

SURVIVAL, ISOLATION, LABOR.



three essays on covid-19 and
the crisis of capitalism

THREE ESSAYS ON COVID-19 AND ADDRESSING THE CRISIS

Compiled, formatted & distributed by the *West Michigan Anarchist Federation*.
all text has been sourced from *theanarchistlibrary.org*.

PAGE 4-9: ***What's Worth Dying For?***

Confronting the Return to Business as Usual.

Written by *Crimethinc*.

Crimethinc.com

PAGE 9-12: ***Coming Out of Isolation Stronger.***

Techniques for Coping With Isolation

Written by *Sean Swain*.

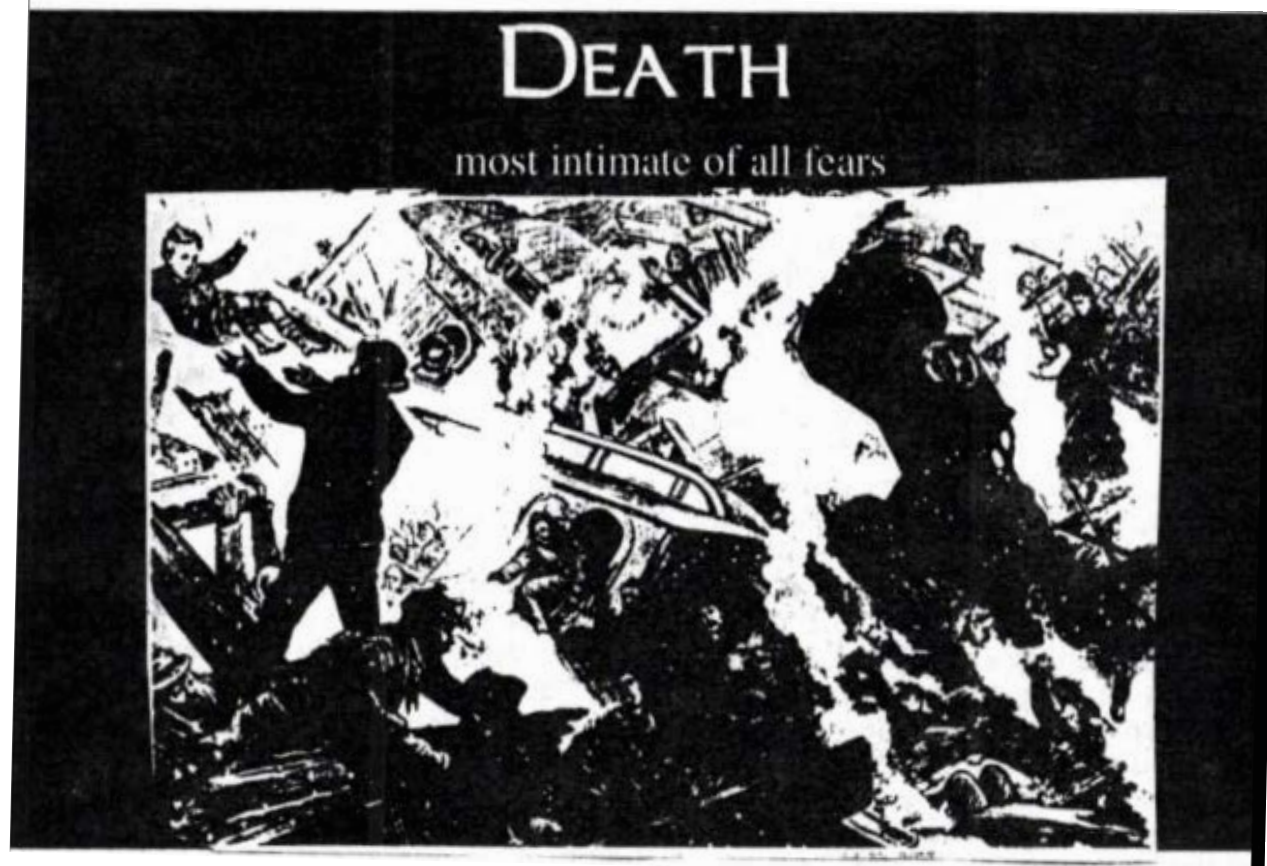
seanswain.noblogs.org

PAGE 13-15: ***Essential Work?***

The Exploitative Labor Divide

Written by *Prole Wave*.

prolewave.noblogs.org





What's Worth Dying for?

