

# The reality of denial and the denial of reality

Antithesi / cognord  
September 2021

*This text was written and published in Greek in September 2021. It was meant as a polemic intervention in a debate around the questions of the Sars-CoV-2 virus, the measures and tools against it and the authoritarianism of the Greek government. Above all, it was triggered by our surprise (and sadness) towards the fact that many of our comrades and friends within the radical milieu had embraced a denialist approach towards the pandemic, while quite a few of them gradually but surely slid into conspiracy thinking and shocking absurdities. What we tried to do with the text, therefore, was not merely to criticize and denounce such irrationalities but to try and understand the different reasons behind such regression. Thus, even though the text tries to answer the question of what the Covid pandemic (and its management) tells us about contemporary capitalism and the state, it also asks the difficult question of what it tells us about the subjects of the contemporary period and the material conditions for collective thinking and struggle.*

*Because this was written with an eye towards a Greek audience, certain passages that related directly to issues only relevant in Greece have been removed from the translation. At the same time, it became clear that many of the points raised in the text could easily apply to other countries. In relation to the embrace of denialism from radicals, for example, the cases of France – and perhaps also Italy – appear to be moving in similar trajectories. The similarities that were identified made the translation of the text a worthy endeavor and we thank our comrades in France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland and Italy who expressed their interest. Among other things, the similarities that can be found between countries indicate that approaching the current situation by looking at specific historical developments within Greece (such as the consequences of a prolonged austerity and the defeat of social movements that emerged against it) can, though significant in many ways, be misleading if utilised to prioritise some specificity of the Greek situation. The combined effects of an unprecedented outbreak (existentially and materially) of a contagious virus almost simultaneously around the world, the fear and uncertainty this generated, as well as the different ways through which state and capital chose to respond, allow us to extend our observations beyond Greece.*

*Since translating essentially means interpreting (and at times re-writing), the structure has been slightly altered in order to give the text a better flow. And though the text was published almost two months ago, we chose not to make too many additions and updates, apart from some comments indicating how some of the frightening predictions we had made unfortunately materialised. We also added some clarifying sentences or paragraphs to render the text more relatable to a non-Greek audience.*

“I did not allow myself to become an accomplice to those who, in the face of unspeakable collective events, spoke of individual matters.”

— Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

The emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus did not simply bring the global economy to a halt for several months, revealing a sense of panic from the managers of this world. Nor was it limited to a set of contradictory countermeasures that were sometimes implemented and sometimes ignored with equal zeal. Among other things, and like any major crisis, the pandemic highlighted the forces and tendencies that had been at work in the preceding period, whether openly or in the background, as much within the capitalist relations of (re)production, as in the narrower spheres of social life, such as radical political spaces. Taking the example of Greece, the crisis generated by the Coronavirus not only revealed the decision of the state to act as a mechanism of triage rather than integration, and the abject state of the health system after years of cuts and austerity; it also brought to the surface the mutations that have taken place within the far left/radical milieus after a decade of defeat and retreat. It was, as we discovered, not only wages, pensions and benefits that were undermined during the austerity period, but the very concept of the *collective*. The consequences of such a development are starkly visible today: faced with a far-right government consolidating its authoritarian path through the irreversible destruction of nature,<sup>1</sup> the abuse and murder of immigrants<sup>2</sup> and the disastrous management of the Coronavirus,<sup>3</sup> parts of the radical movement saw in the denial of the pandemic a field of action and resistance.

The rare fact that an unprecedented percentage of the world’s population was forced to confront the unfolding crisis *at the same time*, did little to diminish the limited horizon of many radicals. Thus, in a situation where governments around the world did their best to

---

<sup>1</sup> The entire North Evia, a huge part of the forests north of Athens and many other forests and settlements were consumed by wildfires in the summer of 2021 all over Greece. The fires burned more than 1,200,000 acres of forest due to the chronic degradation of the forest service and the chronic absence of any substantial prevention and protection measures. During the fires that created a suffocating atmosphere in Athens and many other areas for many days, the response of the state was virtually non-existent apart from a publicity-oriented policy to evacuate all the affected areas and to send police forces where firefighters were needed. This policy had disastrous results since the participation of the local population in fire fighting is irreplaceable, as has been proven many times in the past and during this year’s catastrophe.

After the fires, the government passed a law which, instead of strengthening the decimated forestry department, introduced the institution of the “reforestation sponsor” that takes full control of a forest restoration project. Apart from the fact that the artificial reforestation of burnt areas should only be carried out if natural reforestation fails, it seems that the institution of the reforestation sponsor serves large capitalist enterprises that undertake projects in the context of which the clearing and destruction of forest areas is necessary (gold mining, energy production, etc.). These companies are required by law to carry out the reforestation of an area of the same acreage at their own expense in order to restore the “environmental balance”. Therefore, by assuming the role of the reforestation sponsor, they succeed in meeting the environmental requirements in advance and are authorised to destroy large areas without any further obligations on their part, since the law does not contain any provision precluding such a compensation. It is indicative that so far companies such as “Hellenic Petroleum”, “Independent Power Transmission Operator”, “Public Power Corporation” and “Coca Cola 3E” are amongst the first to be given this role.

<sup>2</sup> All contemporary reports unequivocally show that the new “management” strategy of migrant waves consists primarily of illegal pushbacks that often result in the murder of migrants.

<sup>3</sup> For a summary, see Roufos, Pavlos (2021) ‘Governing the Ungovernable’, in: *Brooklyn Rail* (April), <<https://brooklynrail.org/2021/04/field-notes/Governing-the-Ungovernable>>.

keep the economy open and attempted to distract from the obvious collapse of public health systems after decades of “rationalization” (i.e. fiscal asphyxiation) by promoting “individual responsibility”, many radicals responded by challenging the very notion of *public health*.<sup>4</sup> In a situation of criminal mismanagement that led to hundreds of preventable deaths, many radicals thought it preferable to question the very existence of the pandemic. In the face of the continuing horror that has people *struggling for breath*, many radicals continue to deny the dangers associated with the virus.

Contagious diseases differ from other diseases in a very substantial way: they are by definition *social*. They presuppose contact, co-existence, a *community* – even an alienated one. What the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has shown us, however, is that we are in a historical period where social relations are perceived as the *burdensome void* between solid, closed-up and inviolable *individuals*. Individualities that are self-determined, non-negotiable, non-*contagious*. At this point, it makes little difference whether this predicament gets interpreted as signifying the prevalence of a narcissistic character or that of a (neo)liberal imaginary that mystifies the social character of capitalist relations and the subjects who reproduce them.

Radical critique aims to expose the actual *void* which, in this case, is precisely this *individuality*. Radical critique perceives social relations as *relations*, that is, as connections between people, regardless of the fact that these are not freely and consciously produced and reproduced. This does not stop them from being relations. Nor does it give credence to the notion that the central core of social reality is the individual.

**No one has a personal relationship with a contagious disease.** It therefore follows that no one can relate to it on the basis of purely personal decisions. This is what allows us to speak of *deniers*, a term used to describe both those who deny the existence of the pandemic or the danger it poses, as well as those who refuse to recognise the social character of our existence within capitalist society. More often than not, as we shall show, these two forms of denial are interlinked.

It is no coincidence that, regardless of the way the present crisis is politically translated, these forms of denial are ubiquitous and determine the fundamental framework within which all contemporary objections play out. They are, nonetheless, never expressed with such frankness. On the contrary, most deniers pretend that their criticism concerns the *management* of the pandemic. And while it goes without saying that this management has been (and continues to be) catastrophic, remaining within this framework is misleading. Criticising the management of the pandemic *through* denying its existence or the danger it entails is, to say the least, *itself a catastrophic* approach. This is not only visible in the frictionless (and sometimes unconscious) embrace of proto-fascist reactionary conspiracies; more importantly perhaps, it reflects and promotes a wildly distorted understanding of capital, the state and the concept of collective existence. That this is something found often within the left and radical

---

<sup>4</sup> We are, of course, aware that the concept of *public health* has no historical meaning in a society not dominated by the capitalist state. However, the act of denying the concept of *public health* as a means of demonstrating opposition to the state is as juvenile (and libertarian in outlook) as denying wages because of one’s critique of money. For our part, we use the concept of public health not to denote state management of health *per se* but to depict the existence of a social and collective character of health.

milieus is, in itself, nothing new. But it is perhaps the first time that these distortions have generated such existential fractures within its ranks.

For all these reasons, and before we proceed with an analysis of the deeper explanations of such a denial, it is worth taking a closer look at what exactly this management has (and has not) been, especially in relation to the new phase of managing SARS-CoV-2 through vaccines.

## **Pandemic (mis)management**

In the midst of the 2021 summer tourist season, and after essentially abandoning many of the measures of pandemic containment (track and trace, social distancing, quarantines) that had, in the previous period, been imposed with unprecedented repressive vigour,<sup>5</sup> the Greek government followed the example of many others, switching its focus to vaccines. This meant imposing a series of new provisions to be gradually implemented from early September.

The most significant of these was the introduction of mandatory vaccination for health care workers in both the public and private sectors, suspending (without pay and insurance coverage) those who remained unvaccinated. For those who remained unvaccinated in other sectors (such as catering, tourism, education, entertainment and academia), a negative test result once or twice a week was made obligatory, the cost of which was passed to the liable person (as opposed to being subsidised by the state, as it was the case until these new provisions). In addition, negative tests were also made compulsory for long-distance travel through public transport and for entry into public places, except for restaurants, entertainment and sports grounds where only vaccinated or those who had recovered from a Covid infection were allowed to enter. Unvaccinated pupils had to provide two self-tests per week, available free of charge. At the same time, the government allowed employers to demand proof of vaccinations (or negative tests) from their employees, the lack of which carried a penalty fine with varied amounts according to the scope and field of activity of the business. In this way, an important part of the enforcement of the measures was essentially *passed over* to the private sector, indicating an indirect retreat of the state from the so-called “vaccination campaign”.<sup>6</sup>

The official state propaganda utilised to justify these new measures was, as usual, quite misleading. Placing emphasis on the undeniably significant drop in the rate of vaccinations during the summer period,<sup>7</sup> without however admitting any responsibility for its ridiculous handling, it became clear that the government was hoping to attribute the significant increase

---

<sup>5</sup> The fact that the state imposed these measures in an authoritarian and irrational way is an expression of its inability to resolve the contradictory nature of the objectives that must be simultaneously achieved, as well as a reflection of the ideational fetishes of those in power. Nevertheless, it is truly absurd that there are still people unable to comprehend that minimising social contact during a communicable disease is a reasonable measure, applicable whether we are talking about a modern capitalist state, a feudal society or even communism and *not* some expression of creeping totalitarianism.

