

# **Anarchism and COVID-19**

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## **Capitalism Is Failing to Provide Adequate Healthcare**

The COVID-19 pandemic is ravaging the Earth, its death toll high and its danger warned against by many people, including José Ameal Peña, the last known survivor of the 1918 Spanish flu (Kassam). Capitalism has never been good at providing healthcare, and even the meager system which we have today in the U.S. in which certain companies provide healthcare for their workers for unreasonable costs only came about due to businesses realizing that they had to or else they may lose necessary worker support (“Health care in the United States § History”).

Time and time again, capitalism and in particular the free market have failed time and time again to provide adequate healthcare for all those who need it most. The U.S. is the richest country on Earth, and yet the system here is barely holding together. The coronavirus has only uncovered capitalism’s inherent flaws a bit more. For comparison, look to socialist Vietnam. For the record, I am very against the Marxist-Leninist authoritarian system of state capitalism in place in Vietnam. Still, it is a developing third-world country bordering China, where the outbreak first occurred, yet it is holding together far better than the United States. As of March 16, Vietnam’s infection rate was one in 1.68 million, with zero total deaths; and the U.S.’s infection rate was one in almost 94 thousand, with 68 total deaths. (That number is obviously much, much higher now.) Compare, now, the GDP per capita of the two countries: Vietnam’s is about 2300 USD; the U.S.’s is about 59,500 USD. Why, then, is there this much of a disparity between the two countries’ infection rates? Because in Vietnam, adequate healthcare is provided to all, not just those who can afford to pay (Emeric Johnson).

## **Capitalism Is Failing to Protect Against Hoarding**

Ever since the coronavirus outbreak became an international health crisis, there has been a rampant problem of hoarding toilet paper (Raymond), hand sanitizer (Hains), and other such basics. According to economist Jim Luke, toilet paper shelves have been made empty due to the fact that people usually have a very predictable pattern when it comes to buying the stuff, once every two weeks or so, so stores in turn typically only put a few days’ worth on the shelves at any given time (Raymond).

The problem, however, still can’t be fixed just by simply stocking up more, as there’s still limited space on shelves. The rational response on the part of businesses, rather, would be to: keep more stocked up in the back; lower the price of the products due to the increased demand; and, most importantly, ration the products. But, as is the way with capitalists, not everybody in control of such things has acted rationally. Instead, in order to squeeze the last bit of money out of the suffering customers and workers, companies have used tactics such as price gouging (Phillips), and rationing is rare.

## **Capitalist Policies Caused the Outbreak in the First Place**

SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID-19, was most likely first transmitted to humans at the Huanan Market in Wuhan, China. The Huanan Market is a wet market, where live animals are slaughtered for human consumption. The conditions for the animals are horrible, being kept in small cages stacked on top of each other, fluids from animals above flowing down onto those

below. Unlike some wet markets, however, the Huanan Market specializes in the buying and selling of wildlife, such as turtles, snakes, bats, and pangolins (“How wildlife trade is linked to coronavirus” 01:33–04:14).

The reason Huanan Market and others like it exist in China is because of a long story that begins with the 1970s famine. The authoritarian Marxist-Leninist-Maoist government, which controlled all food trade, was unable to feed all of its people adequately. So in 1978, in order to keep their populace alive, they gave control to the private sector (i.e. capitalism). Though this undoubtedly did good, it also created a capitalist class divide in the food industry, with major agricultural companies capitalizing on popular livestock and crops, while small farms also popped up so that proletarian farmers could sustain themselves. These poorer farmers began to catch and raise wildlife, as it was more accessible than selling the more popular products in the competitive industry (“How wildlife trade is linked to coronavirus” 03:14–04:21).

Then, in 1988, the Chinese government enacted a law which encouraged the domestication and breeding of wildlife. Thus, the trade of wildlife quickly left the hands of small, proletarian farms, and was picked up by big business, becoming a massive industry. A lot more wild animals began to be caught, bred, and sold, the bigger populations creating a higher risk of the spread of disease. More animals also became involved, further increasing the number of viruses in each of these industrial farms. When this all came to a head for the first time in the 2002 SARS outbreak, China quickly shut down its wet markets and banned wildlife farming, but these bans were mostly lifted barely a few months later. As a consequence, almost the same exact thing has now been repeated. Keep in mind, the vast majority of people in China do not consume wildlife; that “luxury” is reserved for the rich and powerful—the capitalist class, which the Chinese government favored over the rest of its people (“How wildlife trade is linked to coronavirus” 04:21–07:31).

As you can see, it was the capitalist class divide, the governmental favoring of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat, which led to this pandemic in the first place. This is also one of many reasons that China should not be considered a socialist state, let alone a communist one; the “People’s Republic” of China’s economy is really just state capitalist.

## **How Would Pandemics Be Dealt With in an Anarchist World?**

Everything I said above has been said before. Many people already realize that much of the suffering caused by COVID-19 is, in reality, blood on the hands of capitalism and capitalists alone. But, ignoring the section immediately above this one, if the coronavirus broke out in my ideal anarcho-communist world, how would it be dealt with?

To begin with, let us define anarcho-communism.

According to Wikipedia, anarcho-communism is a “political philosophy and anarchist school of thought which advocates the abolition of the state, capitalism, wage labour and private property (while retaining respect for personal property, along with collectively-owned items, goods and services) in favor of common ownership of the means of production, direct democracy, and a horizontal network of workers’ councils with production and consumption based on the guiding principle ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. Some forms of anarcho-communism such as insurrectionary anarchism are strongly influenced by egoism and radical individualism, believing anarcho-communism to be the best social system for the realiza-

tion of individual freedom. Most anarcho-communists view anarcho-communism as a way of reconciling the opposition between the individual and society” (“Anarcho-communism.”)

So, in my ideal anarchist world, this is how COVID-19 specifically would be dealt with (other pandemics’ solutions you can infer):

Step #1. Wet markets most likely wouldn’t exist in an anarcho-communist society.

Step #2. Industrial-sized wet markets definitely wouldn’t exist in an anarcho-communist society.

Step #3. Universal healthcare would be guaranteed, no questions asked. I, unlike some comrades, advocate for some small amount of centralization, but only enough for the bare necessities, such as easy-to-organize universal healthcare. (Of course, my ideal universal healthcare system would still be worker-owned and -controlled and no individual government, group, or person could change how it functioned; group action would be required.)

Step #4. There would be enough medical professionals, such as doctors and nurses, to give the appropriate time and treatment to every single patient. I believe that in an anarchist society, where people are raised from birth to understand concepts such as mutual aid and community support, and where people would have complete freedom in choosing their own profession, many more people than in our society today would discover they have a passion for providing health-care.

Step #4. People raised in an anarchist society would all understand the need for and purpose of self-isolation and social distancing without it having to be forced on them.

Step #5. People raised in an anarchist society would all understand the negatives associated with hoarding.

Step #6. If someone did still try to hoard, they would be stopped from doing so by their community, which would in all likelihood collectively decide to ration all products which are on short supply.

Step #7. There would be no organizations dictating that workers must come in to work. Instead, those who choose to work during this pandemic would be doing so because they understood the significance of their job and that they needed to come in or else countless could die. Plus, people with those truly essential jobs would be in it because it’s what they care about, not just for the money.

Et cetera.

I hope this essay has given you a new and better understanding of the situation, and of what the anarchist response to it would be. Thank you for reading, and salutations.

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