – we try to weaken and eventually bring it down with our attacks, blockades and subversion.]*

My first reaction to lockdown was, this is it, the state will not give up the power it's grabbed, as that's the pattern from 9/11 and so on. But, we do have precedent for states going hardcore au-

thoritarian (military rule etc.) then ”democratising”, such as when Britain later repealed some of the Second World War emergency restriction crap *[ed. – introduced by the leftist Labour Party immediately upon entering government, awarding themselves “full power to control all persons and property”]*. In retrospect it seems the scenarios I was expecting to unfold were a little over-pessimistic; I hope I’m not tempting fate here. I think there’s some kind of dynamic between the capitalists and the state where the capitalists are sometimes fine with repression (especially to keep power) but other times are worried the state is getting too big a share of the pie or interfering with their own interests. The trouble is, this won’t happen if the measures are part of the new regime of accumulation (cybernetic control as profit) or if the crisis is so deep that the capitalists are panicky and more afraid of revolution.

It’s hard to see what the agenda is now – if the plan was to shock us with lockdown then introduce a less drastic ”new normal” which people will celebrate even though it’s worse than the ”old normal”, if it was a trial-run to experiment how people would respond to counterinsurgency measures *[ed. – see **Return Fire vol.3 pg5**]* and what systemic strains there’d be, or if it was just a massive fuck-up coming from too much securitisation (i.e., the impulse to use pigs to solve medical problems) combined with legitimation-by-panic.

What I think happened later is that cracks started to show in the lockdowns, ”compliance” went down and political resistance started to recompose. People stopped long-running movements for a month or so, then started again (in Chile, Lebanon, Hong Kong). The *banlieues [ed. – French suburban ghettoes, often predominantly housing racialised people from former colonies]* exploded, then Mayday was marked in several countries, with very successful bike demos in Slovenia and flash-mob actions in Germany. Then there was the big anti-lockdown protests (US, Germany, Brazil) – my impression from articles and people I know is that they’re organised by conspiracy theorists and libertarian rightists, pick up loads of fascists, but also attract anarcho/leftie types, Bernie Sanders voters,

black people fed-up of pig stops and so on *[ed. – see **How the Left is Handing Over Protest to Fascism**]*. There's also (ironically) a left-wing conspiracy theory going around which has the Koch brothers as masterminds behind the anti-lockdown protests and government back-to-work programs… worryingly similar to how the right uses George Soros, though nobody who's into it seems to see the parallel. Although it might be challenging for some to admit, I think that these protests paved the way for the anti-police rebellions after the murder of George Floyd *[ed. – see **The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis**]* by showing that street-level resistance was still possible.

During the first wave of early 2020, governments *said* that they would worsen lockdowns in response to protests and "non-compliance" – but the reality is, every government has dropped or loosened the lockdown within a fortnight or so of revolts. In Britain there doesn't seem to have been much organised protest against it but the police were overwhelmed and at some point people were just ignoring non-compliance – on VE day[1] there were parties and raves everywhere, and pigs ignored them. They were in the media afterwards whining that it was a "losing battle". Then the government went down this new tack of loosening the rules but increasing fines – pigs redirected from checking motorways and day-trip spot to attacking parties and the like.

[1] ed. – Victory Day in Europe; the end of World War Two on that subcontinent. In the UK, while media lauding those out with the Union Jack bunting at the official celebrations, little attention was on the actual elderly survivors of that capitalist war. As ruling-party politicians and social engineers in their service (such as Dominic Cummings) openly talked of what a waste of money it was protecting such economically-unproductive people, do-not-resuscitate orders blanket-allocated to many care home residents early in the pandemic without their knowledge; 25,060 patients were sent back to their care homes from hospitals between 17th March and 15th April, many of them already with COVID and a political decision like that in most of Europe placing care homes last on the list for medical aid; amounting to a government-endorsed euthanasia program.

