
John Holloway

A Cascade of Angers. My Covid 19 Fantasy

The doors open. You can feel the pent-up energy even before the faces appear. The lockdown is over. A dam is burst. Out pours a torrent of angers, anxieties, frustrations, dreams, hopes, fears. It is as if we cannot breathe.

We¹ have all been locked in. Cut off physically from the outside world, we have been trying to understand what is happening. A strange virus has changed our lives, but where did it come from? It first appeared in Wuhan, China, but the more we read, we realise that it could have been anywhere. Experts have been warning for years of the likelihood of a pandemic, even if they did not understand how quickly it might spread. It is not that it comes from any particular place, it comes rather from the destruction of our relationship with the natural environment. From the industrialisation of agriculture, the destruction of the peasantry in all the world, the growth of cities, the destruction of the habitats of wild animals, the commercialisation of these animals for profit. And we learn from the experts that if there is not a radical change in our relation to other forms of life, then it is quite likely that more pandemics will follow. It is a warning: get rid of capitalism or advance on the road to extinction. Get rid of capitalism: a fantasy indeed. And there grows in us a fear and an anger and maybe even a hope that there might be some way we could do it.

And as the lockdown proceeds, our attention shifts, moves beyond the illness to what we are told are the economic consequences. We are moving into the worst economic crisis since at least the 1930s, the worst for 300 years in Britain, they say. Over a hundred million people will be tip-

¹ “We” is always a question. We just do not know how people are emerging from the enclosure. The size of the BLM movement in all the world has surprised us. The riots in Stuttgart on 21 June 2020 have surprised us. More than ever, “we” is a question, an openness to being surprised in a world we do not know.

ped into extreme poverty, the World Bank tells us.² Another lost decade for Latin America. Millions and millions of people unemployed in all the world. People starving, people begging, more crime, more violence, hopes broken, dreams shattered. There will be no fast recovery, any recovery is likely to be fragile and weak. And we think: all this because we had to stay at home for a couple of months? And we know it cannot be so. Of course we will be a bit poorer if people stop working for a couple of months, but millions and millions unemployed, people dying of starvation? Surely not. A break for a couple of months cannot have that effect. Just the contrary, we should go back refreshed and full of energy to do all the things that need to be done. And we think a bit more and we realise that of course the economic crisis is not the consequence of the virus, though it may well have been triggered by it. In the same way as the pandemic was predicted, the economic crisis was predicted even more clearly. For thirty years or more, the capitalist economy has literally been living on borrowed money: its expansion has been based on credit. A house of cards ready to collapse. It almost collapsed, with the most awful effects, in 2008, but a renewed and enormous expansion of credit propped it up again. The economic commentators knew it could not last. “God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time”: the financial crisis of 2008 was the flood, but the next time, which would not be long delayed, it would be fire.³ This is what we are living: the fire of capitalist crisis. So much misery, hunger, shattered hopes, not because of a virus, but in order to restore capital to profitability.

And what if we just got rid of the system based on profit? What if we just went out with our renewed energy and did what needs to be done without worrying about profit: clean the streets, build hospitals, make bicycles, write books, plant vegetables, play music, whatever. No unemployment, no starvation, no broken dreams. And the capitalists? Either hang them from the nearest lamppost (always a temptation) or just forget about them. Better just forget about them. Another fantasy, but more

² World Bank. 2020. Global Economic Prospects, June 2020. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33748> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO

³ See the last chapter of Martin Wolf's *The Shifts and the Shocks*, Penguin Press, New York, 2014: “Conclusion: Fire Next Time”.

than a fantasy: an urgent necessity. And our fears and our angers and our hopes grow inside us.⁴

And there is more, much much more, to feed our angers in the lockdown. The pandemic has been a huge unmasking of capitalism. It stands exposed as rarely before. In so many ways. The enormous difference in the experience of lockdown, to start with, depending on how much space you have, whether you have a garden, whether you have a second home that you can retreat to. Related to this, the hugely different impact of the virus on rich and poor, something that has become clearer and clearer with the advance of the disease. Connected to that, the great difference in the rates of infection and death among whites and blacks. And the appalling inadequacy of medical services after thirty years of underfunding. And the terrible incompetence of so many states. And the glaring expansion of surveillance and police and military powers in nearly all countries. And the discrimination in educational provision between those who have access to internet and those who do not. And the exposure of so many women to situations of terrible violence. All this, and much more, at the same time as the owners of Amazon and Zoom and so many other technological companies reap amazing profits and the stock market, buoyed by the action of the central banks, continue with the barefaced transfer of wealth from poor to rich. And our angers grow and our fears and our desperation and our determination that it must not be so, that we **MUST NOT LET THIS NIGHTMARE COME TRUE**.

And then the doors are opened and the dam is burst. Our angers and hopes burst out on the streets. We hear of George Floyd, we hear his last words, "I cannot breathe". The words go round and round in our heads. We do not have the knee of a murdering policeman on our neck, but we too cannot breathe. We cannot breathe because capitalism is killing us. We feel violence, violence burstin out of us.⁵ But that is not our way, it is

⁴ I am not suggesting that we should hang capitalists from lampposts. But there is an enormous and frightening anger in the world, not surprisingly so. Our thoughts and our fantasies have to claim this anger as ours, our justified anger against the system that is destroying us and against those who profit from and intensify that destruction.

⁵ See Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Time Come": "now yu si fire burning in mi eye/ smell badness pan mi breat/ feel violence, violence, /burstin outta mi;/ look out!" *Dread Beat and Blood*, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, London, 1975.

theirs. Yet our angers-hopes, hopes-rages have to breathe, have to breathe. And they do, in the massive demonstrations against police brutality and racism in all the world, in the throwing of the statue of the slave trader, Edward Colston, into the river in Bristol, in the creation of the Capital Hill Autonomous Zone in Seattle, in the burning of the police precinct in Minneapolis, in so many fists raised to the sky.

And the torrent of angers-hopes-fears-hungers-dreams-frustrations goes cascading onwards, from one anger to another, living each anger, respecting each anger and overflowing on to the next. The angers burning inside us are not just against police brutality, not just against racism, not just against the slavery that created the basis for capitalism, but also against the violence against women and all forms of sexism, and so the enormous marches of 8M surge again singing. The Chileans come out on the streets again and continue their revolution. And the people of Kurdistan push back the states that cannot tolerate the idea of a stateless society. And the people of Hong Kong inspire all the Chinese in their repudiation of the mockery of communism: no more communism, they cry, let's communize. Communism is not a noun to be imposed but a verb to be created and recreated. And the Zapatistas create the world of many worlds. And as the peasants leave their slums and go back to the land and start to heal the relationship with other forms of life, so do urban dwellers set out to start growing urban seeds, to have the beekeepers harvest honey and to create an urban space worth living for all, breaking down the city-countryside divide. And the bats and wild animals go back to their habitats. And the capitalists crawl back to their natural habitats, under the stairs. And labor, capitalist labor, that awful machine that generates richness and poverty and destroys our lives, comes to an end and we start to do what we want to do, we start to create a different world based on the mutual recognition of dignities. And then there will be no lost decade and no unemployed and no hundreds of millions pushed into extreme poverty and no one starving. And then, yes, then we can breathe.