<sup>6</sup> The point here being that the task of keeping track of infection rates, vaccine efficacy and testing no longer falls under a somewhat centralised system but is passed on to the discretion of private companies, under threat of fines.

<sup>7</sup> 93,000 daily doses administered in June turned to 69,000 in July and only 28,000 in August. In the beginning of October, the daily rate of vaccinations had gone down to around 5,600 doses per day (Bouloutza, Penny (2021) ‘Vaccinations in free fall’, in: *Kathimerini*, 14 October, <<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/561538141/emvoliasmoi-se-eleytheri-ptosi/>>). From November onwards, a direct comparison is rather useless, as booster doses have also started.

in new cases (as well as the subsequent rise in hospitalisations and deaths) solely to the unvaccinated (a muddled category that rarely separates those who consciously refuse from those who are not eligible). In this way, their own criminally stupid decision to effectively abandon all other counter-measures during the tourist period was side-lined.<sup>8</sup> There was little doubt that this same “strategy” would also characterise the management of the pandemic *after* the tourist period.

Relying on the irresponsible projection of vaccinations as a *free pass* and the abolition of all restrictions that is contrary to all reliable scientific evidence, the government’s guiding principle was to try to avoid, at all costs, a new horizontal lockdown. Confronted with the higher transmission rate of the Delta mutation, as well as the fact that vaccinations significantly protect against severe disease or death but *do not* eliminate transmission, it is more than certain that the approaching winter will be devastating.<sup>9</sup> The combination of a new mutation, a high percentage of unvaccinated (Greece has the lowest vaccination rate in the Eurozone) and the further weakening (through, among other things, the suspensions of unvaccinated health workers) of a health care system that had already been *overworked* for the last year and a half, a nightmarish premonition is unavoidable. The fact that the government seems to have convinced itself that it can avoid criticism for this foretold catastrophe by transferring all responsibility to the unvaccinated shows, once again, that the main concern of this gang is limited to mere communication and damage control without any meaningful or long-term strategy.

In response to the new state provisions and the continuing contradictory management of the pandemic, a movement of deniers emerged more forcefully than in the previous period. Using the mandatory vaccination of health care workers as its starting point, this movement is far from homogenous. As elsewhere, it ranges from the far-right to orthodox priests, and from leftists/anarchists to health care workers themselves. What connects these divergent political affiliations is not, as some like to pretend, their common refusal of the government’s authoritarian policies. It is rather the denial of the pandemic and/or the danger posed by the virus, the invocation of individual freedom against existing or available measures and the portrayal of the pandemic as a *pretext* for the imposition of a modern dystopia by elites (interchangeably identified as Big Pharma, Big Tech, politicians as their “cynical and morally unrestrained salesmen”,<sup>10</sup> a new world order or “globalism”). Underlying these tendencies, we find a profound misconception of both the capitalist relation and the role of the state within it.

---

<sup>8</sup> Anyone who travelled in Greece during the summer saw that there were no *serious* checks on vaccination, test or recovery certificates, but only its *pretense*. The resulting explosion of cases in tourist destinations thus came as no surprise. As is often the case, an absurd situation produces laughable responses: in some islands, for example, restrictive measures against rising infections consisted of prohibiting *music* in (otherwise open) bars and clubs. It became common for seasonal workers to continue working *while infected*, given that the bosses were unwilling to lose any profits. Similarly, tourists who tested positive in the islands would rush to leave, as there was no infrastructure or provisions for their accommodation during a (supposedly) mandatory ten-day quarantine.

<sup>9</sup> This text was published in late September 2021. The infection rate at the time was around 1,500 new cases per day. At this moment (early December 2021), the infection rate stands at more than 7,000 per day, hospitalisations have massively increased, ICU units are fully occupied and the average death toll has reached approximately 90 people on a daily basis.

<sup>10</sup> Amiech, Matthieu (2021) ‘Ceci n’est pas une crise sanitaire: Pourquoi s’opposer à l’installation du pass sanitaire et à l’obligation vaccinale’, éditions La Lenteur, p. 27.

## A contradictory reproduction

From a certain perspective, to fully comprehend the deeper causes behind the pandemic management, it appears necessary to emphasise that the state is the *political form* of the capitalist social relations of production. Given that these relations are by definition contradictory, such contradictions are also manifest at the level of state policy. In the context of the unfolding of an unprecedented pandemic, for example, the need to reproduce healthy and productive labour power can come into conflict with the need for an uninterrupted continuation of capitalist exploitation. Put differently, the need for the material reproduction of all elements of the capitalist relation can contradict the need to increase the creation of value and profitability. On this basis, the direct and short-term profitability of capitalist enterprises (even dominant ones) might come into conflict with a long-term maintenance of the relation that upholds them. This contradiction became quickly apparent *both* as a conflict over policy *and* in the contradictory nature of the policies pursued.

The state is responsible for implementing a series of policies to sustain capitalist accumulation, such as increasing labour productivity, adapting labour power to the needs of capital, refining the division of labour and reducing its reproduction costs. But it is also concerned with its own legitimacy and that of the exploitative social relations it supports. The co-existence of these tendencies became, during the pandemic, explosive. In the end, the policies that ultimately prevailed represented nothing but a temporary balancing out of these contradictions, without ever being capable of overcoming them.

At the moment, there is no doubt that every government wishes to avoid, at all costs, new horizontal restrictive measures that will further damage already faltering economic activity. This tendency was already evident during the second Greek lockdown, imposed in November 2020, which was already less restrictive than the first one, seeking the least possible damage to the labour process and accumulation especially in sectors deemed vital for the Greek economy (such as tourism). Targeting instead the non-directly productive activities of the population, the second lockdown was almost exclusively focused on leisure time activities while also repressing any collective mobilisations.

The inherent contradiction between the need for social *isolation* and that of labour *concentration* for the continuation of economic production and distribution, determined from early on the organisational form of the (non-medicinal) side of pandemic management.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is by now quite obvious that the initial suspicion and indifference shown by Western countries to the warnings of a novel contagious virus can be explained by the dramatic predictions of global GDP collapse, the blocking of supply chains, trade suspension and all other forms of disruption concomitant with labour and value production stoppages. A similar approach can also explain the eventual adoption of contradictory half-measures, whose potential effectiveness was undermined from the start: the continued operation of most workplaces with essentially non-existent controls and the (pseudo-scientifically justified)<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The medicinal side concerned, on the one hand, the absurd effort to cover the needs of the health care system *without* providing for substantial and long-term structural investments and, on the other hand, the massive injection of public funds allocated to vaccine research.

<sup>12</sup> In a display of either contemptuous indifference or frightening idiocy, Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis went to parliament to overrule concerns about crowded public means of transport as Covid clusters, citing a research conducted in France which reported that “only 1.2 per cent of clusters is related to means of mass transport”. Had the Prime Minister or his advisors read more than the title of the research, they would have probably

indifference towards public transport as an obvious cluster of contagion, *while* heavily policing outdoor public spaces, were all clear evidence of this.

What is also of concern, however, is that this rather straightforward contradiction between different aspects of the capitalist relation and the state seems to have strained the conceptual capacities of some radicals, leading to centrifugal interpretations that rejected both the (semi) measures of the government *and* the pandemic itself. From their perspective, governments using the pandemic as an excuse to intensify their authoritarian embrace of society is indicative of the fact that there is no pandemic.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, if it does actually exist, it is only dangerous for a small and already vulnerable percentage of the population. More often than not, that category was consistently (and wrongly) age specific.<sup>14</sup> Based on this approach, there was no discernible reason for the imposition of any horizontal measures apart from authoritarianism. The high transmissibility, risk and significant mortality of the novel virus was thus conceptually transformed into a simple and manageable issue that could be easily solved if (already structurally neglected) vulnerable old people were “protected”, i.e. removed from our field of vision. Any other measure, claimed the deniers, had the sole aim of extending state control and discipline.

In the early days of the pandemic, a mixture of lack of credible data, a suspended disbelief towards the unfolding dystopia *and* the warnings by *already delegitimised* organisations and institutions played a crucial role in creating such narratives. More critical, however, proved to be their adoption by people with a claim of scientific “authority”. As early as March 2020, to give a clear example, and at a time when most people had not even registered the existence of the Sars-Cov-2 virus and the incoming threat, John Ioannidis published an article that warned against exaggerated, non-effective and potentially disastrous measures to

---

noticed that it referred to “airports, boats and trains”, *not* public buses, trams or the metro. The research was published in the *Point Epidemiologique Hebdomadaire* on 1 October 2020, <<https://www.santepubliquefrance.fr/content/download/285453/2749950>>.

