

An Anarchist and Filipino Diaspora Perspective on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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It has been 2–3 months since the COVID-19 virus had spread across the world infecting hundreds of thousands and killing tens of thousands, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a pandemic. Within that span of time, places of work and schools here and abroad have shut down, effectively leaving people at risk of losing their jobs and becoming evicted from their homes.

The bosses are forcing workers—especially those working in supermarkets, warehouses, factories, retail etc.—to continue to work causing potential spread of infection. Many of which don't have health insurance to cover the treatment of COVID-19 should they be infected. Even those imprisoned are coerced to work for little to no wages to produce masks and hand sanitizers. They are trapped in prisons that are incubators for infection which will only exacerbate this pandemic. All this in the name of saving the economy, which of course is on the verge of heading into a recession. (By the time you're reading this, we've probably arrived to a recession.)

The Trump administration claims to be handling the situation perfectly. If this is true, then why are there so many accounts of doctors, nurses and other health care workers claiming that they are running dangerously low on personal protective equipment (PPE) such as N95 masks needed to protect themselves while tending to those infected?¹ Like many of us in the Filipino diaspora in the so-called United States, many of our loved ones are health care workers, specifically nurses and even caregivers. They, themselves are on the frontlines of this pandemic. Each day, these nurses enter the hospitals and nursing homes to tend to the infected and the elderly who are at higher risk of infection. Without proper equipment, they risk bringing the virus home and potentially infect their families.

Not only that, Trump's calling of the COVID-19 virus, the "Chinese Virus" has fueled racist attacks on the Asian American community. Reports of hate crimes against Asian-Americans² have arisen here and elsewhere in the world,³ some of which the victims are members of the Filipino diaspora.⁴ Our concern as Asian Americans is not only just the threat of the virus but also racism and xenophobia.

Time and time again has shown that the state is incompetent in times of crisis, only to bail out the capitalists and bureaucrats while leaving ordinary people in the dust. That is a given for us anarchists. But we shouldn't despair. Rather than relying on the state and corporations to save us, many of us across the country and around the world have formed autonomous mutual aid projects,⁵ from volunteering to help gather groceries and other supplies for the elderly and immunocompromised and pitching in financial support for others.

Not only that, workers in big grocery and retail chains like Whole Foods, Amazon and Instacart have planned on walking out of their jobs in protest for better safety equipment and paid sick leave.⁶ Even General Electric factory workers are walking out of their jobs manufacturing jet engines and opting to manufacture much needed ventilators to help in the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ On April 1st, there will also be tenants across the country who will organize and participate in a rent strike.⁸ Many tenants are out of jobs due to the pandemic cannot pay rent and yet the landlords still insist on collecting rent from them. How typical of a landlord to exploit the vulnerable especially in the midst of the pandemic! We will have none of this!

It is quite obvious that we hold the power to keep this system in place; we also have the power to destroy this system. A return to normal is unthinkable because it is this normalcy that brought this situation on us to begin with. Solidarity to everyone organizing against the state and capital and against this pandemic!

Another world is possible.

¹ Diana Swift. "Survey Shows Just How Dire PPE Shortages Are at Many Hospitals." *Medscape*. March 29, 2020, <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/927728>

² Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil. "Asian Americans report over 650 racist acts over last week, new data says." *NBC News*. March 27, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-report-nearly-500-racist-acts-over-last-week-n1169821>

³ "List of incidents of xenophobia and racism related to the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic." *Wikipedia*. n.d. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_incidents_of_xenophobia_and_racism_related_to_the_2019%E2%80%9320_coronavirus_pandemic

⁴ Brittany Wong. "For Asian Americans, There Are Two Pandemics: COVID-19 And Daily Bigotry." *Huffpost*. March 26, 2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/asian-american-racism-coronavirus_l_5e790a71c5b63c3b64954eb4

⁵ "COVID-19 Mutual Aid." *It's Going Down*. n.d. <https://itsgoingdown.org/c19-mutual-aid/>

⁶ Julia Arciga. "Whole Foods Workers to Strike After Amazon, Instacart Employees Walk Out." *The Daily Beast*. March 30, 2020. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/whole-foods-workers-to-strike-after-amazon-instacart-employees-walk-out>

⁷ Edward Ongweso Jr. "General Electric Workers Launch Protest, Demand to Make Ventilators." *Vice*. March 31, 2020. https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/y3mjxg/general-electric-workers-walk-off-the-job-demand-to-make-ventilators

⁸ "Between Eviction, Infection, And Refusal: What You Need To Know About The April 1st Rent Strike & How To Plug In." *It's Going Down*. March 27, 2020. <https://itsgoingdown.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-rent-strike/>

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