Confronting the Return to Business as Usual

by *Crimethinc*

Some things are worth risking death for. Perpetuating capitalism is not one of them. Going back to work—at risk of spreading COVID-19 or dying from it—so that the rich can continue accruing profits is not worth dying for.

If the problem is that people are suffering from the economy being shut down, the solution is clear. People were already suffering as a consequence of the economy running. The inequalities it created are one of the reasons some people are so desperate to go back to work—but in a profit-driven economy, the more we do business, the greater the inequalities become.

Practically all the resources people need exist already or could be produced by voluntary labor on a much safer basis, rather than forcing the poorest and most vulnerable to work for peanuts at great risk of spreading the virus. Rather than going back to business as usual, we need to abolish capitalism once and for all.

Why Do Some People Want to Let COVID-19 Spread?



Supporters of Donald Trump are calling for the economy to resume immediately at any cost: they are gambling that, like Rand Paul and Boris Johnson, **they won't be the ones to die.**

It's easy to understand why the beneficiaries of capitalism would welcome a pandemic that could kill off

a part of the unruly population. The distinction between "essential" and "inessential" workers has laid this bare for all to see: a large part of the population is no longer essential to industrial production and the logistics of international distribution. In a volatile world, increasingly affordable automation has reduced the angry and precarious to a mere liability for those who hold power.

We are not yet desensitized enough to this notion that those who govern us can speak openly about it, but there have been attempts on Fox News to shift to a discourse that takes millions of additional deaths in stride as a worthwhile price to pay to keep the economy functioning. Aren't we already desensitized to workplace accidents, air pollution, global climate change, and the like?

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. —A Christmas Carol, Charles Dickens.

But why would workers call for the reopening of the economy?

If the logical result of a large part of the population being superfluous to capitalism is a greater willingness among the ruling class to sacrifice our lives, it is not surprising that workers who cannot imagine anything other than capitalism would also be more willing to see other workers die.

Discussing the economic impact of the bubonic plague in Caliban and the Witch, Silvia Federici argues that *“the scarcity of labor which the epidemic caused shifted the power relation to the advantage of the lower classes.”* Federici meant to call attention to the powerful labor movements at the end of the Middle Ages, but today we can derive grim implications from this analysis. In the same way that bigots wrongly imagine that shutting down immigration will secure high-paying jobs for white citizens, they might conclude that the smaller the working class, the better the deal for the survivors.

This is the same segment of the working class that has always welcomed wars and championed unthinking obedience to authority—the ones who accepted white privilege as a bribe not to show solidarity with other workers. Lacking longstanding bonds or a deep-rooted tradition of collective resistance, workers in the United States have always been especially willing to play the lottery when it comes to questions of survival and economic advancement. Many conservative whites seem to have given up entirely on realizing the dream of economic security that their parents sought, settling instead for seeing others suffer even worse than them. As we argued early in the Trump era, Trump did not promise to redistribute wealth in the United States, but rather to redistribute violence.

This willingness to risk death in hopes of seeing other (likely less privileged) workers die might be disguised as conspiracy theories about the virus, or even as outright denial of its existence—but at base it is schadenfreude of the worst kind.

Defending Liberty?

Yet there is something else going on here, as well. To some extent, those who have protested the lockdown over the past few days have understood themselves as defending their “rights” as citizens—though, senselessly, they are serving as shills for the reigning authoritarian government of the United States to intensify the control via which it will go on exposing them to risk. Their slogan might as well be “Kill all the immigrants and prisoners—set yourself up as dictator in the name of freedom—just let me die of COVID-19 in the comfort of my boss's workplace!”

In this regard, in a confused way, the protests against the lockdown are part of a worldwide pushback against state authority in response to lockdown measures during the pandemic.

In Russia, demonstrations in response to the quarantine conditions have led to open confrontations, something rare indeed in Putin's totalitarian regime. In France, riots have broken out in several cities and suburbs, such as in Villeneuve-la-Garenne, in response to the police taking advantage of the lockdown to murder five people and injure many more, the latest victim being a motorcyclist ; during the ongoing repression, officers shot a 5-year-old girl with a LBD40 rubber bullet, fracturing her skull. In Peru, police have attacked crowds of impoverished refugees attempting to flee the capital to their home villages, having run out of resources during the lockdown.