<sup>13</sup> As Rene Riesel and Jaime Semprun noted in a 2008 text about the ecological crisis and its management: “we witness the case of curious ‘revolutionaries’ who maintain that the [ecological] crisis concerning which we are now inundated with information is ultimately nothing but a spectacle, a decoy by which domination is trying to justify its state of emergency, its authoritarian consolidation [...] the syllogism goes as follows: given that media information is obviously a form of propaganda for the existing social organization and that said information now concedes a great deal of attention to various terrifying aspects of the ‘[ecological] crisis’, therefore this crisis is nothing but a fiction invented to disseminate the new slogans of submission. Other deniers, as will be recalled, applied the same logic to the extermination of the European Jews: given that the democratic ideology of capitalism obviously was only a false disguise of class domination and that said ideology made ample use during the postwar years of Nazi horrors in its propaganda, therefore the extermination camps and gas chambers can only be inventions and staged frame-ups.” (Semprun, Jaime and Riesel, René (2014) *Catastrophism, disaster management and sustainable submission* [2008], Roofdrukk Edities, p. 16)

<sup>14</sup> This misconception arises, like many others, from a distorted kernel of truth. Since one’s immune system plays a role in fighting off viruses and their effects, those with compromised immune systems (like older people) are *by definition* more vulnerable. But vulnerability is not a category that applies specifically or exclusively to older people. As Dauvé put it, “[l]ike any serious disease, Covid-19 is likely to kill people weakened by age, another disease, and/or a debilitating lifestyle: poor diet, air pollution (estimated to kill between 7 and 9 million people worldwide), chemical pollution, sedentary habits, isolation, old people out of work and therefore out of society [...] Various non-measurable factors together create a non-quantifiable excess mortality with a class dimension: unemployment, insalubrious housing, junk food (obesity is more common among the poor).” Vulnerability, in other words, is part of the contemporary proletarian condition. Additionally, Covid fatalities are not, and were never, the only consequence. Covid-19 affects a plethora of bodily organs and functions, while recent research on long Covid (especially in younger age groups) is increasingly worrisome (see, for example, the interview with Akilo Iwasaki, “What’s causing long COVID?”, in: *The Naked Scientists*, (16 August 2021) <<https://www.thenakedscientists.com/articles/interviews/whats-causing-long-covid>>).

counter the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> The central argument was the seemingly obvious, that there was not enough evidence to justify such drastic measures as lockdowns, masks and social distancing. In a somewhat baffling way, this lack of data did not prevent Ioannidis from suggesting that *no significant measures* should be taken. While carrying a semblance of scientifically solid argumentation, Ioannidis' claims in fact represented a specific (and politically discernible) rejection of existing pandemic management protocols. Given that mutations of flu viruses had been detected as taking place roughly every decade or so, existing public health protocols in the US (and, by extension, other countries) have been largely based on the approach that it is better to take drastic measures in the early days of an epidemic rather than allow viruses to spread, often with exponential growth rates, to such an extent that managing them is rendered impossible.<sup>16</sup>

It requires little intuition to decipher what the effects of the implementation of such a protocol are for the economy. For this reason, objections such as the ones raised by Ioannidis do not just represent mere technical or scientific disagreements with the existing protocols. Rather, the reluctance towards the implementation of such measures is concomitant with the central contradiction we have identified, i.e. the trade-off between economic activity and direct profitability (affected by the shutdown) versus the expanded reproduction of key elements of capitalist relations. Ioannidis, and others like him, took a specific side in this trade-off.

Still, and despite the gradual realisation that a shutdown of economic activities became necessary to prevent the further spreading of the virus and its disastrous consequences for the *totality* of the capitalist economy, arguments like those of Ioannidis have since defined the central framework of deniers: the persistent (and contrary to actual data) portrayal of SARS-CoV-2 as a mere flu; the conspiratorial questioning of its mortality rate; the selective, misinterpreted or downright falsified use of statistical data that downplay the risks involved;<sup>17</sup> the promotion of the notion that only elderly people with compromised immune systems are under threat. All of these arguments, that have since been repeated *ad infinitum* by deniers around the world, can be found in Ioannidis' March 2020 article.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Ioannidis, John P.A. (2020) 'A fiasco in the making? As the coronavirus pandemic takes hold, we are making decisions without reliable data', in: *STATNews.com*, 17 March, <<https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/17/a-fiasco-in-the-making-as-the-coronavirus-pandemic-takes-hold-we-are-making-decisions-without-reliable-data/>>.

<sup>16</sup> When an outbreak of swine flu in Mexico in 2009 raised the question of implementing this precise protocol, the administration of newly elected Obama, which was at the time dealing with the global financial crisis, decided against it. The fact that this outbreak did not turn into a pandemic *retrospectively* confirmed this choice and reinforced the notion (which informs Ioannidis' position) that bypassing the protocol represents the wiser choice. Following this approach, by the time that Sars-Cov-2 was officially recognised as a pandemic in Western countries, it was too late.

<sup>17</sup> Being critical of official data might appear as a reasonable attitude but it is not identical to having a critical attitude towards the world that produces them. Unless there is a clear understanding of the potential reasons *why* data can be misleading, one can (and many have) easily end up promoting further confusion and conspiracy thinking. In the case of deniers, for example, it is more than evident that their selective use of data is geared towards downplaying the numbers of cases or deaths, precisely because the underlying aim is to shake the narrative of a dangerous virus. This approach ignores the possibility that the opposite might in fact be more true, i.e. that official authorities are themselves publishing figures that downplay the actual numbers of both cases and deaths not due to any conspiracy, but simply because of lack of testing and the associated difficulties of recording Covid-related deaths outside hospitals.

<sup>18</sup> Despite the systematic recording of multiple mistakes, misinterpretations or even misrepresentation of data by Ioannidis, and the heckling he received from his colleagues, he has not admitted a single mistake. Hiding behind formal and often ambiguous academic language, he dismisses any criticism as a misunderstanding of what he



In the Greek landscape, such approaches were further strengthened by the particular circumstances of the first wave of the pandemic. At the time, the government's almost panic-stricken quick imposition of strict measures, the fact that the outbreak started during a non-tourist period with limited international travel, and a generalised concern among the population that the public health system was already decimated by a decade-long austerity process leading to self-imposed caution, meant that Greece went through the first few months with a rather low number of cases, hospitalisations or deaths (compared to Italy, for example). This (temporary) success has since morphed into a peculiar confirmation bias, generating the false impression that the risk of the virus is inflated, fuelling the arguments of deniers who continue nonetheless to insist that theirs is a refusal of government management.

In any case, these initial low numbers led to an eventual relaxation of measures, facilitated by the governments' desire to re-open during the 2020 tourist season and leading straight into the second wave of late October 2020. By the time it became clear that such a nonchalant attitude was not merely wrong but disastrous, it was already too late; not only for the thousands who became ill and the hundreds who died from a virus that was still presented as a simple flu, but also for all the deniers who continued to interpret the situation on the basis of the first wave, firmly attaching their ideological blinkers and approaching subsequent developments through the filter of a situation that already been refuted.

## The divergent realities of pandemic management

The popular delusion that approaches such as Ioannidis' or the widespread Great Barrington Declaration<sup>19</sup> have been "silenced" or ignored, presupposes a shocking level of denial, given that such positions clearly determined the framework of action for heads of state such as Trump, Bolsonaro and Johnson. Until a certain moment, that is. Consistently downplaying the necessity of anti-Covid measures and the reality and danger of Sars-Cov-2 eventually came into direct conflict with the tremendous rise in cases and the subsequent hospitalisation

---

says. Of course, this did not prevent him from approaching the White House with a group of advisers in April 2020 and trying to convince Trump not to take lockdown measures, advice that the US president adopted (and with the expected tragedy that followed), influencing other leaders such as Bolsonaro and Johnson. Lately, Ioannidis has also been writing against the vaccination of young people, arguing that those who are vaccinated are not as careful and so they transmit more (cf. Ioannidis, John P.A. (2021) 'COVID-19 Vaccination in Children and University Students', in: *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, Vol. 51, Issue 11. Curiously, the fact that non-vaccinated people transmit even more does not seem to concern him. The ambivalence of many of Ioannidis' findings and the way it has been used by various HIV/AIDS and climate deniers was already pointed out in 2007. Cf. 'The cranks pile on John Ioannidis' work on the reliability of science', in: *Respectful Insolence*, 24 September 2007, <<https://respectfulinsolence.com/2007/09/24/the-cranks-pile-on-john-ioannidis-work-o/>>.

<sup>19</sup> The Great Barrington Declaration (GBD) is essentially an anti-lockdown petition signed by "thousands of scientists", promoting the idea of "herd immunity" while normalising the notion that a focus on "measures to protect the vulnerable" is the only acceptable approach. The human cost of following this laissez-faire strategy in relation to deaths, hospitalisations and long-lasting pathologies is, clearly, not within their "scientific" concerns. Appealing to the "authority of scientists" and utilising the public relations trope of a "sceptical" and "magnified minority" that disproportionately exaggerates contrarian views, the essence of the petition lies not in the (pseudo) scientific expertise of the signatories, but in their "persecution" by the mainstream. In this sense, the GBD follows the line of similar petitions against Darwinian theory, HIV/AIDS denialism, 9/11 conspiracy theories and, lastly, climate change denialism. For a critique, see Gorski, David (2020) 'The Great Barrington Declaration: COVID-19 deniers follow the path laid down by creationists, HIV/AIDS denialists, and climate science deniers', in: *Science-Based Medicine*, 12 October, <<https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/great-barrington-declaration/>>.

and death toll, forcing even such governments to adopt some form of lockdown and social distancing, while also leading to the blocking of international supply chains.

The reasoning can be quite straight-forward: the goals of promoting direct profitability and that of the broader defence of the capitalist relation have never been identical. The tilting of the balance between the two reflects, among other things, the level and intensity of social struggles and legitimacy questions. But there has never been any question of an absolute and conscious abandonment of the possibility of a broader reproduction of the capitalist relation in order to satisfy a section of private capital or, even worse, of the abstract goal of disciplining.