Not as strict as March (eg. support bubbles stay) but it's very blatantly hypocritical. Schools and universities stay open, so does non-essential work if it can't be done from home, but all kinds of everyday activities and most fun stuff are banned, no non-essential travel, etc etc. Presumably no protests. So two workers walking together to a non-essential factory job are breaking the law, but then once they're there, they might be working without proper protection in close proximity all day. Very clear that "essential" means capitalist. I'm worried about the cybernetic totalitarianism scenario again because it's very clear the system is rerunning the scenario but has learned from the first time round. The scenario they want to perfect is one where capitalist activity goes on as normal, but everything that can move online does move online, necessary reproductive labour continues, but all other social contact is eliminated. I don't think it will work because (among other things) public support for lockdowns is fraying and "compliance" is now very low. Plus the incompetence of the state is becoming more and more obvious to everyone. But we'll see.

the Third Way[10] power-grab in the social-democrat parties, the marginalising of Marxism in universities, etc. etc… Now, it does seem again this time that the countries which took vaguely socialistic approaches (Sweden, Venezuela, Belarus, Cuba, Iceland…) were more successful in handling COVID than the usual neoliberal regimes, but it hasn't attracted much coverage and doesn't seem to be causing a rethink. A big conflict with China or Russia (who have much more interventionist economies) might change things though.

I think lockdown may have the same role in our time as war in the last Kondratiev-wave; if there's another international surge of revolt like that of 1968 it will be the anti-lockdown age the same way the '60s/'70s was partly driven by draft-dodging and anti-war sentiment.

And now Britain's in a new national lockdown, just coinciding with the likely unrest following the US election. Supposed excuse is a rapidly increasing infection rate (NOT death rate – that's going up but slowly) which is probably caused by increased testing using tests with lots of false positives, plus massive infections at schools and universities when they went back (c.f. Freshers Flu).

[10] Third Way is a generic term for parties/regimes starting from left or centre-left parties, which claim to offer a "third way" between socialism and capitalism but in fact largely abandon socialist and social-democratic policies. Instead they embrace neoliberalism almost completely but try to combine it (rhetorically and with varying degrees of concrete policy input) with a wide range of progressive goals such as "equity", poverty alleviation, healthcare, gender equality, environmental protection, participatory governance, expansion of education, etc. As well as Blair and the Blairites, the Clinton regime in America and the right-wing of the Democrats are Third Way, as was the Hawke government in Australia in the 1980s, arguably the PSOE governments in Spain, and arguably Schroeder in Germany. The difference between the Third Way and the right-wing of social-democracy is mainly that social-democrats still pursue redistribution, job creation, nationalisation, demand-side stimulation and the rest of the Fordist-Keynesian toolkit, whereas the Third Way completely renounce these kinds of policies. In most cases the Third Way had to effectively steal the social-democratic parties from the social-democrats to get into power.

My big fear is a new cybernetic totalitarianism,[2] kinda like permanent lockdown, but for some reason I feel the lockdown has backfired in certain ways, the system isn't ready for this kind of transition, because it can't sustain (social