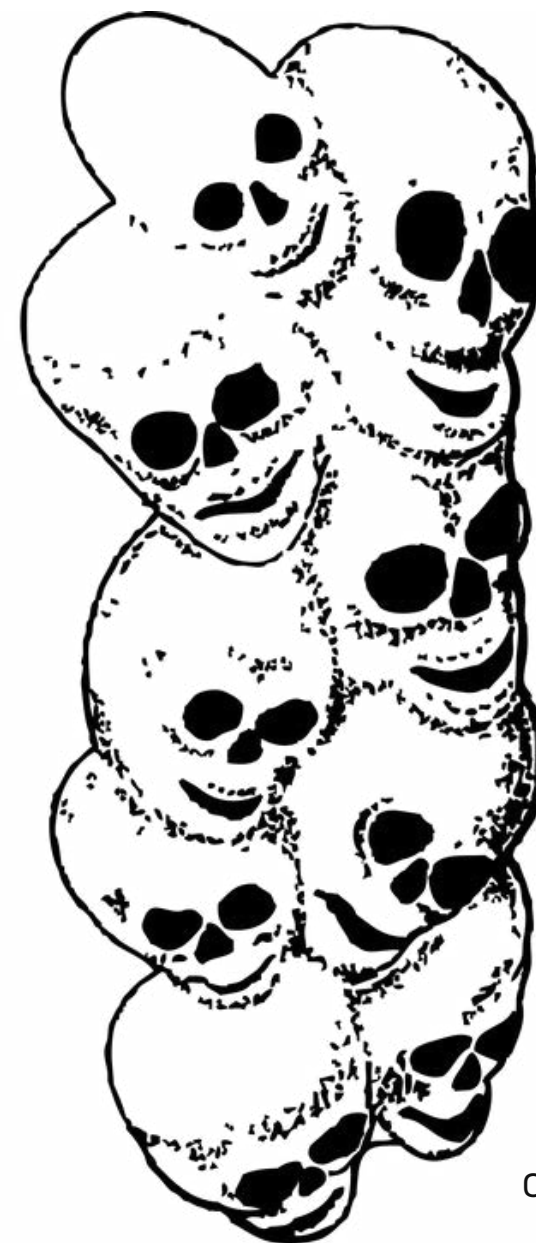
All of these examples show how poorly capitalist governments founded on coercive violence are equipped to maintain the sort of quarantines that can prevent a pandemic from spreading. In a society in which almost all wealth is concentrated in a few hands, in which state edicts are enforced by violence, a large part of the population lacks the resources to ride out a disaster like this in isolation. Most people who have maintained social distancing have done so out of concern for all humanity, at great cost to themselves, not because of the force employed against them by the state. State enforcement of the quarantine has been uneven, to say the least, with the governor of Florida declaring professional wrestling an essential

function and police around the world turning a blind eye to conservatives who flout the shutdown.

In the absence of a powerful movement against rising authoritarianism, people who are concerned about the power grabs of the state may join "protests" like the ones encouraging Trump to lift the lockdown. This is one of the hallmarks of an authoritarian society: that people have no options to choose from other than to support one of the factions of the government, all of whom are pursuing totalitarian visions. Rather than choosing between subjugation under a technocratic state and risking death to continue our economic subjugation, we have to pose another option: a grassroots struggle against capitalism and authoritarianism of all kinds.

To some extent, the protests in favor of reopening the economy are an astroturf phenomenon, aimed at expanding the Overton window in order to make it easier for Trump to restart the economy at whatever cost. Both Trump and his Democratic rivals share the same fundamental program. They only disagree about the details.

There was never any plan to protect us all from COVID-19. The Democrats just wanted to pace the impact of the virus on healthcare infrastructure for the sake of maintaining public order. They, too, take for granted that the capitalist market must continue—even as it impoverishes and kills us in greater and greater numbers. They won't revolt against Trump's ban on immigration any more than Trump will object to the



surveillance measures they aim to introduce. Supporting either party means accepting the arrival of a totalitarianism in which it will be taken for granted that workers will risk death simply for the privilege of letting capitalists earn a profit off their labor.

To protect our lives and the lives of our neighbors, to gain access to resources, to attain freedom—there is only one way to accomplish all of these things. We have to revolt.