At the same time, the reverse approach that many parts of the left promote is equally mistaken. The state is not a neutral mechanism that can, under the right conditions or with a different government, be put at the service of workers. Radical critique neither glorifies a state pole anxious about the overall reproduction of the capitalist relationship, nor is it deluded into thinking that a strengthening of the state mechanism could represent any victory for “the people”, a condensed and congruent concept if there ever was one. When the state erects barriers to private capital accumulation, it does not do so to defend the proletariat from savage exploitation. It does so because its role *also* consists of ensuring the long-term survival of the capitalist relation, one that often comes up against the short-term plans of (individual) private capital no matter their share of produced surplus. The state intervenes either to relieve social pressure or, in its absence, due to a perceived inability to resolve intra-capitalist rivalries that might end up threatening the relative balance between private capital accumulation and wider reproduction. It does not abolish this relationship.

However, neither the laws governing the operation of private capital (the perpetual increase in profitability at all costs), nor the difficult balance that state mediation is called upon to maintain, are prepared or suitable for dealing with serious crises. Private capital that fails to gain advantages (despite common assistance by the state’s legal and political framework) will be sacrificed on the altar of competitiveness, while we have many examples where the failure of a state to maintain a necessary balance has unravelled its ground and has transformed into a failed state. In any case, the attempt to keep the economy open and to thus prioritise *one* side of the capitalist relation eventually showed its limits, rendering the protection of its wider reproduction imperative.

Faced with such developments, one would expect those who insisted on treating the Coronavirus as a simple flu that only posed a threat to the elderly would pause for thought and reflection. If anything, such an approach was already undermined by the simple fact that the managers of the world economy were forced (however reluctantly and belatedly) to block economic activity for months and to disrupt the mechanisms of production, distribution and profitability, while also approving of the (until that moment *unthinkable*) swelling of public debt as a necessary weapon for dealing with the consequences of such unrivalled economic disarray. Geared towards financial support for those out of work or furloughed, as well as considerable (public) investment towards vaccine research, this scrapping of economic orthodoxy took place in a period when even the most dynamic economies (such as the US or Germany) were already struggling to manage prolonged economic stagnation and low growth rates. The central question of why exactly such a dramatic shutdown of the world economy was necessary for advancing authoritarianism is one the deniers continually fail to address.

What we saw, instead, was a remarkable doubling down that can only be explained as yet another expression of the confusion that reigns with regards to the functioning of the capitalist economy and the state, fused this time around with an almost unquestioned embrace of individualism. Instead of reflection, a whole set of complementary theories began to be produced, ranging from far-right/antisemitic conspiracies around 5G and Bill Gates, all the way to left-wing or anarchist narratives about Big Pharma, Big Tech, new totalitarianisms, “hygienic apartheid” and the imperative to “discipline” the proletariat.<sup>20</sup> Despite their differences in content and emphasis, they all retain the same starting point: the insistence that the virus is nothing but a pretext and, as such, not in itself a real threat. Their differences reside in the reasoning over what this “pretext” is really about.

## The social background to the pandemic

The emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was not an exogenous shock to an otherwise stable normality. It was *both* the logical consequence of the capitalist economy and the various ways in which “capitalist production relates to the non-human world at a more fundamental level – how, in short, the ‘natural world’, including its microbiological substrata, cannot be understood without reference to how society organizes production”<sup>21</sup>; *and* an occurrence in a historical period that was already struggling to overcome a prolonged economic crisis, exacerbated in cases such as Greece by the already devastating effects of a decade-long austerity process.

Especially in places like Greece, such effects were multi-layered. On the one hand, one should remember that the ideological justification of the harsh austerity, which no proletarian revolt managed to contain, was framed in the name of the *general interest*. The eventual defeat of social movements that attempted to halt this meant that the one-sided class politics of this “general interest” did not lead to a strengthening of proletarian struggles

---

<sup>20</sup> Disciplining proletarians is, and never was, an end in itself. It takes place within the context of the reproduction of the working class and tends to lose its meaning when proletarians get sick and die *en masse*. Stupefied by some ill-digested readings of Foucault, more than a few radicals have come to understand discipline as autonomous from value creation, seeing it as a goal without any further objective or particular purpose other than itself. In other words: a sick proletariat standing in line outside closed-down workplaces is no model for capitalist accumulation, however “disciplined” it may be. Moreover, the approach that sees the implementation of measures as drastic as shutting down the global economy *as a tool* for “disciplining” proletarians would be forced to demonstrate, in a concrete way, the prior existence of a worldwide *undisciplined* working class. A similar argument can be made about the constantly evoked trope of deliberately infusing society with “panic and obsessive fear” in order to install a “governing through fear”. (Amiech, Matthieu (2021) ‘Ceci n’est pas une crise sanitaire: Pourquoi s’opposer à l’installation du pass sanitaire et à l’obligation vaccinale’, éditions La Lenteur) We fail to see how exactly capitalist relations benefit from a widespread fear over being in the same room with others.

<sup>21</sup> Chuang (2020) ‘Social Contagion: Microbiological Class War in China’, in: *Chuang*, <<https://chuangcn.org/2020/02/social-contagion/>>. It is worth mentioning here the obsession of tracing the origin of the Sars-CoV-2 virus to some secret lab. Mutations of viruses are part and parcel of their natural development as *viruses*. That these land on a historically contingent period, which will determine how their management (or non-management) will take place does not mean that they are deliberately created (and mistakenly or willingly released) in secret labs. As serious engagement with the issue has shown (e.g. the work of Mike Davis, Chuang, Andreas Malm and Rob Wallace), the process of pathogens crossing the animal/human boundary (known as zoonotic spill over) because of deforestation, i.e. minimising the spatial difference between tropical environments and human populations, is far from new and it corresponds directly to the development of capitalist production, circulation and subjugation. For more than a decade, scientific literature has consistently warned that “infectious diseases are emerging globally at an unprecedented rate”, with zoonoses occupying two-thirds of these.

against capital and state. The impossibility of maintaining a community of struggle against the austerity measures after the effective defeat of the mobilisations against the memoranda in the winter of 2012 played a decisive role. What we saw instead was the consolidation of a withdrawal into (pre-existing and socially filtered) petty-bourgeois forms of limited physical association and socialisation (family, small circles of friends, the local café) where, in contrast to the explosion of collective experiences of the previous period, a form of *horizontal social control* is easier to maintain and where the aggressive emergence of the segregated but glorified individual identity is almost inescapable.

In this context, accumulated defeats and a loss of perspective significantly undermined a notion of the *collective*, both as a social reality and as a necessary condition for resistance to capitalist machinery. That is not to say, of course, that before the crisis the concept of collective existence and mobilisation was not often translated and experienced as support for political parties/organisations (for the extra-parliamentary and parliamentary left), or to the vague, temporally recurrent but constantly fleeting concept of “insurgents” (for the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu). But although the retreat of social movements served as a reinforcement of such separations, it is worth noting that the generalised feeling of *withdrawal* that followed the defeats fragmented such divisions even further. If this became bitingly obvious for the left the moment Syriza was elected in 2015, leading to an endless series of splits and divisions related to one’s proximity to the new state apparatus, significant parts of the anarchist milieu weaponised this development as a confirmation of anti-social isolation and of the belief that there is, in fact, no collective *stake*, but only rebellious individuals moving in small organisational forms or through informal networks of friends.

There is a certain historical inevitability towards such retreats and privatisation after a major crisis and a crucial defeat of collective demands. But its negative effects can also be somewhat mitigated if there is, firstly, a recognition of its underlying causes and their contingency and, secondly, if there is a conscious attempt to resist the entrenchment of this marginalisation as the sole position from which contemplation of the social is possible. In any case, resistance to the tendency of promoting a weakened and isolated position could only be verified (or denied) in the next cycle of struggles. In this context, if the period of the pandemic is to offer any indication, it is a negative one. For a significant part of the antagonistic movement, the gradual abandonment of a collective vision gave way to either a stripped-down consolidation and defence of (individual) autonomy and self-determination, or to the segregated activism of the political sect. In this environment, the *social* has come to be seen as an exogenous intervention or, even worse, an ideological invention in tandem with state authoritarianism. As they have made it abundantly clear in their focus and interventions, a large part of the antagonistic movement recognises no actual public health issue – if there is, in fact, any viable meaning to the concept of “public health” itself. Instead, they identify only a “biopolitical” disciplinary attempt and, subsequently, a series of state- and pharma-led exaggerations meant to transform an issue that only concerns a small category of elderly and vulnerable into a testing ground for long-lasting transformations at a societal level.

In presenting those who took the pandemic seriously as willing (or duped) supporters of creeping state authoritarianism,<sup>22</sup> however, deniers have essentially created the space for the state to present itself as a responsible and rational exponent of the “general interest” against irrational individualism. The infinite extension of individual freedom *as an oppositional point* to a collective malaise, such as the pandemic, reinforces the framework of a war of all against all, allowing the state to appear as a (more) rational mediation; and this in a period of growing dissatisfaction and anger against the scandalous failures of the state apparatus and its pandemic management. Instead of a social movement that would fight as much *against* a management geared to minimise disruption of economic output, as well as *for* universal and unconditional access to existing protective options (from vaccines to remunerated withdrawal from work) and expanded health care, we have the development of tendencies that demand, in the name of “freedom” and self-determination, the right to pretend that Sars-CoV-2 does not exist.

## A bunch of individualities

Behind the use of concepts such as the “self-determination of the body” and the defence of the individual right to choose,<sup>23</sup> we see the desperate anthropology of a weakened individual, perpetually at the mercy of objective forces and effectively unable to even erect a fantasy of collective existence beyond the delusion of aggregate individualities.<sup>24</sup> Individual freedom fails to challenge the foundational framework of its impotence, while also side-lining any obligations, commitments, responsibilities and consequences concomitant with collective existence. While it is true that social bonds can become an obstacle, they still express *connections* between people and are therefore, potentially, a field of emancipation.

There is a further dialectical ambiguity in the concept of individual freedom itself. As much as it came to represent, historically speaking, a safe haven against clerical and feudal authoritarianism, it was equally a vehicle for embedding capitalist social relations of separation mediated not through religion or the divine right of kings, but via the abstract categories of law and market. To the extent that the content of contemporary radical denialism does not even pretend to involve any *commitment* or recognition of its social consequences, its limits and impoverished horizon are openly exposed, emerging as a *schlechte Aufhebung* of bourgeois individualism. If liberalism struggles to reconcile the emptiness of the isolated individual by appealing to the abstract universalisations it promotes (law and market), no such attempt is made today.