[2] I've not pinned down exactly what the difference is between totalitarian and other statist models. There's a few things which seem to come together in regimes of this type: attempts to deny all political space to (radical) opponents, to absorb everything into a single social machine, to reduce the autonomy of different social subsystems to a minimum or zero, to monopolise the production of emotions, and to close open spaces and shut down the "social principle" as Kropotkin calls it. This is different both from the democratic/liberal approach of trying to contain, exploit and recuperate social processes, and the cruder authoritarian approach which centralises political power and neglects social power. I've been witnessing a slippage towards a totalitarian model over the last 15-20 years, corresponding to the loss of space for creating open spaces and autonomous zones (even non-political ones), the corrosion of non-incorporated social connections, the intensive regulation of public space, the growth of a police-state and surveillance-state, the reduction in the range of permitted dissent, and a creeping "inwards" of counterinsurgency/criminalisation towards less and less "extreme" tactics and beliefs, and also the penetration of these kinds of authoritarian ways of being into everyday life at a deeper and deeper level (people snitching each other for petty stuff for example, and behaviourist pop-psychology). The way I'm thinking about it at the moment is: statist societies contain some percentage of anarchy/"social principle", and the percentage relates to the difference between normal statism and totalitarianism (and as a continuum, of course there's also slippage, slow transitions, borderline cases). It's hard to pin down, but I really feel there's been an enormous loss of spaces either of "permitted difference", places power can't reach, and "margins" *inside* the system. Anyone who wants to work with/inside the system is straightaway forced into compromises which reduce them to cogs, and anyone who doesn't is treated as an enemy or a criminal. To a degree that's always going on, but it seems to be drastically sharpened now. In relation to historic varieties of totalitarianism, I think those involved heavy elements of Fordism, including a very strong state role in the economy, whereas current variants leave a lot more space for a cronyist/oligopolistic style of market economy (i.e., where private businesses are allowed to operate but the state chooses which ones get opportunities, meaning the private businesses are run by the "cronies" of the people at the top of the state). There's also a move from "hard control" to "soft control", heavy use of cybernetic nudging which is more sophisticated and less blatantly controlling. I think China is the most extreme form and other states are moving towards their model.

and ecological) reproduction by itself. I think the reasons I'm feeling this, are the lockdown has not been extended indefinitely, it has not "beaten" the disease,[3] it has sped-up and worsened an

[3] I don't trust the infection statistics because they're too dependent on levels of testing and there's too many perverse incentives. Death figures are harder to fake though there's a lot of tweaking in both directions, but I expect they're more reliable over time. The mainstream messaging has been so focused on cybernetic signalling, full of U-turns and fast and loose with the truth, that it's really fuelled skepticism. However, in response to those who think it's all a big hoax, I find it quite unlikely it doesn't exist at all because there's so many surplus deaths. Sure, they could classify lots of flu/pneumonia/COPD *[ed. – another respiratory disease with symptoms similar to COVID]*/old age deaths as COVID and invent a pandemic that way but there should be a corresponding decline in those categories of death. I can't see the *cui bono,* the person who stands to gain. The main winner from the crisis would be China, but it seems perverse that they would release it on their own population. I also don't see the point in a bioweapon (another popular theory as to what COVID is) that kills a bunch of elderly and sick people and leaves military-age youths mostly alone. Also if it was intentional then the fallout has been badly mismanaged. If the point is to justify continual lockdown then the disease would be designed so that lockdowns work. This does not necessarily seem to be the case; Cuba brought in limited lockdown measures in April but no stay-at-home order. Tanzania – another country with a leader who refused lockdowns – claims to have defeated the virus "with prayer" (mass religious gatherings were encouraged); the infection rate is supposedly declining and there are only 412 deaths reported in the capital by opposition activists. Ghana focused on testing and has had 320 deaths. Kenya, which has a curfew, gathering ban and other measures, has had 1093 deaths; this includes a second wave worse than the first (which has not happened in Tanzania or Ghana). Of course we have to be a bit careful as these governments might lie about figures (but so do most of them: Washington state recorded several shooting deaths as COVID deaths recently). Sweden has higher deaths per capita than Norway, Finland or Denmark which some people are using to say lockdowns work; however, they also have fewer than UK, Italy, France, Spain etc. and at least half their deaths are in care homes (which were semi-locked-down); also none of the Scandinavian countries had full lockdowns. *[ed. – Note that these figures were as of early November 2020, so do not account for the current winter.]* Another article – called "Staying at Home" on eFlux – suggests there's a redistribution of risk going in a lockdown of the type we mostly saw. A big proportion of the workforce are still working, and these people are at increased risk of being infected before herd immunity is reached, because they're still active when everyone else isn't. So basically lockdowns dis-

would work better with global cooperation which at the moment seems unlikely. What *might* happen is that China develop a New Deal (which in some ways they already have: banks are nationalised, many companies are state-owned, the state actively promotes certain companies, the currency is controlled) and outcompete everyone else until everyone starts copying. Alternatively the elites might just prove incapable of handling the crisis and the system will start to fall apart.

