

COVID-19: or, How I learned to stop worrying and love the virus

Jakob Larrew

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“Mr. President, I’m not saying we wouldn’t get our hair mussed. But I do say no more than ten to twenty million killed, tops. Uh, depending on the breaks.” (Stanley Kubrick, 1964)¹

Watching *Dr. Strangelove* during this pandemic is a surreal experience. The movie is a seething satirical critique of the mystification of American society: from the blind belief in American propaganda to the point of fanaticism, to the government’s incompetency and its willingness to follow its ideology to the point of fascism and the death of the human race. During this pandemic we have seen an eerily similar situation take place in our reality: from the right-wing protests to “re-open the economy,” to the government’s willingness to sacrifice millions of people to ensure the continued function of the capitalist system. But much like watching *Dr. Strangelove*, our present situation is an experience that makes people ask challenging questions about the mystification of our society.

Capitalism, like every hierarchical system, relies upon a particular myth: individuals and institutions in power are seen to be wise; they have power because they know what to do with the power they are given, and do so for the common good. So, when we see those individuals and institutions fail to even provide the simplest measures to protect us from a world-wide pandemic, it rips that mystification from people’s eyes.

Without the comfort of the mystification of power, many have been forcefully introduced to the truth that those in power have always been incompetent; that institutionalized power was never about the common good, it was about keeping power out of our hands and in the hands of the powerful, even at the sacrifice of all human life. This has brought people all across the U.S to ask important questions: “Why should I have pay rent when I have no paycheck?” “Why am I payed minimum wage when I’m an essential worker?” “Why are people sleeping in the street when there are empty houses?” etc. While these questions themselves are an important leap of class consciousness, we are seeing an ever-exciting turn of events: people are answering those questions and turning the answers into organizing.

¹ *Dr. Strangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Columbia Pictures Corp., 1964.

The terms “general strike” and “rent strike” are not only trending on social media, but are tools people all across America are using to survive.² People who would never have organized something even close to a strike now find it a necessity to survive. People have to rely upon each other and have solidarity in order to survive, and those are roots that’ll last far beyond this pandemic. As anarchists, it is up to us to cultivate those roots or start growing them wherever we might find ourselves. While these roots may not be the end of capitalism itself, it gives us the greatest foundation we have ever had to build a movement not only to end capitalism but to bring about a truly democratic world.

Even in my own rural and generally right-wing state, I am beginning to see the expansion and growth of these radical roots. Wyoming has some progressive momentum, but before the virus you could possibly find only twenty active leftists in the state. But now, during this crisis, we are seeing leftists of all stripes popping up and starting to organize. I have experienced this most directly in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA): where before there were barely enough active leftists for one DSA chapter, now there are people organizing chapters all across the state. Even in forgotten places like this, we are seeing that not only people have the time, but they have the energy and courage to begin building the foundations for a better world.

While this exhilarating radical movement is happening, it’s important that we understand this doesn’t mean that we aren’t going to have to struggle: every day the state is pushing to “reopen the economy” at the potential cost of millions of people’s lives. Not only are we going to see and feel death in our lives, but in this chaos of grief and destruction the state is going to do whatever is in its power to keep the system running as it’s supposed to. As anarchists we are going to need to take the role of cultivators; we are going to need to organize, not only to protect our communities from this virus, but to protect them from the weeds of the state, of capitalism, and of fascism.

We still have a fight on our hands; we also have a growing movement of dissent. People are coming to the realization that things need to change, and they are willing to fight for it. So during this pandemic, don’t give up hope, because if there was ever a time to be hopeful it is now. Turn your anger, your fear, your sadness into organization. Because if we can do that, we will come out of this pandemic not only safe and healthy, but we will have the tools we need to finally bring this system down!

Jakob Larrew is an organizer in Wyoming. Over the last year they’ve worked on building student power through education and collective action. They’re also an active member in the local DSA chapter. If you want to get in contact with them their email is JakobLarrew@gmail.com

² Elk, Mike. “COVID-19 Strike Wave Interactive Map.” Payday Report, May 6, 2020. <https://paydayreport.com/covid-19-strike-wave-interactive-map/> The Payday Report, at the time of this writing, has tracked 175 wildcat strikes across the United States. This is a huge development for our generally union- and strike-hostile nation.

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