Within this framing we also recognise the psychic formation of the modern narcissistic individual, and its knee-jerk attempts to maintain its integrity against the incessant threats of disintegration produced by the pressures of the contemporary world of which it is, of course, directly derivative. Precisely because narcissism is the *loss* of the self and not its self-

---

<sup>22</sup> “A part of the left (including ‘anti-capitalist’ milieus) has for the most part become an active supporter of the technocrats in power” (Amiech, Matthieu (2021) ‘Ceci n’est pas une crise sanitaire: Pourquoi s’opposer à l’installation du pass sanitaire et à l’obligation vaccinale’, éditions La Lenteur, p. 16).

<sup>23</sup> It is useful to remember that in today’s context, the proper content of this “choice” is the right *not* to take necessary measures to limit contagion or to personally decide which ones to follow. The methodology through which such personal decisions are made is never questioned.

<sup>24</sup> The portrayal of the “movement of deniers” as an overall healthy reaction to which the far right and religious ideologues *parasitically* attach themselves is an indication of this confusion.

affirmation, it is accompanied by a selective apathy towards collective life pointing towards a practical abolition of empathy. At the same time, the individual's contradictory sense of powerlessness also leads to a defensive reaction formation that generates feelings of superiority over others. In a seemingly paradoxical way, the exculpation and the ascendance of individual freedom as a counterweight to state authoritarianism leads to the eclipse of individual subjectivity. People can only function as individual subjects (and not as reified abstract units) within collective processes and relations unmediated by money, the market and the state, glimmers of which we experienced in class antagonisms and communities of struggle that were defeated and dissolved in the previous decade.

Despite the denialists' contentions and appeals to "freedom", if the concept of reality, and the meaning it seeks, are ultimately personal and subjective matters, if they have no reference to anything outside our immediate personal experience, they will fail miserably to offer any refuge or support. The constitution of the self and individual freedom as a vector of resistance produces a self tormented by feelings of humiliation and loss of control, seeking a "restoration of justice" by any means, and turning against everything outside its expansive sense of identity. In the process, it also produces a distorted image of the state, the capitalist world and of those it perceives as either allies or enemies.

Bound by a shift to the language of rights and the demand for autonomy of an individuality *as inviolable private property*, the standpoint of social emancipation through the abolition of class society and capitalist property is abandoned, precluding as it does a collective attack against the compounded dangers of an infectious virus *and* the human cost of capitalist contradictions.

What is more, those who speak against the imposed restrictions and negative consequences of the lockdown, while *at the same time* rejecting the reality of the pandemic, also distract from the fact that individual freedom within capitalist society was already formal and limited. Nobody freely and consciously chooses to go to work every morning after mature thought, nor does one have direct access to the way in which this process is organised. People are *forced* to do so in order to survive, and it is only their collective struggles that determine the scope within which this coercion will be more or less direct and violent. In this context, denialism is not (and cannot be) a field of antagonism against the state form or capitalist relations *per se*, but an attempt to protect a certain *normality* against an ambiguous *discord* (the global pandemic). For deniers, the pandemic comes to represent the bad dream of an already chained society which fights for its right to sleep.

Before the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, only a handful of committed anti-vaxxers with already wildly confusionist views would have considered the mandatory vaccination of health care workers as an expression of an emergent new authoritarian order.<sup>25</sup> If one takes SARS-CoV-2 out of the picture, in fact, it quickly becomes apparent that one would have to be shockingly dense to actually uphold that taking protective measures against

---

<sup>25</sup> In Greece, as elsewhere in the EU, health care workers were *already* obliged to be vaccinated (or have proven immunity) against contagious diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis A and B, chicken pox (for those engaging with patients of high risk), certain types of conjugate meningococcal infections (for microbiologists) or tetanus, diphtheritis and whooping cough. This mandatory requirement has been, for a long time, part of EU commitments and guidelines in relation to the protection of workers *and* patients from exposure to biological elements. As far as we are aware, none of these provisions and obligations were ever described as a "hygienic apartheid".

infectious diseases should be delegated to the field of personal choice, especially considering how such “choices”, even among health professionals, tend to be shaped by the cesspool of social media, inflated by reactionary ideologies and framed through the kaleidoscope of sterile individuality.

In the background of the imaginary institution of such an autonomy of the ego and of an approach to the body through the terminology of rights, we recognise, along with Dauvé, the traces of “a bourgeois revolution forever being completed and perfected by asking democracy to have content instead of only form. Radical critique is not dismissive of these endeavours: it only points out their limits. When it is impossible to address the causes of oppression, it is inevitable for the oppressed to fight against its effects. In that case, the claim to *own* one’s body is experienced as a protection against its appropriation [...] Unfortunately this safeguard proves an illusion. Individual ownership is no protection against dispossession. [...] Re-appropriation of the self can only be collective.”<sup>26</sup>

A radical defence of individual rights is not possible when it is not recognised as a *limit*, let alone when it works to the detriment of our collective experience. The extreme (and abstract) constitution of the individual produced by the liberal imaginary or, which amounts to the same thing, an inability to understand the social character of a contagious disease, are prerequisites for such a conceptualisation to thrive.

Everyone knows that the false selves that attach one to a company, a family, a tradition, a nationality, a nation or society *in general*, produce oppressions in the name of a collective “we” that merely perpetuates existing domination. But the response, as Dauvé notes, “is not the addition of new egos but the creation of non-false selves [...] All that is won and all that is positive, ‘more human’, is the result of common actions [...] Our bodies belong to those who love us, not because of some legal ‘right’, but because, as flesh and blood, we live and move only in relation to them. And, to the extent that we know and can love the human species, our bodies are theirs.”

Rather than undermining any notion of collective existence or even of the concept of public health itself, concern and care for those around us is a non-negotiable feature of radical critique, precisely because viewing social relations *as obstacles* to the individual abolishes the real richness of human experience. This concern for others was never confined to different degrees of vulnerability, nor was it dependent on a thorough evaluation of scientific research. Would the absence or ambiguity of such research ever qualify as a reason to suspend such care or concern? It remains puzzling and profoundly saddening to see people (especially close comrades) willing to *negotiate* such care or concern in the name of a critique of “scientific totalitarianism” or because it imposes limits on personal egos and individual freedoms. We see no systematic critique of the scientific discourse, nor a heroic disobedience to the authoritarianism of the state or capitalist apparatus in such positions. What we see instead is an attitude reflective of a selective or confused reading of available data on the pandemic and its wider social implications led, above all, by an attempt to rationalise (and reject) the heavy psychological burden that the recognition of the dystopia we live in requires, and the range of responsibility that has suddenly been thrust upon us.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Dauvé, Gilles (2010) “Pour un monde sans morale” [1983], *Troploin*, < <https://www.troploin.fr/node/37>>.

<sup>27</sup> We would be amiss not to recognise that the almost fanatic support of all state measures and their medicinal extensions also stem from a similar position of *fear*. But the issue was never to criticise “fear”. As Théorie

## Political identity of denial

It is hardly a coincidence that the extreme right is hegemonic in the denialist movement at a global level. This is an ideological space especially susceptible to conspiracies as rationalisations of an expanded loss of control, with an underlying penchant for authoritarian disciplining. At the same time, fascist tendencies have a rich history of embracing a politics of *Thanatos*, directed as much against those who ‘contaminate’ the social fabric or are unproductive members of it. That these same political forces were overwhelmingly in favour of the full reopening of the economy and restarting the productive process at all costs was naturally no accident. Nor was their eager adoption of narratives of herd immunity, behind which their social Darwinism and a backdoor path to eugenics was scarcely hidden.

The rise of such post-fascist tendencies is, to be sure, a global phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> In the case of Greece, such a trend has been stimulated by the mass nationalist protests against Macedonia and the racist pogroms against migrants in the Greek islands (and border regions), activities that morphed such tendencies into a significant social bloc, eventually spilling over and integrating themselves into the state apparatus.<sup>29</sup> Within the overall context of the predominance of separated individuals, a certain quest for universalisation is bound to be attached to abstractions such as a strengthened religious belonging or the contours of national identity. As some comrades from Thessaloniki put it, “the communities of nation and religion [gain significance] as refuge spaces promising stability, a sense of protection and a recovery of individual/collective control, [at a time] when all other powerful symbolic or material references (the patriarchal affection of the state, its welfare policies, etc.) seem to collapse”.<sup>30</sup> In their attempt to reconfigure this patriarchal structure of the state (i.e. the provision, that is, of obedience in return for protection), these fascist perspectives found in the pandemic a fertile ground for opposition, either through copy-pasting widely promoted conspiracies (Jew-Masons, 5G, Bill Gates, Soros) or through introducing Greek-centric additions (the orthodox faith as a shield against the virus, delusions about a resistant Greek DNA, etc.). For this coordinated mob, “the invocation of the homeland and orthodoxy [...] and the exhortations to a national uprising try to obsessively construct an imaginary that will be in a position to take on an invisible enemy, whose origins may remain shadowy, but whose aims seem clear: the fragmentation of the Greek territory, the obstruction of its religious rituals, the economic strangulation of its most profitable sectors, the subjugation and disciplining of an inherently powerless people”.

Alongside fascist tendencies, one can also observe a steady flow from the circus of libertarians (whose obsessive concern is precisely the unconditional defence of private property and the individual against any notion of collective interest and/or common good) and, for the first time in such a public display, a denialist co-habitation (often described as

---

Communiste succinctly put it, “one has to have a certain relationship to existence to claim that fear is an impediment, as if it were a choice.” *Théorie Communiste* (2021) ‘Conspiricism in General and the Pandemic in Particular’, in *Cured Quail*, < <https://curedquailjournal.wordpress.com/2021/02/14/conspiricism-in-general-and-the-pandemic-in-particular/>>.