In this moment they seem reluctant to (maybe unable to) jettison neoliberal policies and launch a New Deal. This may involve stuff I said above about footloose financial capital etc., and may also relate to changes in the composition of the state itself (again, anarchists might not notice that the state itself changes in form while remaining in some ways the same; today the old bureaucrats, development technocrats and professional "experts" have been replaced by economists, spin-doctors and cyberneticians, and this compromises the state's *ability* to go the New Deal route). I think the New Deal and the rise of Fordism/Keynesianism was also tied-up with the power of socialist ideology in both its social-democratic and state-communist forms: basically the West had contained socialism through either recuperation (social-democrat betrayals in WW1) or repression, but the Soviets found their way out of the economic crisis via a planned economy, then the Nazis copied them, and finally the liberal regimes copied an approach which seemed to "work". The need to build a war economy in anticipation of conflict with either Russia or Germany might also have been a factor in the '30s, but I think in Britain the reform trend only really kicked in during the war itself. The neoliberals spent the '80s-2000s trying to systematically close all the openings through which a quasi-socialist solution was possible "last time" (as a result of nearly losing power in the '60s/'70s I suspect), for example the various World Trade Organisation-type treaties (NAFTA, Trans-Pacific Partnership, etc.), the replacement of old-type technocrats with new-type,

The elite seem particularly reluctant to make any concessions at all now. I think it's partly about faith in cybernetic and counterinsurgency techniques as well as repression, and also there's no way neoliberalism can continue but they're refusing to give it up. One of the reasons they can rely on repression is that we're in a long downturn of resistance since about the '70s, so on the one hand they aren't all that worried about repressing the workforce, and on the other, our capacity to disrupt infrastructure is not so powerful.[9] What's partly shifted is that in the past states would give concessions in terms of *material/economic* provision (wages, benefits), *social rights* (legal squatting, university asylum), or *cooperation with movement leaders* (tripartite governance); today they mainly look to give *symbolic* concessions in terms of politics of representation, or what I think of as "negative patronage" – banning things they don't like, repressing people they don't like. They're relying on the pervasiveness of the cybernetic numisphere to make these mostly-illusory concessions effective, and to some extent it's worked.

We'll see post-COVID how economic rebuilding is attempted. It looks like governments are planning neoliberal business-as-usual but with a slow economic "reopening" so as to maintain control. A New Deal seems to be needed to get the system out of the crisis but there's a huge difficulty with states being unable/unwilling to grab the needed resources from transnational capitalists – I think that's another factor in the preference for repression. There's potential solutions (e.g. Tobin Tax; nationalising banks) but they

[9] ed. - Perhaps a qualifying statement to make in this regard would be that capitalist infrastructure is in fact within almost everyone's grasp, spread out around the territory of urban or rural areas, running on always-on/just-in-time production and surprisingly open to sabotage (see ***The 5G Net***); however, as well as lacking concentrations of antagonistic workers self-organising on the same scale that capitalism of previous centuries faced, disruptions to these infrastructures are very rarely tied in with attempts to reclaim the spaces left open with activities that actually meet our tangible needs in a non-capitalist sense.

economic crash, and protests – Black Lives Matter (BLM) and anti-lockdown – have resurfaced.