Capitalism Is a Death Cult

Nothing matters to the market but profit. Forests only have value as timber or toilet paper; animals only have value as hot dogs or hamburgers. The precious, unrepeatable moments of your life only have value as labor hours determined by the imperatives of commerce.

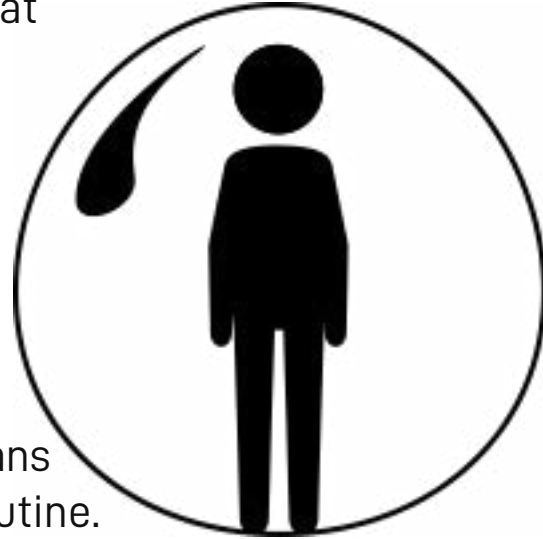
The market rewards landlords for evicting families, bosses for exploiting employees, engineers for inventing death machines. It separates mothers from their children, drives species into extinction, shuts down hospitals to open up privatized prisons. It reduces entire ecosystems to ash, spewing out smog and stock options. Left to itself, it will turn the whole world into a graveyard.

Some things are worth risking our lives for. Perpetuating capitalism is not one of them. If we have to risk our lives, let's risk them for something worthwhile, like creating a world in which no one has to risk death for a paycheck. Life for the market means death for us.

Coming Out of Isolation Stronger

By Anarchist Prisoner, *Sean Swain*

The latest concern that folks are expressing during this zombie apocalypse is their inability to cope with isolation and quarantine. We're just a few weeks into this thing and already folks are going a little bonkers. This is strange to me, given that I've spent years at a time in total and complete isolation. It's almost hard for me to fathom that someone wouldn't know how to cope in such an environment. So, this week is going to be something of an instructional video – only, without the video, and maybe not very instructive.



OK, first things first. You gotta stay mentally organized, and staying mentally organized means living in a way that's organized. You need a routine.

Routine is key to long-term segregation. You want to get up in the morning at the same time. Set an alarm. Get up, get out of bed, make the bed. It doesn't matter that you have nowhere to go. It doesn't matter that you're not leaving that living space. You get up at the same time and you make the bed, because the sleeping period is over. Create for yourself set times for eating your meals, or a small range of times for those meals to happen in. Set a time for showering or bathing and personal grooming. It doesn't matter that you're not going anywhere.

Laying in bed all day in the same sweater and underwear from last Tuesday is not mental organization. It's surrender. Yes, I'm talking to you. No, you, there. Yes, the one in the sweater and the underwear. Right.

Break up your day into chunks. Fill those chunks with activity. Maybe you like to read. Designate a period of your day for reading. Designate another part of your day for writing, another part for skyping and twitter and social

interaction. Doing this gives you routine, but it also gives you benchmarks as you travel through your day. You can say to yourself "I've gotten this done, at such-and-such a time, it's time to do X." You are now doing your time, your time is not doing you.

Your time will move faster, you'll get more accomplished. Which brings me to my next point: accomplishing. Each day will bring you multiple opportunities to fulfill goals. Get something written. Get something read. Go a certain time on your stationary bike. Dispose of the body of that annoying next-door neighbor... former neighbor. Just kidding. Don't kill your neighbor. There are security cameras everywhere. I digress.

The thing is: each day you meet some small goal, then another, then another. You take in calories, you move from activity to activity. Most importantly: you survive. Each day you end still breathing is a mission accomplished. You're not just writing emails or riding your stationary bike, you're fighting for your very survival, albeit in a mundane kind of way.

Physical exercise. The human body is a machine made for motion. So move. My captivity workout, I do sets of push-ups, crunches and squats, one set after another. It works major muscle groups, gets my heart pumping, gets me sucking oxygen, and helps me to think more clearly. It allows me to release tension. Now more than ever, that's important, not just for your survival, but for the survival of your annoying neighbor. So get exercise and whenever possible, in a way that's safe, try to get an hour of direct sunlight outdoors. Go outside and breathe deeply and feel sunlight on your face. It matters.