<sup>28</sup> Tamás, G.M. (2001) “What is Post-fascism?”, in: *Open Democracy*, (13 Sep.), <[https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article\\_306jsp/](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_306jsp/)>.

<sup>29</sup> The government of New Democracy has placed three known extreme right politicians in ministerial positions while many of its deputies consistently regurgitate alt-right talking points.

<sup>30</sup> “They are hiding something from us”, in: *Tyflopontikas*, July 2021, in Greek <<https://yfanet.espivblogs.net/>>.



*Querdenken*) with a motley crew of Q-Anon freaks, mystic homeopaths or spiritually sensitive anti-rationalists, who found in the anti-lockdown, anti-mask and anti-vaccine mobilisations an opportunity to spread their new age superstitions, to sell alternative “healing” recipes and to promote astrological mumbo-jumbo.

### **The real split in the antagonistic movement**

Unfortunately, however, this far-right rabble does not monopolise denialism. In specific countries (with France and Greece appearing at the forefront of this phenomenon), a disproportionately large part of the radical left/anti-authoritarian milieu has systematically opposed masks, social distancing measures, quarantines and even contact tracing by either focusing on the repressive (and irrational) way these were implemented in Greece or, even worse, questioning the pandemic itself. Following a similar trajectory with the far right, this contingency has also joined in the opposition to vaccinations and, where applicable, to the “Green/Health Pass”.

We have already noted that many of those who mobilise politically against all the above are driven, in many ways, by a misconstrued image of capitalist society as one ruled by Big Pharma, Big Tech, big banks, mass media and neoliberal politicians (occasionally even borrowing the far-right term “globalists”). At the same time, as with the right, resorting to the easy dismissal of branding such phenomena as “conspiracy theories” doesn’t solve much. Not because they are not based on an extravagant stretching out of essentially contentless banalities (the state is a monstrous apparatus, ruling classes have interests, technology is not neutral, *ad nauseam*), but because such modalities of thinking are pre-emptively equipped with a fail-safe automatism that translates any critique towards them into a verification of their “truth”: that they are targeted, vilified and silenced for standing up to the mainstream. Being inconsistent today has now emerged as a straight path to becoming a martyr.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, and in contrast to the right, denialists coming from the antagonistic movement do not promote the national or religious imaginary as a counterweight to the collapse of the collective/social field. What needs to be examined however is what exactly they *are* counter-posing. In some cases, the denialist/anti-vax tendencies of the milieu try to assert that those mobilising against the measures and vaccinations are a class subject which is (in the best of cases) hijacked by the extreme or religious right *because* they are sold out by the left which is indirectly or directly supporting the state. In more than one country, such arguments have been used by (ex) comrades to justify participating in the same demos as fascists. It is worth noting, at this point, that the often heard accusation that we are inexcusably “bundling together” left and extreme right denialism, skilfully ignores the fact

---

<sup>31</sup> A typical example is the constant whining about being silenced, shamed, excluded, etc. The fact that the core of their views on the pandemic has determined the policy followed (at least until the second wave) in the US, Britain, Brazil and elsewhere, or that open access to social networks (which they apparently prefer) has not only given a platform to such ‘alternative’ views, but has inflated them to an unthinkable degree, obviously does not shatter this delusion of “victimisation”. While there are, of course, media outlets whose aim is simply to spread government propaganda, the complaint of *exclusion* from official media is, truth be told, a very odd approach for people within the antagonistic movement. The press and media, as institutions, are neither organs of public information, nor purely mechanisms of dry propaganda. Above all, their role as institutions is to produce *consensus*. In the contemporary conditions of entrenched spectacular democracy, where ideologies of “public debate” and the free exchange of ideas abound, promoting “oppositional” views is not mere clickbait but part and parcel of consensus-producing.

that it is often they themselves who allow it: we are surely not the only ones to have heard, in private conversations, (ex) comrades declaring that “they don’t care if these positions are held by fascists if they are correct”, or things like “at the moment it is (unfortunately) only the extreme right that is resisting.” But anecdotal evidence is not without its theoretical justifications in public: a symptomatic French text concludes its analysis by arguing that “the population is divided between those who perceive that the technocrats (in France as elsewhere) are prepared to do absolutely anything to defend the existing political and economic system; and those who believe that these technocrats are doing what they can in a difficult moment, and that we should demand they protect us better.”<sup>32</sup>

In a somewhat similar fashion, the Italian collective Wu Ming warns against dismissing these mobilisations, as well as “the ease with which labels were applied and the adherence to what we called the ‘pandemic social peace’”, adding that these mobilisations are “contradictory but inevitable”. Interpreting the presence of fascist tendencies as only worrisome when *organised fascist groups* are present, Wu Ming concludes that participants in these struggles are essentially “concerned with their own proletarianization” and that “calling all this ‘fascist’ is at least a sign of ideological delusion” stemming from a left that has become an “active supporter of the state” (Amiech) or potential “gatekeepers of the system [and] defenders of the status quo” (Wu Ming).<sup>33</sup>

Others go even further. Accusing those who take the pandemic and its dangers seriously as “subservient”, “state collaborators”, “hygienic totalitarians” and other similar rubbish, such denialists deliberately ignore radical critiques of the pandemic management, declaring in essence that the *only* real opposition to the contemporary predicament comes from rejecting lockdowns, masks, social distancing and vaccines. Arrogantly differentiating themselves from “subjugated” society and posing as “insurgents” (a choice of a concept which, in the absence of an insurrection, is particularly nonsensical), denialists ridicule the *fear* generated by a contagious disease while elevating their inflated *anxiety* towards biotechnology and surveillance. In the mobilisations they see (and celebrate) “uprisings” against technological dystopia. For our part, we fail to see how a political discourse emerging from online ‘research’, algorithmic nudges and social media magnification of even the most absurd of positions can be described as a sort of awakening against a techno-dystopian future of mass surveillance.<sup>34</sup>

In challenging the “manufactured” severity of SARS-CoV-2, denialists essentially reveal a desire to return to a normality that preceded “hygienic totalitarianism” and the imposition of “apartheid”,<sup>35</sup> where no certificates were required by contemporary Dr. Mengeles’ and social life could be enjoyed without restrictions or exclusions. In other words, a return to life *before the Coronavirus*.

---

<sup>32</sup> Amiech, Matthieu (2021) ‘Ceci n’est pas une crise sanitaire: Pourquoi s’opposer à l’installation du pass sanitaire et à l’obligation vaccinale’, éditions La Lenteur, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Wu Ming (2021) ‘Conspiracy and Social Struggle’, in: *Ill Will*, 18 November, <<https://illwill.com/conspiracy-and-social-struggle>>.

<sup>34</sup> The mind-numbing absurdity of seeing posts by verified users on Facebook lamenting Sars-Cov-2 as an excuse to hand over personal data is simply too much on the nose.

<sup>35</sup> We should remember that the repetitive and inflationary comparison with past atrocities facilitates exactly what it is supposed to combat: it relativises historical reality and contributes to the normalisation of horror.

We are far from questioning the desire to escape from the dystopia in which we live. We continue to challenge the notion, however, that such a potential can be reached by pretending that the virus is “just a flu”, by consciously refusing to take protective measures against it, including vaccines whose effectiveness against symptomatic infection, hospitalisation or death is overwhelmingly proven by the data. It is not without surprise that we encounter the phenomenon of otherwise smart and radical perspectives not flinching at the idea that the appropriate answer to the state’s attempts to reduce everything to “individual responsibility” lies in the personal freedom of *indifference* towards a social reality, rather than a collective struggle that puts our interests above those of the economy and its consequences.

The supremacy of the law (and its repressive features) inspires awe and submission when confronting the isolated individual; they can only be ridiculed in the face of collective resistance. But collective resistance is not the aggregate of separated individual freedoms that can only be united under the auspices of a *political* framework (which is what the far right is attempting). If radical critique and praxis have a role to play, it is not to replace one political framework (far right) with another (left) while maintaining intact the content of what these politics express, i.e. individual freedom. A struggle for autonomy and individual freedom posed against the misunderstood workings of capital, state and scientific developments can only end up as a constitutive part for re-affirming *capital-in-general*.

Within such a configuration, the critique of capital, state and even science itself remain shallow and caricature-esque.<sup>36</sup> Capital is subjectified and, as a subject, it *conspires* and uses the pandemic as a pretext to forcibly impose something that was, by all means, *already* on the agenda – without however eliciting the kind of concerted resistance that would justify this massive mobilisation of disciplinary measures that lay behind the Covid decoy. Moreover, such a conception of capital as a conspiratorial subject ultimately fits into both a left-wing and a far-right/antisemitic “anticapitalism”, which is nothing but a fetishized, reactionary anti-capitalism (as Postone has noted).

Similarly, the state stops being understood as a **political form** of capital-as-social relation but becomes, in a move reminiscent of the worst residues of orthodox Marxist thinking, an instrument of the elites (a scheme directly implying that a different set of elites can force the state to “serve the people”). From this approach, a key explanation for the various misunderstandings and exaggerations around a “politics of discipline” can be located: with *discipline* becoming an end in itself, state interventions to ensure expanded reproduction are removed from the picture, just as the specific reproduction of the proletariat – as the *sine qua non* of capitalist production – is mystified. Instead, we are urged to think that public and transnational authorities who promote supposedly experimental or dangerous vaccinations are for some reason willing to sacrifice the health and life of billions of proletarians and the most valuable commodity for capitalist accumulation, labour power, in order to ensure the profits of a few pharmaceutical and big tech companies.