Here's three obvious problems the systems faces to any such transition – economic collapse (*unlike* WW2 which caused a boom) suggests they can't run a war/crisis economy with any degree of effectiveness; psychological collapse (around 50% in the North suffering severe problems) suggests they don't have ways to buck up the population and keep it functioning in isolation; and political backlash/fraying (BLM, anti-lockdown, intensified left/right violence) suggests they can't maintain the the sudden moment of Spectacular unity around this particular crisis for more than a few months. I think there's a lot of smaller problems as well: the ways various aspects of the social support system haven't adapted to lockdown and left massive gaps, the distrust/low legitimacy of governments, etc. And the ways particular local economies are collapsing because they were too dependent on particular markets, like tourism. I think the COVID crisis has partly tested the current state of cybernetic/4th-5th Industrial Revolution technologies in the same way WW2 tested Fordist[4] production, and whereas WW2 stimulated economic booms despite massive destruction and disruption of existing sectors (because of the new technologies and their rapid development and immense mobiliastion), the COVID crisis has instead shown the limits of current technology in substituting for in-person activities (economic and non-economic) and becoming the driving force in the economy. I have a certain fear that China

place part of the death figures from middle-class people onto working-class, black and precarious groups.

[4] Fordism was the historical period of mass production and consumption based on a small but well-paid core group of assembly-line workers producing mass-market consumer goods; can be dated roughly 1930-1973. Keynesianism is a corresponding government economic policy which involves tax-and-spend to stimulate consumer demand, and interventions to offset "imperfections" in markets (eg. nationalising natural monopolies). The New Deal was America's transition to Fordism; a new "Green New Deal" might initiate a kind of neo-Fordism.

might leverage cybernetic control systems such as social credit[5] as the new cutting edge, but they aren't exactly *productive* technologies. The ecological stuff is not so obvious with COVID but there's the same strains in terms of heavily relying on things which are quite precarious and likely to run out or go into crisis. **The system thinks it's prepared for what to do if transport is disrupted or there's extreme weather events or particular resources are temporarily unavailable, but actually it's a false sense of security based on PR-based market fixes which collapse when they're actually needed.**

The system (capitalism/state) has always relied on exploitation of things outside it (but part-captured or plundered) on various different levels: reliance on natural ecosystems, reliance on subsistence economies or non-capitalist modes of production to underpin low wages, reliance on unremunerated labour (i.e. house-work

[5] ed. – "In China there is already a system in place that acts as a laboratory for the automatic management of behaviour: the social credit system, Alibaba's Sesame Credit. This is aimed at almost everyone - with the exception of people with criminal records – and is based on the scientific assessment of behaviour, providing you with an initial score that decreases following different daily actions you undertake. People with higher scores get benefits like being able to rent a car without a security deposit or having greater access to the healthcare. Those who end up on the "non-compliance list" can be banned from buying a plane ticket, building a house and enrolling their children in private school. Sesame Credit uses an algorithm to analyse things like the purchases you make, your level of education and the quality of your friends. People can only guess how to improve their individual scores and get rid of friends with low scores. In only two years, Sesame Credit had recruited 400 million people, taking over every aspect of their lives. For the company's CEO, the rating system "will ensure that the bad people in society don't have a place to go". In an interview, the Social Sciences Academy researcher who invented the social credit system states: *"It's the best way to manage society, it allows us to control financial risks and reinstate moral education […] We need peace and stability and for everyone to live well, only then can we talk about rights. It's an excellent technological method. France should adopt our system to deal with social unrest, with social credit they wouldn't have had the Gilet Jaunes, they would have been identified from the start and there would not have been unrest"* " (Cybernetic Society & its World).

Partly the way it works: the state, when it's pared back to its core functions (repression, military, policing), is an anti-production machine; it operates to freeze or break down life, to block and disrupt activity and energy, *not to generate it.* **A certain amount of this "devivification" stabilises capitalism by attacking social movements and slowing down change; too much kills the vital sources of capitalist exploitation.** Capital has a slightly different logic: it activates energy in controlled forms (work, consumption, Spectacle) then vampirises it. Too much devivification and there's not enough left to exploit; too little and the forces become unexploitable. This is why capital is constantly torn as to whether it wants to empower the state or views it as a threat *a la* Jefferson etc., and whether it would rather make concessions or repress. Capital will temporarily side with a strong state out of fear or weakness, but will often also try to claw back power which it has lost in the process. A complication: usually the concessions also come via the state, but not via the antiproduction machine itself. Hence the constant dynamic of incorporating an included stratum who are incorporated in the state (directly or as insider NGOs, unions etc.) but which aren't pure antiproduction machines (they're more about trying to "harmonise" the state's functioning with the social principle in particular manifestations, or to exploit the latter for the former).