Now, if you're all alone, you can organize your day any way that you want. You can modify your routine at will until it works for you. But if you're not alone, you have to synthesize your routine with the lives of those around you. Urge them to adopt a routine. Socially, it helps keep the peace. You know what other people are doing at given chunks of the day, and they know what you're doing. You want periods of solitude and periods of social interaction, time set aside for your own projects and time for collective and communal activities.

Through the course of this, you're going to experience heightened anxiety. It's easy to dwell on your own situation and let the worry spiral out of control. It's easy. We all do it. So what you do, to get out of that spiral, you focus on the struggle of someone else. Get out of your own head. Contribute to someone else's plight. This isn't just some Mother Theresa kumbaya crap. It's not just some virtuous selflessness. It's a selfish act. It's motivated by your desire to further your own survival. If you get out of your own head and help someone, you're exiting that spiral of anxiety.

Some other tips: While it's good to do some planning for the future, force yourself to stay grounded in the now. Daydreaming about when this is over just makes the now suck worse. A little of that can go a long way. Also, be realistic about how long this is. Don't wake up every day thinking that we're all going to pour out into the streets like some flashmob dance routine. It ain't happening, probably for months. So get yourself into a comfortable routine, for months. This is your reality. It is what it is. Also, when that reality feels overwhelming, remind yourself that this is just temporary. It will pass. Even if it takes months, it doesn't take forever. Nothing is forever.

Don't forget, however bad you've got it, others less capable than you have gotten through longer chunks of time in far worse conditions. I did a year with virtually nothing, on starvation rations, with very little soap, locked in a space the size of a bathroom with another poor bastard. We were both idiots, and yet we both survived. You will too.

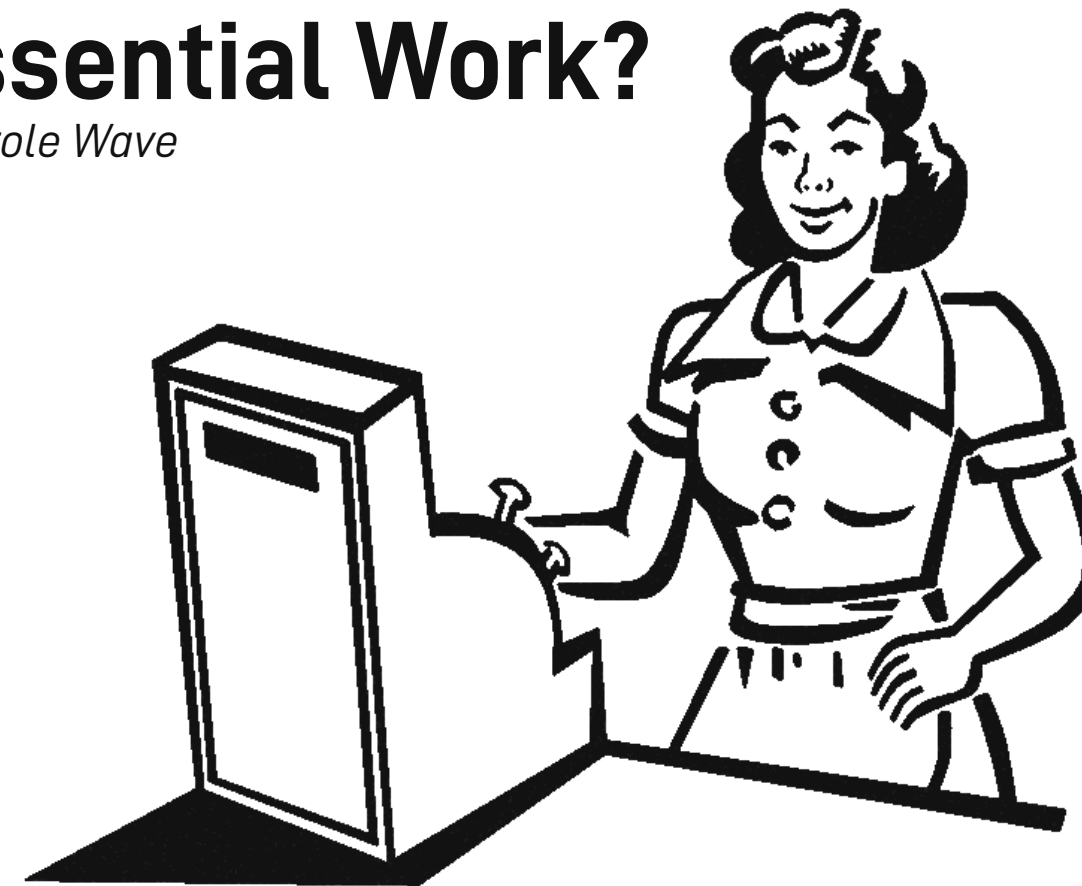
Resolve to survive this. Walk around your living space. Tell the walls: "You won't defeat me." Tell your couch: "You won't defeat me." Tell all your furnishings: "You won't defeat me." Then look in the mirror and tell yourself: "This won't defeat me." And mean it.