As already noted, such unfortunate confusion renders denialists incapable of coming to terms and analysing crucial reconfigurations among state actors and capital. Embracing

---

<sup>36</sup> Reading Amiech, for example, we learn that one can place no trust whatsoever on “science” because “science” has made terrible mistakes in the past. The fact that such mistakes were sometimes discovered following a *scientific* process is, obviously, of no concern to such grandiose declarations.

the bogeyman of some ubiquitous and abstract disciplining incentive under the excuse of a “pandemic fiasco”, no possible explanation can be offered for the fact that central components of global political economy of the last decades have been set aside *overnight*. In this context, noticeable shifts such as turning a blind eye to the “disastrous” increase of public debt; the direct intervention of central banks through money printing *without* conditionalities of austerity or exclusion of fiscally “undisciplined” states; the provision of EU funding in terms of grants (and *not* loans); none of this can even remotely be understood within the context of a “flu” that allows Big Pharma to get rich.

Lastly, a small word about science. Unless one is mentally overwhelmed by the imaginary of a techno-dystopian apparatus which surveils and collects data destined “to train robots and develop the countless algorithms that will determine, in our stead, what we do, can, and want”,<sup>37</sup> we prefer to understand science as, at the same time, a productive force, as expropriated social knowledge and as a production process. Indeed, in modern capitalism the production process has generally been transformed into a scientific process. But the production process is not only a process of valorisation but also a process of use-value production. And these use-values satisfy the needs both of capitalist commodity production and of the reproduction of labour power. Clearly, science “appears as an attribute of capital over productive labour”, as “capital’s power over living labour” (Marx, *Grundrisse*) and from there arises the proletarian struggle against machines and science as a form of capital’s power and of alienation. But at the same time, it is a social productive force that satisfies human needs and, in the case of medicine and pharmacy, people’s most elementary need to be healthy.

In contrast to those who seek in religious metaphysics the answer to the problems posed by the virus, most right- and left-wing denialists try to counter the scientific evidence of the dangers of the pandemic (and the effectiveness of the vaccines) by utilising other scientists. This approach, to the extent that we can differentiate it from the (multiple) *pseudo*-scientific discourses (microchips in the vaccines, vaccinated people turning into magnets, mRNA vaccines changing human DNA, etc.), is not only different from self-referential religious views (Jesus will save us, holy communion *cannot* be contagious, etc). It also tries to strengthen the radical credentials of the critique by stressing that denialism is *as much* a result of scientific evidence, the difference being that “critical” scientists are slandered and silenced precisely because they don’t follow the mainstream, official approach.

One interesting aspect of this approach is the simultaneous attempt to politicise and *de*-politicize this alternative, non-submissive approach. We thus see that it laments official scientific discourse (WHO, CDC, etc.) as being profoundly *political*, serving the generalised direction (apartheid, separation, second-class citizenry, etc.), while being outrageously *indifferent* towards the political positions of the scientists it favours.

The result is painful. Comrades who have offered a lot to the antagonistic movement have ended up being impressed and reproduce the words of scientists who can only be placed within an arch that ranges from neoliberal pro-market positions, all the way to the far right. And, of course, there is no lack of pure and simple charlatans and confidence men who take advantage of the widespread fear and insecurity as a vehicle to benefit financially from the

---

<sup>37</sup> Amiech, Matthieu (2021) ‘Ceci n’est pas une crise sanitaire: Pourquoi s’opposer à l’installation du pass sanitaire et à l’obligation vaccinale’, éditions La Lenteur, p. 16.

doubts they spread. In any case, we do not see a systematic critique of scientific reason, but the tight embrace of any view that tickles the fancy of pre-existing suspicions and relieves from the heavy psychological burden of accepting the nightmarish reality of the virus.

Criticising such views, however, is not meant to present an uncritical acceptance of experts, nor is it meant to convey a blind acceptance of the limited aims of science. If science appeared in the past as an alternative to discredited metaphysical thought-systems such as religion, this does not mean that it has been successful in offering a coherent and thorough explanation of the world and of our position in it. In today's framework, in fact, science does not even try to offer suggestions for a different way of organising and reproducing the totality of life.

In contrast to the arguments of the denialists, however, while radical critique does not celebrate the authority of experts or science in general, let alone when social questions are posed, it does not fall back to endorsing and promoting the position of every *non-expert*. When Ivan Illich was criticising the fact that new medical technologies abolish older ones *even if these are clearly more effective*, he was not implying (as many denialists are today) that the solution towards *modern diseases* (such as Covid-19) lies in the adoption of past (and often medically discredited) nostrums or snake oils. Rebelling against technological domination could create new forms of community, but it can also strengthen nihilism and a blurred and paper-thin subjectivity. Irrationality was never a good counterweight against instrumental reason.

The framework within which the critique of expert authorities takes place is not the delusional idea that each one of us can express *equally valid opinions* on questions of epidemiology, immunology or communicable diseases. It starts, in fact, from the recognition that *every* scientific position exists within a given historical framework and reflects given social relations. The key question is getting the historical and structural framework right, not to second guess medical facts after reading a Facebook post. If anything, and from a purely methodological standpoint, the direction of medical research, the investments spent and the choices according to which their results are distributed, all express given dynamics and relations that are determined by the predominant capitalist mode of production. This does not mean, however, that scientific knowledge, research, or its *results* are by definition false, misleading, useless or tailored to promote obscure interests. The key instrument of radical critique lies precisely in its exposition of the social conditions under which scientific discourse and work takes place, as well as in the attempt to explain its wider consequences. The attempt to discredit all scientific advances due to the social reality within which they take place is, if anything else, not only doomed to meet insurmountable obstacles, but to feed reactionary positions.<sup>38</sup> As we've demonstrated here, our position towards the measures and vaccines is not the result of the fact that we suddenly became epidemiology experts – though this does not mean that we are incapable of understanding this research. It follows *essentially* from the study of the historical role of the state mechanism, from the point of view of a multi-layered

---

<sup>38</sup> The current “critique of scientific reason” that some denialists are promoting is so obviously contradictory that it remains surprising to us that it has not been fully discredited. An ill-digested approach that wants medical science (which is, among other things, accumulated knowledge) to be purely and solely determined by the capitalist relation cannot stand closer scrutiny. On the basis of such a logic, we should reject all scientific development that has taken place during period of the dominance of the capitalist mode of production. Together with vaccines, therefore, we should start rebelling against all medicine or treatment that exists against any disease.

approach to science within a capitalist society and from a communist position on the question of collective existence.

A critique against scientific and medical reality could, for example, take the form of indignation against the fact that existing treatments and medicine are *unavailable*, due to profitability questions, to populations that capital treats as surplus. In parallel, one can criticise the fact that no serious and systematic vaccine or medicinal preparation for the event of a pandemic existed, precisely because such an event was irrelevant and inconsistent with the short-term perspective of direct profits.<sup>39</sup> It was only when it proved to be a direct necessity for fighting a global pandemic that almost limitless (public) funds were given for vaccine research, with the consequence that there are now almost 10 different and very effective vaccines in circulation.<sup>40</sup> Instead of criticising this previously skewed interest of scientific research, condemning the lack of access to scientific knowledge and treatment in large parts of the world, deniers have chosen to focus on the right to reject vaccination based on abstract fears and a distorted image of what scientific development means.<sup>41</sup>

### **The smokescreen of the opposition to compulsory vaccination**

In light of the state's provisions for the expanded and cheap reproduction of healthy and productive labour power, recent measures around vaccinations aim at preventing both a new wave of deaths and a collapse of hospital care, as happened last winter, and the possibility of a new lockdown. Vaccination, to the extent that it acts as an effective *prevention* against SARS-Cov-2, is the cheapest solution within the market framework, thus fitting into the government's broader strategy of further shrinking (and privatising) the health care system. As Greek PM Mitsotakis already stated, not only is there no intention to recruit, increase spending and support the public health system, but on the contrary, the aim is to close even more regional hospitals and to advance privatisation by allowing private companies to enter hospitals, thus allowing a portion of government spending to stimulate the profitability of private capital.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, vaccination is not only a cheap solution for the state, but also for

---

<sup>39</sup> Before the emergence of Sars-CoV-2, funds towards medicinal research and development were mostly directed towards those areas where higher returns were calculated, like the improvement of products like antidepressants and Viagra. In contrast, mRNA research was marginalised and underfunded, despite the fact that it appears to show a promising potential way against diseases and viruses like cancer or AIDS.

<sup>40</sup> The poor argument that the pandemic management was constructed for the purpose of facilitating the profits of "Big Pharma" despite vaccine effectiveness fails to recognise that some (equally Big Pharma) multinationals failed to produce effective vaccines and therefore lost massive investments after their clinical trials. For the 10 effective ones circulating, there have been at least 7 or 8 that have failed. When one subjectifies capital, such contradictions fall between the cracks.

<sup>41</sup> Contrary to the illusion that the contemporary vaccines are experimental, the reality is that there has never been a more tested vaccine in the history of humanity. With 7.5 billion doses already administered, and a vested interest in paying close attention to adverse effects, these vaccines are more tested and safer than most medicine that people consume on a daily basis. Furthermore, the notion that the vaccines remain experimental because they are circulating after an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) procedure (the implication being that normal protocols have been disregarded) would not be as problematic if the same critics were willing to accept their eventual *full* authorisation or, even better, if those who promoted such views did not *at the same time* propose alternative medication against Covid (such as remdesivir, hydroxychlorine and the monoclonal bamlanivimab) which are also circulating through an EUA.

<sup>42</sup> Already, and under the obvious *pretext* of dealing with the unvaccinated, the Greek state has outsourced important parts of the health system (such as cleaning services) to private companies. The 2022 budget voted by the government in November 2021 foresees a reduction in health spending of 820 million, of which 200 million is a reduction in the regular subsidy to hospitals and 600 million is a reduction in spending to deal with the

capitalists: to the extent that it will be an important preventive weapon in the fight against the pandemic, it also becomes an alibi for the abolition of protective measures in the workplace and therefore for the unblocking of production, distribution and profitability.