When back-to-work started in May, economic effects of the lockdown were becoming clearer: 3% GDP drop in Germany, 13% industrial production drop in China (both figures as of that time). However, certain companies – the richest ones already, particularly tech and pharma giants – are profiting massively. I suspect there is a wealth redistribution going on, from some capitalist sections to others, and this may be why the political class (eg. in the US) are also so strongly split.

ways view history and society from the perspective that privileges state power" (Worshiping Power: An Anarchist View of Early State Formation).

the economy through indirect cybernetic nudges directed to corporate cronies who were satisfactorily meeting social needs. It didn't happen because everyone's burnt-out and the connections through which they'd otherwise craft their own responses were disrupted by the lockdown, and because corporations are built around indirect reliance on a bunch of other stuff.

This is also a problem with a (current) recomposition of capitalism around surveillance and information technologies: the difficulty at that stage is that the cybernetic way of organising (including all these self-help things like CBET, CBT – competency-based education and training and cognitive behavioural therapy – etc.) is not actually able to handle wide spheres of social reproduction – it doesn't protect scarce resources or the ecosystem, it's not very good at health or education or agriculture, its social-control systems lack (perceived) legitimacy, etc. This *might* mean no recovery along these lines, and/or no recovery at all; or it *might* mean something similar to Fordism: the state takes on the sectors cybernetics can't handle, and runs them in a decommodified way so as to sustain profitable activity in the other sectors cybernetics *can* handle (similar to mass production in Fordism: for all the radical rhetoric that schools or hospitals are mass-production facilities, nobody seriously tried to run them exactly like a factory, with deskilled labour and homogeneous turnaround, etc).[8]

[8] ed. – "Anticapitalists will often insist that the purpose of public education is to prepare workers. This is balderdash, a perfect example of dogma obviating reality. The vast majority of the lesson plan, once a pupil is literate and knows the most basic maths, is irrelevant to the tasks of the future worker, unless we count the abilities to follow orders, accept confinement, and complete meaningless tasks; however, those skills are required of all citizens, employed or unemployed, prole or petty-bourgeoisie. A typical worker has absolutely no need to know about ancient Egypt, William Shakespeare, or basic chemistry. No, the fundamental purpose of education is to civilize children, and a large part of this means filling their heads with the lies that are necessary to make them al-

and care-work under patriarchy), reliance on the "social principle" (mutual aid etc.) to provide meaning in life and meet everyday needs, (in Fordism) reliance on decommodified welfare systems to support the general functioning of the economy, reliance on informal economies to fill gaps in the formal system, etc; its reliance on "labour" and "desire/use-value" might fall in the same box. It's always in a weird position of simultaneously depleting these other sources because it wants to eat up the whole world and make it capitalist, while also depending on them to not collapse from its own short-sightedness and unsustainability. Neoliberalism in particular (as theorised by Baudrillard, Virilio…) is particularly reluctant to admit this other level it depends on and prone to deplete it willy-nilly. If you look at the ideologies involved, there's a certain faith in the ability of the market to magically solve everything because of a bunch of quasi-theological axioms, and a certain faith in people's capacity to cope ("resilience") and find/make their own solutions. And so neoliberalism has actually been pushing harder and harder at people's emotional and economic absorption capacity, which is actually leading to more and more reliance on non- or semi-neoliberal everyday stuff that isn't generated by the system.