You have two choices, flat-out. You can survive this, or you can sit down on the curb, and sooner or later the dogs and the birds will eat you. It's your choice. I've made my choice. Hope I see you on the other side of this shit.

This is anarchist prisoner Sean Swain in exile from Ohio at Buckingham Correctional in Dillwyn, Virginia. If you're surviving, you are the resistance.

Essential Work?

By *Prole Wave*



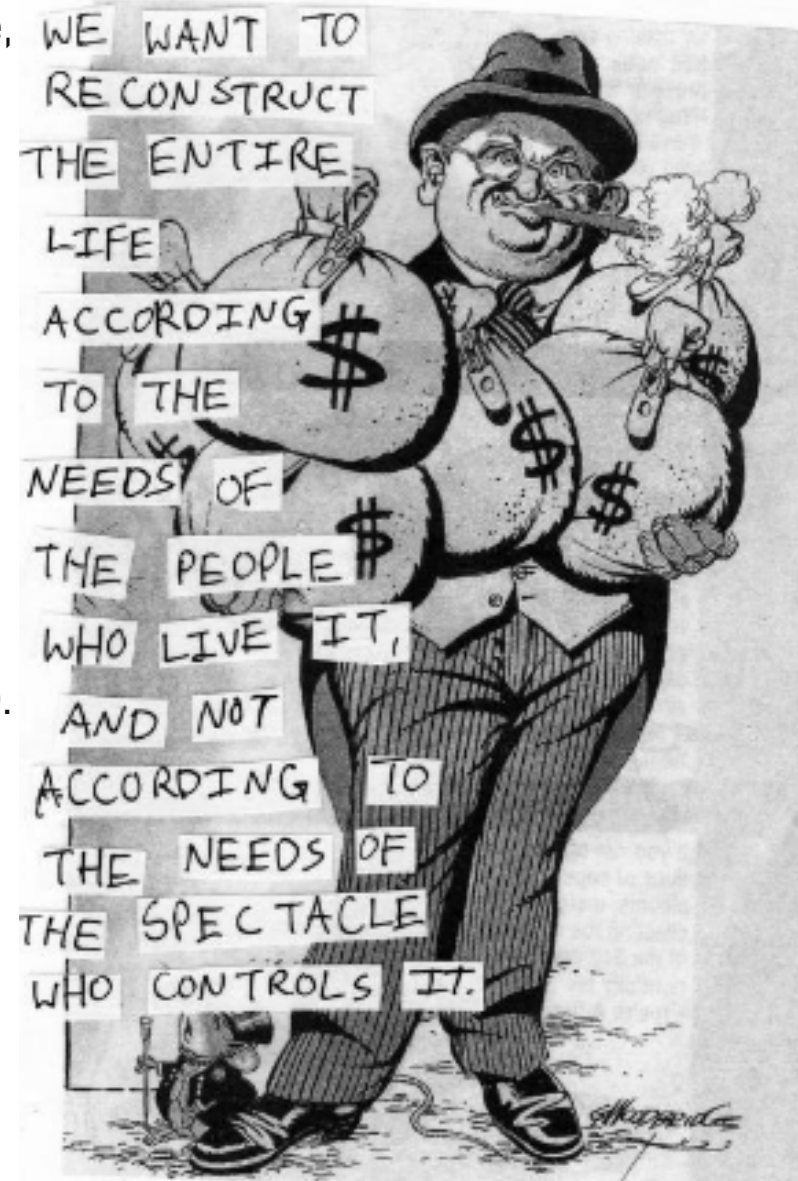
Splitting proles (workers) into the categories of 'essential workers' and 'non-essential workers' (if they're employed at all!) is a reflection of capitalist ideology. ALL wage labor is an imposition whether caring for the infirm or filing papers in some business firm. What is today highlighting the role of so-called 'essential workers' is the overwhelming risk that they are compelled to enter, via the wage and/or vocational notions, to keep the capitalist world humming along. But it is this non-communal, piecemeal and capitalist approach to confronting the pandemic which ends up over-burdening these 'essential workers' with the responsibility for resolving or providing logistical support for a crisis not of their making and of which they have very little say. As it stands, a largely wildcat strike wave is upon us (e.g. Instacart, Amazon, Whole Foods, sanitation workers, bus drivers, etc.). These workers are striking in rejection of their being sacrificed during these times of pandemic. They become another resource, another number deployed by bosses and the State and not a part of a communal social fabric combating something which can effect us all. Capitalist media abounds with stories of the hero-making myth of

