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# Immunity for All

Invitation to a Strike

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March 27, 2020

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We know how to survive a plague.  
*La salute è in voi!* — Health is in you!

The inevitable non-payment of countless debts will be our first blow against the world of measure and control. This is the easiest thing we can do. In the face of disease, begin with *ease*, grace, rest.

If work itself is killing us, the strike cannot be more work. April 1 is not a day of action. On that day, sleep in, call your friends, kiss your love, read, meditate, drink water, and *get ready*. That day is a small key which opens a large door. The managers of the coastal cities are already beta-testing the new normal, but the cards are still being dealt. The crisis isn't over until *we* decide it is. Now, when everything is at stake, our collective refusal to play their game is our greatest weapon.

The old world will not give us all we require. How could it? Health, rest, a world without debt or prisons, home—we who step through this door will have to find these things for ourselves. We must understand the strike in the broadest possible terms.

We are not afraid of ruins. Today, when our futures have been cancelled, this time together may be all we have. We won't be returning to normal. We will be the ones to shape what comes next. Set down your burden. You need not face this alone. We are striking out. With so much distance between us, it's time to activate everything that connects.

Islands in the stream  
That is what we are  
No one in between  
How can we be wrong  
Sail away with me  
To another world  
And we rely on each other,  
ah ha

Don't pay. We won't either. They can't evict us all. We'll give them hell if they try.

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organizers, or militants. It belongs to all of us, to everyone who simply cannot or will not bear the burden of this crisis. It belongs to everyone who won't pay, who won't take on more debt, to all who will affirm each other in saying "no." To all who love and protect each other.

We have already been on strike.

Some of us have gone on strike in prisons, in lecture halls, in the streets and at the ports. Now we are striking from our homes. The same way we went on strike after the pandemic of 1918, just as we went on strike after the bubonic plague. After those disasters, they couldn't keep us at work, they couldn't stop our free movement, and we discovered the formulas which allowed us to expropriate from the rich the wealth they hoarded even in death—that equalizing force. Infinite new possibilities for life have suddenly become thinkable for countless people who are only just now imagining a life outside the economy. There has never been so pressing a need for our imagination, our energetic attention.

The same progressive politicians who defanged the word *abolition* are already trying to appropriate the language of mutual aid. They know the state cannot save us. If mutual aid is in fact a factor in evolution, then the ways that it has spread far and wide are already transforming us. When this is over, the authorities will tell us that we only survived because of their control; liberals are already applauding the new authoritarianism in the name of the common good. Yet we know that what really keeps us alive is our care for each other.

The virus threatens our lives, but it also threatens the social order that was making them impossible. Rent, work, fares, debt, insurance—all the scams we were born into as marks—let the virus freeze them. We'll drink fire and tend our hearths to wait out the cold.

And spring is upon us. With April Fool's Day, spring arrives in earnest: a renewal, a jubilee, a suspension, a reversal, a cosmic joke—but not on us. The fool's journey opens the way to the world.

must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency; and our position in the struggle against fascism will thereby improve.”

— Walter Benjamin

We are not paying rent on April 1. We cannot afford to. We already barely could. Rent: our monthly contribution to the fallacy that the homes we inhabit on stolen land are owned by our landlords, to whom we are indebted simply for being alive. Now, when our very existence as a species is in question, we cannot endure the nightmare of that relationship.

Over the past decade, insurrections that toppled regimes have been defeated by the global gentrification of the cities. Rebels in cities around the world have bowed to the increasing cost of living and the soul-draining attrition of work. Our lives have become unending hustles. They’re pumping a trillion dollars a day into the banks to keep them afloat. Daily applications for unemployment throughout the so-called United States are already surpassing those at the peak of the financial crisis that preceded the occupation movements. In California, the association of apartment owners sent a letter to its constituents advising landlords to freeze rents, work with tenants to establish payment plans, and suspend evictions. Yet city governments are offering only paltry protections for renters. Capitalists have announced their willingness to sacrifice us en masse on the altar of the economy. They want us back to work already.

Our enemies are afraid. They know a storm is coming. Something has to give.