So for example, let's say: working-class single mum who would have been on benefits 20 years back, now has to work three jobs and manages it because granny and her friends take the kids when they aren't at school. She also makes sure granny has food and isn't lonely. They're all gig economy jobs *[ed. – see **A New Luddite Rebellion**]*, she also gets money from her boyfriend who's off-radar (in the 'shadow economy') and relies on her to get medicines; now suddenly there's lockdown and kids aren't at school, granny and boyfriend can't visit, two of the jobs are gone and the last she's struggling to work with kids around, granny can't take care of herself but daren't see anyone because of the virus, boyfriend's meds run out… **It's pretty clear how the informal social support networks, plus precarious market stuff, are actually the difference between "just coping" and "not coping at all".**

And all the energy which might otherwise have been put into the collective mobilisation has already been burned-up surviving day-to-day. If WW2 is an analogous situation then it seems there was a lot more reserve capacity to draw on in terms of family, social relations, state, environment. The big *economic* problem then (factoring out for now the horrors of the war itself, the death toll, and the attacks on civil liberties) was that workers had been conscripted and factories taken over for the "war effort", and also there was destruction resulting from the war itself, and food shortages because trade is disrupted. And it's at this point that the relative stability of social/ecological reproduction systems really saved the state. Women substitute for men in the labour force, the impact of rationing is mitigated by subsistence farming, children are sent to the countryside which back then was less overexploited, local shopkeepers (who knew their customers) also became mediators in the rationing system and probably mitigated the harm it did, community groups become in effect the base level of the state, a whole "wartime spirit" is generated (no doubt exaggerated in propaganda, but still). Anything that's not working, either the state steps in (eg. health) or communities solve themselves. I'm probably exaggerating how effective this all was, but I'm not sure there was the same kind of crisis of reproduction to the same depth as now.

People were already talking about "reproductive crisis" before 2020 and this COVID crash has been called a *massive* crisis of reproduction… partly this is about pre-existing depletion of the "public sector" (healthcare etc.) but also about what happens when the "social principle" – the everyday connections – are cut. First off the ways people are subsisting are mostly lost, the government has to pay furloughs or people won't stay home. The food production system goes into crisis. Farms are short of temporary labour; processing plants keep operating, but everyone's getting sick; distribution centres have shortages and don't have the capacity to handle the sudden surge in online orders. The emotional support networks collapse, and the underlying psychological fragility is

laid bare. And they're struggling with really basic things, like the whole crisis in care homes, the difficulty getting enough tests, even the shortage of masks in the first months. It isn't difficult to mass-produce masks but there just isn't the organising force there to do it, particularly without popular input because of isolation.[6] **And the fact that the Leviathan now doesn't have the power to make sure even its useful conformists are fed, housed, educated, healthcare-d, entertained, and kept sane[7] (it also can't make sure there's enough clean water or electricity, or that people are protected from natural disasters to some minimal degree) blows wide open the extent to which it was relying on a load of subsidiary systems it was depleting in the first place.** The state doesn't have the capacity (partly) because everything's been marketised and it doesn't know how to do anything except repression any more, and the market doesn't have the capacity because it's short-termist and itself reliant on reproduction of labour-power and "resources" outside its own mechanisms.

I *suspect* the hope in the lockdown was for something like the WW2 effect where the combination of mass mobilisation with new technologies would turn it into a system-reviving wave of creative destruction, and all these new marketised cybernetic systems would step into the void and substitute for all the things which had been banned or which people were scared to do. People would pull together to transition to work-from-home; corporate distribution systems would step up to the block; people would use self-help techniques and home entertainment to boost their mood; the family or household would revive as a support focus; the government could then keep running

[6] ed. – In the end it came out that North Korean slave labour was behind the eventual influx of masks to the UK.

[7] ed. – From Japan to India, suicide rates are soaring, while in the UK an October report found that eight in ten young people reported that the pandemic had made their mental health worse.