

## THE “ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN” FRIENDS OF THE STATE AND SCIENCE

*“In the face of the continuing horror that has people **struggling for breath**, many radicals continue to deny the dangers associated with the virus. Contagious diseases differ from other diseases in a very substantial way: they are by definition **social**. They presuppose contact, co-existence, a **community** – even an alienated one. What the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has shown us, however, is that we are in a historical period where social relations are perceived as the **burdensome void** between solid, closed-up and inviolable **individuals**. Individualities that are self-determined, non-negotiable, non-contagious.”*

The above quotation is from the introduction of Antithesi / Cognord’s text, *The Reality of Denial and the Denial of Reality* (September/December 2021, from now on RDDR). This text exemplifies the ideology of biological reductionism through which many people in the so-called far left/radical milieu perceived the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic the previous years. These people simplistically perceive social relations as physical contact between biological organisms that can cause... infection. This biological conception of sociality and by extension of solidarity -which became a strictly sanitary approach to the social question- constitutes the core of the argumentation on which this still current gem is based. “*No one has a personal relationship with a contagious disease*”, we are sternly reminded by its authors. That’s not hot news: everything -from human cognition to our constant contact with viruses- is the result of inevitable (material and formal) social metabolism and it includes biological mechanisms of social transmission. Indeed, formal social metabolism is of particular importance since no one in a society dominated by alienated capitalist relations can have “pure” personal/individual or social *relationships* with anything or anyone avoiding the mediation of the commodity-form, the money-form or the spectacle. And no one can avoid confronting the *specifically capitalist distinctions* of “contamination” and “purity” these alienated capitalist relations entail. Would it change anything if we said that we cannot have a “personal relationship” to the question of “public security” or “public order”, for example? Aren’t both of these two issues also “collective” and “social” ones? Aren’t both of these two issues, like everything else about capitalist society, also mediated by the divisions and pseudo-unifications imposed by the capitalist social relation? Note also that nowhere in their text one can find the scientific, production and exchange processes of this specific social relation held responsible for the origin and spread of SARS-CoV-2. According to the authors, “*mutations of viruses are part and parcel of their natural development as viruses*” that simply “*land [sic] on a historically contingent period*”!

The abstract contrast between “individual freedom” and “collective freedom”/“collective class need” Antithesi and Cognord establish is thus false for the reason that it bypasses the *socially imposed mediations* in the individual’s relation to herself; we are talking about impositions on the body or freedom of movement and mediations that reproduce the capitalist relation, individualize and subjectify individuals in particular ways, and invalidate antagonistic individuality. The starting point of any movement that aspires to question the capitalist relation starts from the level at which it is first perceived, the individual, since “*the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all*”. That’s the alphabet of radical theory, if we are not mistaken, or not? But the only individuality the authors acknowledge is the bourgeois individuality. Therefore, it is no coincidence that despite their collectivist grandiloquence, in a footnote that has been omitted in the English version of their text they introduce the capitalist-inspired notion of “individual responsibility” through the back door: “*We have already referred at length to the question of the impossibility of a personal relationship with a pandemic. But this approach should not be understood as a complete elimination of any notion of individual responsibility. The*

*functional use of this ideological approach made by the state apparatus... does not mean that subjects who are ostentatiously indifferent to those around them have no share of responsibility.*" The "subjects who are ostentatiously indifferent to those around them" are those who struggled equally against lockdowns, remote education, mandatory vaccination and austerity measures! We do, however, know from the struggles of the proletariat throughout history that the invention of the ways in which antagonistic individuality is articulated in a class community of struggle has as its starting point the *resistance* to direct or indirect oppression and not the *conformity* to state and capitalist plans which is served up to us here camouflaged by these "radical" experts as the new "communist" normative gospel.

What we say in the two preceding paragraphs should logically belong to the elementary prerequisites of a critique that wants to call itself "radical". The absence of these prerequisites is not the only problem with RDDR. Even more infuriating is the pompous and authoritarian style with which they wag a finger at anyone who doubts their supposedly self-evident interpretation of concepts such as "public health", "collective class needs", "solidarity", "freedom" and, above all, the one and only practical "truth" that pervades their text, namely that we should scrupulously observe the state sanitary orders which they simply call "effective, protective, horizontal measures"!

The fact that the terms and concepts that the capitalist state itself has used extensively in its propaganda -we could mention, for example, among other things, the state's substitution of a socially and historically determined multifactorial concept of illness by a mechanistic, virocentric one, according to which a disease has a single cause- were not deconstructed cannot be attributed exclusively to the authors' inadequate analytical method; the fact that the world is presented by the authors standing on its head, through an arrogant, almost prosecuting, discourse, can mainly be attributed to *the retreat of the movement and its recuperation by the state* (a process of statisation) even before -let alone after- the election of the Syriza government in 2015. The proximity of parts of the radical milieu to this new type of party and the re-legitimation of the state and its functions during the Syriza's term of office played in 2020 an important role for the Left in seeing the state as the protector of "public health", even the "defender of reason". How successfully has the state been re-legitimised in Greece is revealed at one point in their text where the authors claim that *"the deniers [i.e. those who have doubts about the sanitary party line] have essentially created the space for the state to present itself as a responsible and rational exponent of the "general interest" against irrational individualism"*, apparently referring to how the state was presented *in their own eyes*. Contrary to Antithesi/Cognord's way of thinking, let us be serious: it is a complete and brazen reversal of reality to say that it is the questioning of the state's management of the pandemic that has strengthened the state apparatus and not, on the contrary, the trust it has enjoyed by "radicals" like them in practice in the past three years!