many workers, but as we see more and more even these workers know when they're being swindled into believing their occupation is a lofty vocation that somehow exists above capitalist social relations.

Specifically waged labor now dubbed as essential is often deeply racialized & gendered under capitalism; its perpetuation would only further the naturalization of sexist & racist notions of who is naturally pre-disposed for which kind of labor. Some may feel smugly superior to their boss knowing that their labor is more 'essential' than that of others, but the fact of the matter is that ALL wage labor creates a social situation which only benefits those who profit.

What people are rightly noticing is that certain kinds of labor are indeed superfluous to human existence, something which communists & anarchists have never denied, but to simplistically champion the labor necessary for human existence under capitalism would merely reinforce the racialized & gendered division of labor, whether waged or unwaged. Suffice to say it also naturalizes the capitalist category of labor (where proles are reduced to their labor power). **We are more than workers.**

To re-imagine how we can communally care for each other is something that we must bear in mind and action, as communists & anarchists, if we care about overcoming



FAST WORKERS

DIE YOUNG



**TAKE A BREAK
WHENEVER
YOU NEED ONE**

what a racist & sexist capitalist system offers us. Those dubbed as 'essential workers' cannot pay rent with our well-wishing, cannot be protected from infection with thank-yous or attend to their families with while being forced to work interminable hours.

The beginning of truly communal care is beyond the realm of capitalist work. Otherwise care and health work will be relegated to the same over-burdened workers. It is essential that we support employed proles on strike, as well as those who may not have the capacity to go on strike, by not crossing the picket-line and not by not buying into capitalist ideology that says their labor must not stop. It is clear the State and capitalists have no real plan to get out of this manifold crisis that does not include primarily saving their capitalist economy. The transformation of this social crisis into a crisis for the capitalists, through communist measures, is what will help us truly care for each other and abolish capitalist social relations once and for all.



This booklet contains three writings on the Covid-19 pandemic from an anarchist perspective.

What's Worth Dying For by ***Crimethinc*** offers an analysis on the organized demands and demonstrations advocating the ending the quarantine. Crimethinc examines whether preserving the capitalist status quo is something worth risking millions of lives for.

"Some things are worth risking death for. Perpetuating capitalism is not one of them. Going back to work—at risk of spreading COVID-19 or dying from it—so that the rich can continue accruing profits is not worth dying for."

Coming Out of Isolation Stronger by ***Sean Swain*** gives advice and tips on how to use time spent in solitude productively. Sean Swain offers his personal insight and techniques that he has used. Sean is an anarchist prisoner who has been incarcerated since 1991, spending the last eight of those years held in a supermax facility.

"You have two choices, flat-out. You can survive this, or you can sit down on the curb, and sooner or later the dogs and the birds will eat you. It's your choice. I've made my choice. Hope I see you on the other side of this shit."

Essential Work? by ***Prole Wave*** examines the new categorization of "essential workers" which spawned during the pandemic, which they argue allows for further exploitation of already vulnerable workers.

"What is today highlighting the role of so-called 'essential workers' is the overwhelming risk that they are compelled to enter, via the wage and/or vocational notions, to keep the capitalist world humming along. "

Formatting, design, production, and distribution by the ***West Michigan Anarchist Federation***. To request physical copies contact: wmaf@riseup.net. To find other WMAF publications visit: facebook.com/wmafed.