Finally, the reduction of mortality and the prevention of the collapse of hospitals through mass vaccination also directly concerns the issue of **legitimisation**, not only because a different development would have a high political cost for the government by further undermining the fragile trust in the state, but also because it allows the state to appear as an agent of rationality in the face of discredited and irrational enemies. It is also from this perspective that the campaign of attacking the unvaccinated has to be examined: aware of the failure of the vaccination “campaign” and of the grandiose plans for a return to normality, the state retains a fallback plan so that *when* cases increase, and the pressure on the health system intensifies and failure becomes apparent, the responsibility will have already been shifted away from the state apparatus.

The deplorability of the government’s management policy (in relation to mandatory vaccinations for health workers) is also highlighted by the fact that it turns a practically non-existent issue into a central one, as the majority of doctors and nurses had already been vaccinated before the announcement of mandatory vaccination. Through such tactics, it did however achieve to rally the anti-vaccination movement, while also producing an inhibiting effect on the rate of vaccinations with tragic consequences, given the low rate of vaccination in the general population. But this obvious contradiction does not deter the government, which is trying to create a win-win situation: if coercion leads to an increase in vaccinations, it will come closer to the goal of avoiding a horizontal lockdown and achieving the wider opening of the economy; on the other hand, if it rallies and increases anti-vaccinators, it can blame them for the increase in cases, avoid responsibility and further justify the wider design of deregulation and privatisation already in place. Once again, and within its ideological and spectacular content, the state faithfully follows Debord’s comment that democracy wants “*to be judged by its enemies rather than by its results*”. In this case, that “enemy” is the “anti-vaccination movement”.

But recognising the details above is not enough to constitute a radical critique. At a very simple level, the fact that a form of protection against SARS-Cov-2 reduces costs, generates profits and reinforces the legitimacy of the state is not *in itself* a reason to reject it. Contrary to some alleged revolutionaries, we are not against the fact that state and capital prefer us alive.

What is becoming clearer with the passage of time is that anti-vaxxers are a manufactured enemy. Not of course in the strict sense that the state created this movement from scratch and conspired to promote it (although the church as a part of the state in Greece

---

pandemic, in line with a prediction that it would be over, which has already been refuted (<https://www.news247.gr/oikonomia/proypologismos-oi-dapanes-ygeias-vazoyn-fotia-stin-kontra-kyvernisis-antipoliteysis.9431519.html>, in Greek). It must be noted that the government is setting aside the previously mentioned amount of 600 million euros as a contingency fund for the recruitment of temporary staff or the temporary requisition of private clinics. It is clear that they want to avoid at all costs the long-term strengthening of the public health system as it comes into contradiction with their strategy for its partial privatisation and that they are attempting to respond to the pandemic exclusively with short-term measures. The statements of the Minister of State, Akis Skertzos, that “the government does not wish to create a luxury health system that will be superfluous after the pandemic is over”, express this orientation in the clearest way (<https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1796568/a-skertzos-den-uparxei-logos-na-dimiourgisoume-ena-poluteles-sustima-ugeias>, in Greek).

and a number of far-right organisations on the fringes of New Democracy played a central role in its formation), but in the specific sense that it reinforced it with the authoritarianism, opacity and systematic absurdity of both the measures (and half-measures) it took since the beginning of the pandemic, and the ways in which it exploited its strengthening in order to present itself as a responsible and rational exponent of the “general interest” vis-à-vis irrational individualism.

As we have already mentioned, compulsory vaccination of health workers for a number of infectious diseases was already part of European legislation to protect workers and patients long before the Coronavirus pandemic. Many countries also impose mandatory vaccination of children in order to enroll them in kindergartens or schools. Such provisions that require health workers to be removed from work if, for example, they have active tuberculosis are, from the point of view of capital, aimed at protecting the health of the workforce in order to limit the loss of working days – that is to say, the production of value and profit. But it is absurd not to recognise that they also meet a *fundamental* collective class need. Was such explicit requirement for health workers not to be contagious also some kind of “dictatorship” in the past, or did it only become so because of the Coronavirus? With an active pandemic that has claimed over 5.3 million recorded victims (most of which in countries with *developed* health care systems), and which claims more than 80 people per day in Greece (on average), vaccination becomes even more important for our health, even though it is clearly not a panacea. It is becoming more and more obvious that the best chance of avoiding the perpetual recycling of this pandemic lies in increasing the percentage of those with enough antibodies to undermine the dangers of the virus, and vaccines are an essential feature of this potential.

In this context, and from the point of view of proletarian interests, it makes no sense to pose the opposition between compulsion and freedom in an abstract way. Labour law, i.e. the reified and alienated form that the results of class struggle take within capitalist law, demonstrates as much. In Greece, for example, labour law still includes some prohibitions and obligations which *favour* the workers: it prohibits dismissals for trade union activity and counter-strikes by employers, while also restricting the “individual freedom” of the worker to sign agreements that essentially violate labour laws and/or collective agreements. In fact, the appeal to the “freedom of the individual to decide for herself” was a key ideological weapon for the deregulation of labour law, as was evident in the debate on the ten-hour working day limit introduced by the Greek government. In any case, compulsion is not necessarily against class interests, just as the right of individual choice is not necessarily in favour of class interests.

From a wider perspective, it is clear that the compulsory character of law serves the reproduction of capitalist social relations. The abolition of this compulsory character and the communist overcoming of law does not, however, lie in the “right to individual freedom of choice”, but in the abolition of separation and the creation of a real community in place of the illusory community of separated individuals through the intensification of class struggle. And from this point of view, the opposition between obligation and individual freedom is false. The separations imposed on the unvaccinated are not merely a product of state measures, but express separation as the **common essence** (*Gemeinwesen*) of individuals in capitalist society. The state imposes unity through coercion and exclusion. To the extent that



anti-vaxxers frame their refusal at the limited level of “personal responsibility”, they invite the state to appear as the sole expression of the collective or social interest, thereby *intensifying* exclusions precisely because the only unity that the state can impose is based on generalised exclusion. The abolition of exclusion, as well as the abolition of coercion, cannot be achieved by appealing to its own foundational basis, i.e. the “personal choice” of the separated individual, whether we are talking about vaccinations, tests or masks.<sup>43</sup> The abolition of exclusion as the necessary framework of state authority requires the creation of a community that functions through genuine solidarity and, therefore, the assumption of all the necessary measures to contain the pandemic.

To conclusion: the issue at stake is not the compulsory character of vaccination *per se*, nor the catchy slogan of “resisting state authoritarianism.” It starts from the specific terms and the level of acceptance (or denial) of the danger of the virus and of the effectiveness of protective measures. This is why we have never before seen mobilisations against existing mandatory/precautionary measures for communicable diseases as expressions of stigmatisation, separation and “health apartheid.” The “right to choose” in the current context appears as the right not to take measures for the containment of the pandemic and therefore easily acquires (and attracts) a reactionary and individualistic content, whether that is informed by ignorance or, even worse, indifference and social Darwinism.

From the standpoint of class and social solidarity, vaccination is a self-evident act to protect and care for those around us. Its use and manipulation by the state does not invalidate this reality. For this reason, the constructed antithesis between the state and the anti-vaxxers is false. Neither are the anti-vaxxers against the state’s management of the **real** health crisis since they actually intensify it, nor is the state’s vaccination policy analysed in its true dimensions.

Against the state management of the pandemic, which is directed against proletarian interests and needs, we must promote the collective struggle for the satisfaction of our needs which includes, but does not stop at, universal vaccination. Instead of defending the self-delusions of denialists who disguise their indifference to the pandemic through mobilisations against government authoritarianism, we must demand universal access to all preventive and therapeutic possibilities. As a group of striking health workers put it in May 1968, “a real struggle against illness, implying a considerable extension of the idea of preventative medicine, would rapidly become political and revolutionary, as it would be a struggle against an inhibitory and repressive society.”<sup>44</sup>

The inherent divisions and antagonisms of capitalist society will always be reflected in its political form, i.e. the state. When these contradictions are imposed through repressive

---

<sup>43</sup> “Ultimately, the ideology of hooliganism [*teppismo*] and crime, if it actually exceeds the obsolete stylistic elements of militant politics, effects a recuperation on revolutionary subjectivity, convincing it that “criminal” and generically illegal behaviour are expressed at the level of individual choices, and instantly discharges any positive tension. As soon as one is satisfied with being the habitual transgressor of every norm, the “criminal” drowns his own project of being in a simple and caricatural disobedience to the normative as such, which therefore becomes, quite simply, the norm in negative: having in place of being. The compulsion to repetition is the miserably maniacal trait that degrades to routine, to nostalgic repetition, the actual insurrectional creativity of the coup.” (Cesarano, Giorgio (2020) ‘Excerpts from “Apocalypse and Revolution’ [1973], in: *Endnotes 5: The Passions and the Interests*, p. 300, emphasis added).

<sup>44</sup> “Medicine and Repression”, National Young Doctors’ Center, 13 rue Pascal, Paris V, 1968, in: Vienét, René (1992) *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May ’68*, Autonomedia, p. 146.

measures, the (also inherent) anti-state sentiments will reach the surface and explode in divergent forms of opposition. Fetishizing these oppositions, however, while neglecting their underlying content, renders critique incapable of recognising a historical truth: namely, that opposition to a *state of affairs* can just as easily be reactionary, a category not exclusive to organised fascists (though they are clearly not far).

The necessary opposition to the state and its management of the pandemic loses its emancipatory potential when construed as an expression of *indifference* towards a real threat, largely premised on the illusion that specific individualities (usually, healthy young bodies) are being beyond risk. Resisting effective precautionary measures against an airborne virus in the name of a conceptualisation of freedom that pre-emptively excludes vulnerable (i.e. proletarian) categories cannot be the ground for a radical questioning of existing society. The decomposition of collective existence and resistance through repression and austerity, responsible for producing the underlying framework within which contemporary denialism flourishes, cannot be recomposed by appealing to the emptiness of individual autonomy in the face of a collective menace.