



FHM

Politics

The Coronavirus Pandemic Demonstrates the Failures of Capitalism

This op-ed argues that the coronavirus outbreak has shown us how little capitalism has done for so many people in the U.S. — and that other ways of living and working are possible.

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I took a free dance class from Debbie Allen the other day. I also FaceTimed with some childhood friends I hadn't talked to in a while. Getting laid off during a pandemic isn't the best thing that could have happened, but I'm coping.

If you lose your job and don't come from money, there's an instant fear of how you'll be able to survive. It's never really an ideal time to be out of work, but right now, with U.S. economists **saying that we are officially in a recession**, it's particularly unnerving. And with a **dangerous, highly contagious virus** spreading throughout the country, I find myself both without a steady income and without health insurance — great!

This pandemic has brought into sharper relief what some of us have always known to be true: **Capitalism**, and the culture of hierarchy that props it up, is extremely screwed up. Rich celebrities like Kris Jenner are getting **tested** for coronavirus without having symptoms, while regular people who do show symptoms **have a tough time getting tests**. A journalist at a White House press briefing **asked** President Donald Trump, “How are non-symptomatic professional athletes getting tests while others are waiting in line and can't get them? Do the well-connected go to the front of the line?” The president responded by saying, “No, I wouldn't say so. But perhaps that's been the story of life.”

Trump's right about one thing: It is definitely the story of capitalism. And while we are still reeling from the shock to our everyday lives, we should look at some of these huge changes to our routines as a possible — even hopeful — new normal.

Selling your labor in a capitalist marketplace so you don't end up on the street is horrible and unnatural, and we shouldn't have to exist this way. While many of us have long questioned the idea of working our lives away to pad a company's bottom line, the pandemic has given us a glimpse of what an anti-capitalist society could actually look like. This isn't to romanticize what is happening — after all, **people are gravely ill and dying every day**. But if we are to fully examine the crisis for what it is, then we must recognize that COVID-19 is not the only virus that must be destroyed. We also have to confront capitalism and the world that sustains it.

Combating the disease has normalized working from home, instead of slogging through daily commutes, **for those who have the privilege to do so**. It convinced **some Republicans to support** some form of universal basic income, and caused some companies to temporarily bring down their paywalls. Adobe is **offering free two-month subscriptions to help struggling freelancers**, proving that open source of expensive software is possible. And without sounding like an **eco-fascist**, the environment is perhaps getting a chance to recover while humans are forced to pause our ever-growing carbon output — the starkest articulation yet of why we should never return to our “normal” pre-virus life.

Photos **uploaded** from people in Venice show clearer canal waters, and Stanford University researchers **reported** that the halt of day-to-day business in China has dramatically reduced air pollution. We know we need to reduce greenhouse emissions, but watching the climate crisis unfold slowly before us wasn't enough to make the world pause. We now have a moment to consider **what a rapid global response to the climate emergency** would look like — how we could build a society that completely transforms our social order toward something that is in equilibrium with the biosphere and gives to each according to their needs.

The realm of possibility has shifted since the last financial crisis. Legislators are **taking steps** to put evictions on hold, and federal regulators are **ordering** a break on mortgage payments. The reaction by the state is far different in that way than it was in 2008, but with proposals to **spend billions of dollars bolstering the private sector**, the protection of private interest over public interest remains the same. And ultimately, **the grand or so that the Trump administration is offering to send to all of us** in the next month amounts to crumbs. As millennials and Gen Z'ers, **our lives have been shaped by one crisis after another**, and an array of trends, from the worsening climate crisis to **increased workforce automation**, suggest that things will keep getting worse.

So our current way of living must end. But we must start with the practical. My rent is due in less than two weeks. How does this current crisis offer a chance to

reflect on the longer-term crisis of affordable housing, and what can we do now to build a movement to force change?

That's where **mutual aid** and community organizing comes in. For years, communities, organizations, and activists have petitioned legislators and local representatives to do something about the national housing crisis. It's been mostly for naught. Last year in Los Angeles, where I live, nearly 59,000 **people** were counted to be homeless. Rising rents have priced out families from communities they grew up in. This past year, the city allowed for a 4% rent **increase** for those living in rent-controlled units, and for some, a breaking point has clearly been reached. Even as the federal government discusses short-term housing relief, Reclaiming Our Homes has **attempted to reclaim 12 houses outright** in Los Angeles County, an inspiring show of direct action in a time of crisis.

What the coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated is that our cheapskate government can provide far more in social programs than it has. We **could afford life-changing, comprehensive legislation** like the Green New Deal and Medicare for all. No one should need to pay for housing or have full-time employment in order to receive health care benefits. This is an abominable way to live. We must demand more and dream for better for ourselves and the planet.

Trying to protect our health during a pandemic is more than enough. We shouldn't also have to worry about surviving capitalism.

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