On April 1, an unprecedented wave of us will simply not pay our rent. Some will do this in solidarity. Some will do this as their only option. Some will do this as an entire building or as an entire block. Some will go it alone. This strike does not belong to activists,

As the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic kicks in, grassroots momentum is building around the United States, Canada, and worldwide for a mass refusal to pay rent, mortgage, and loans. This April, millions of people won’t be able to afford their bills regardless of whether they want to pay. Like the pandemic, this is the inevitable consequence of a system that wasn’t designed to keep us safe in the first place. The virus threatens our lives—but it also threatens the social order that was already making our lives impossible.

From our perspective, the most pressing thing is to defend those who do not pay against eviction and other negative consequences. If we fail to come together to defend each other, those who hold power will isolate, betray, and destroy us one after another. Reach out to your neighbors. Build defense groups. Identify local pressure points. Talk tactics. Be creative. Prepare to stop the evictions by any means necessary. The more people who participate, the safer all of us will be. Together, we can overwhelm the courts and sheriffs that enforce the special privileges of the rich.

The beneficiaries of the prevailing order are mobilizing to impose the consequences of this crisis on us—one law for them, another for us. Corporations like Subway, the Cheesecake Factory, Adidas, and others have already declared that *they* won’t pay rent in April. There are provisions to protect middle-class people who can’t afford their mortgages, but none for the poorest people who must pay rent.

Here, we present a poster and two texts about the rent strike: the first from participants in a group offering countrywide coordination for the strike, the second from anarchists involved in rent strike organizing on the West Coast.

## Immunity for All: In Defense of Home

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the feeling of home has become an increasingly precarious and temporary experience.

Some sleep on trains or on the streets; for those who dwell within walls of cardboard, even that narrow layer of comfort may be snatched away by the police at any moment. Others rent boxes of wood and drywall, in which the feeling of home is interrupted by monthly reminders that we are only paying to linger on someone else's property; the following month's rent starts looming as soon as the impact of this month's payment wears off. In a grander sense, all the living things on this planet share the feeling of losing our home as industrial capitalism progressively renders it uninhabitable. A billion dead animals strewn across Australia as smoke blots out the sky overhead—pools of black oil floating on water—an island of plastic in the ocean: these catastrophic scenes of increasing frequency and magnitude imply that soon the earth may not be able to offer us a home anywhere.

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of these catastrophes. Yet it has driven home to us the importance of *home*. Repeatedly washing our hands and continuously suppressing the impulse to touch our faces returns our attention to our bodies. Wiping down surfaces and doorhandles reminds us of all the ways our physical presence inescapably overlaps with the presence of others. Our failure to contain the proliferation of an infinitesimal piece of information—30 kilobases of RNA within a viral envelope—underscores the fact that genetic matter has always been a kind of commons. Our bodies are echoes of a shared ancestry; they ground us on the earth.

This is the foundation on which we must build a new sense of home. Ideally, the home should be a structure that supports life, a place of comfort and privacy, a place where we don't have to work. Our homes should offer us immunity from the countless forces acting upon us. In the face of a pandemic, when we "shelter in place" so as not to spread the virus, the greatest threats to our immunity

are the forces that seek to rob us of our homes. With unemployment anticipated at a staggering 20% due to the pandemic, we must confront the property relations that subject our homes to the pressures of leases and mortgages.

Our first line of defense is immunity from the landlords and developers who expect a full return on their investment even as the economy collapses. We need immunity from the bill collectors, from the courts issuing eviction orders, from the police carrying them out. We need immunity for the patients issued \$40,000 bills for emergency medical care to treat COVID-19. We need immunity for prisoners, immigrants, and asylum seekers all over the world who are condemned to sickness and likely death while they are trapped in cages that will never be homes. We need **immunity for all**.

This April, countless people will refuse to pay rent and, with this single gesture, give new meaning to "herd immunity." Viruses have always played an evolutionary role as vectors of information transfer across species and kingdoms; they are masters at synchronizing ecologies. What is possible if we synchronize our actions into a collective refusal? **Let us commit together to defend this place we call home.**

## Invitation to a Strike

"My imagination makes me human and makes me a fool; it gives me all the world and exiles me from it."

— Ursula K. LeGuin

"I'd prefer not to."

— Bartleby

"The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'emergency situation' in which we live is the rule. We