Their misleading reference here and there to state management as "destructive" has only the meaning of a complaint: the state did not apply its mandates with the consistency they

would like - and in a magical way, without repression!<sup>1</sup> The capitalist state is presented in their text as the rational power which, despite its U-turns, is obliged, in the interests of a healthy labour force, to take collective protective measures for the “common good”. While they use an analysis that at first sight resembles ours, namely the analysis of the contradictory functions of the state (accumulation and legitimation),<sup>2</sup> and even though they feel obliged to refer -in order not to be considered “Mitsotakis' minions”- to the disciplining of labour power as a necessary component of these functions, however, they are unable to show us why and in what way disciplining was attempted through the pandemic measures. They think that disciplining and reproduction of the working class “lost its meaning” and this is due to their inability to understand what happened during 2020-2022. First, “proletarians” did not “get sick and die en masse” because of covid 19 as they claim - there was excess mortality only in the winter of 2021-2022 during the period of universal/mass vaccination for reasons that no one has explained convincingly yet. Second, value creation and the reproduction of the working class did not stop completely during those years. There was a phase of devaluation of (constant and variable) capital -which they do not acknowledge- and the slowdown of the economy was carefully handled. The disciplining measures that a phase of devalorisation demands are different from the disciplining measures taken during a phase of expanding valorisation of capital. However, the radical critique, which they slander and distort, has treated and still does treat the proletarian body as a **constant** field of state policies, and therefore as a battlefield; it has never equated the needs of capital with those of the proletariat and has subjected the capitalist form in which the state reproduces us to the most relentless criticism; radical critique knows that the state always treats us as expendable: either as “contaminated” bodies under the

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<sup>1</sup> *“Anyone who travelled in Greece during the summer [of 2021] saw that there were no serious checks on vaccination, test or recovery certificates, but only its pretence”,* write these fans of policing (without repression!). They continue undeterred: *“the resulting explosion of cases in tourist destinations thus came as no surprise”*. What came as a surprise was the fact that they did not ask for strict checks on certificates in the summer of 2022, nor are they asking for them today, even though the pandemic did not end in May 2022 because their state decided so! A multiple paradox indeed, as they themselves, in their biologized version of sociality that they advocate, do not distinguish either between the phases of a pandemic or between historical social forms: **“minimizing social contact during a communicable disease is a reasonable measure, applicable whether we are talking about a modern capitalist state, a feudal society or even communism”**, they say without much understanding of the logical consequence of such statements. Let us explain: if the coronavirus is now *“endemic, remaining dozens of times more deadly than the flu”*, as they continue to claim on their personal facebook profiles, then why have they **increased** their social contacts by going to events, bars, etc.? But, as we have many times said, the supporters of “responsible stay-at-home-ism”/vaccine worshippers have long since divorced themselves from reason and consistency.

<sup>2</sup> All three authors of the text are former members of TPTG who, fortunately for us, have left long before 2020. They still use the basic analyses of our journal (the interpretation of the crisis as a crisis of reproduction of capitalist relations, revolutionary defeatism, the necessity of a proletarian public sphere, the critique of identity politics, etc.) but now embedded in a completely different political context.

investigation of technoscience and biomedicine, or as bodies and minds to be exploited, or, in certain cases, as cannon fodder.<sup>3</sup>

The authors' schizoid attitude towards the state, the result of the impossibility of reconciling the necessity of complying with its orders on the one hand with the maintenance of an allegedly radical critical stance on the other, tries to camouflage itself by appealing to an abstract proletarian consciousness which will promote "class and social solidarity" by recognizing that mass/universal/mandatory vaccination "*meets a fundamental collective class need*". They expected in vain that class self-discipline would free them from the awkward task of justifying state coercion! Their entire text is reminiscent of decrees of a medical police recruited in the service of an authoritarian, hypochondriac collectivism that many proletarians would gladly choose to remain outside it. Actually, this is what happened in the summer of 2021: proletarian distrust towards the state measures was so widespread that the state had to impose a bill providing that any boss in the private sector could dismiss any employee that failed to display vaccination, paid test or recovery certificates and that's how the Health Department's or Antithesi/Cognord's "persuasion campaigns" ended.

The only activities that expressed "class and social solidarity" in the period of 2020-2022 were activities against the lockdowns, the introduction of a university police corps and mass/mandatory vaccination. It comes as no surprise that these activities (e.g. the class content of the suspended health workers' movement) are absent from Antithesi/Cognord's text. They were so busy defending conceptual categories and "truths" used by the state in the pandemic (what constitutes a pandemic, a disease or public health, what it means "*to take protective measures including vaccines whose effectiveness against symptomatic infection, hospitalization or death is overwhelmingly proven by the data*" [actually it has been disproved by the data and not only due to adverse effects!]) and vilifying anyone who challenged them as "individualists", "deniers", "conspiracy theorists", "reactionaries" and - how consistent for "left-wing communists"!-... "fascists" that it barred them from dealing with class struggle.

State-capitalist rationality (that is, irrationalism and glorification of capitalist science) is legitimized through the tactical sophistry of "yes, but". Quoted from the text: "*the fact that a form of protection against SARS-Cov-2 reduces costs, generates profits and reinforces the legitimacy of the state is not in itself a reason to reject it*"; "*while radical critique does not celebrate the authority of experts or science in general, let alone when social questions are posed, it does not fall back to endorsing and promoting the position of every non-expert*". Although they confess that they are not "epidemiology experts", nevertheless they are sure that mRNA vaccines "*are more tested and safer than most medicine that people consume on a daily basis*", simply because celebrated experts and the state told them so!

Not only is common sense disdained but even radical critique is systematically distorted and altered in order to be "creatively" adapted to the authors' views on the necessity of defending state measures (and pharmaceutical companies). E.g. the old left communist critique of the feminist slogan "my body, my choice" is transformed by Antithesi/Cognord

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<sup>3</sup>Much ink has been spilled in the texts of the Assembly Against Biopower and Confinement to analyze disciplining as a condition for the enhanced continuation of the devaluation of labour power after the memoranda period and during the "covid crisis". A very small sample of these texts can be found here: <https://againstbiopowerandconfinement.noblogs.org/post/category/international/>

from being a critique of the limits of the body's self-determination -a form of self-determination that was not rejected but considered unable to address the deeper causes of oppression- into an authoritarian denunciation of the right of self-determination of the body and into a justification of mandatory medical acts in the name of "the social character of a contagious disease" and of not letting individual choices work "to the detriment of [their] collective experience"!

They invoke Adorno -Adorno, who declared that "*progress occurs where it ends*"- to convince us of the usefulness and progressiveness of state measures taken in the name of the "collective"; they even point to Debord's words, going so far as to distort the meaning of his statement that democracy wants "*to be judged by its enemies rather than by its results*". In this famous statement Debord was not referring to the real enemies of bourgeois democracy -the social movements, one of which was, at the time, the anti-vaccination movement- but to the "mysterious" and "invisible enemies" that the state itself constructs -terrorism, or "murderous viruses" in our case- in order to present its declaration of a (protective) state of emergency as a sign of the utmost kindness of the hegemon towards his subjects!

We will not continue analyzing countless other howlers in that text, such as that "*central components of global political economy of the last decades [e.g. austerity] have been set aside overnight*" to save global labour power or their downright falsified use of statistical data. Even state *recommendations* for vaccination of health workers for a number of infectious diseases in Greece and other European countries are presented by the authors as "*compulsory vaccination*" that existed "*long before the Coronavirus pandemic*"! For the time being we would like our critique to be as short as possible.

We will close by mentioning an interesting aspect of the history of Antithesi/Cognord's text that should not come as a surprise to the reader: the managers of Atlantico (a right-wing French news website whose founder and director does not hesitate to declare that "*liberalism and capitalism are not swear words for us*" and one of whose owners is the former director of Sarkozy's election campaign) appreciated from the very first moment the valuable contribution this work from the "radical left" made to the mainstream state propaganda and wanted to publish it, grasping perfectly well its content, contrary to what Cognord said in his negative reply!<sup>4</sup>

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*The above text which consists of extracts from the latest issue of TPTG has been written as a reply to Angry Workers' question which bits of the Antithesi/Cognord's text we find reactionary. For a more comprehensive critique of their political position during the pandemic, see the Appendix of the publication The Proletarian Body as a Terrain of Political Controversy: moments of struggle against compulsory vaccination in Victorian England in the 19th century, which is a presentation and commentary on Nadja Durbach's book Bodily Matters. The Appendix is entitled Some Reflections on academic and other "critics" on the movements against compulsory vaccination, it is divided in two parts and can be found on the site of the Assembly Against Biopower and Confinement. These texts include a more extensive critique of both the text referred to here and other views of Antithesi and its allies both in Greece as well as abroad (Karmina, Pasamontana, red n'*

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<sup>4</sup> Bλ. [twitter.com/atlantico\\_fr/status/1485585860565389312](https://twitter.com/atlantico_fr/status/1485585860565389312)

*noir, etc.) - a critique that also includes reference to their political trickeries with statistical data. Unfortunately it's all in Greek.*