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Open Letter to Comrade Žižek

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Dear Comrade Slavoj Žižek,

I am certain that the title of this letter will remind you of that the Dutch communist, Hermann Gorter, sent to Lenin in response to his famous book titled “*Left-wing’ communism, an infantile disorder.*” In his letter, Gorter refuted the arguments and the general overview that served the bases of such manifesto in which the Russian revolutionary, for many reasons, disqualified the movement of the so called Left, mainly in Germany and England, and incited it to redirect its revolutionary tactics, lining up to unions and official socialist parties, in an attempt to adjust the political struggle to the strategy developed by the Bolsheviks in Russia. Against all that, Gorter critically pointed out that such strategy could have worked well in Russia, but that it was ineffective and counterproductive in Western Europe, mainly by the degree of submission of

political parties to the liberal-bourgeois parliamentary life and by the growing corruption and aristocratism in the unions, which made impossible the dream of a legitimate representation of the working class in said bodies.

Don't you think it seems curious that from the beginning of the debate Lenin spoke of a "disease" and Gorter, ironically, spoke of "spots and germs," as if the leftist movement were a virus threatening to infect the "authentic Left"? That such threat had to be cured with the theoretical and practical vaccines of the Bolshevik strategy? Isn't it curious that our theoretical teachers were so aware for so long of the medical and health language that today we are no longer able to get rid of in any way, shape or form? I considered this point a good reason to begin this letter, even though I don't intend to dwell on it.

First of all, I must admit that your heterodox views and thought-provoking depth were fundamental influences during my theoretical and intellectual formation. No one like you has been able to synthesize at once the criticism of Marxism with its reconstitution, the radical critique of postmodernism with the reformulated acceptance of many of its premises; the vindication of psychoanalytic discourse (especially in its Lacanian version) against the purported superiority of psychiatric and neuroscience, and the deconstruction of the politically correct homily in view of its reactionary consequences perpetuating the contemporary systemic powers. You are the ultimate and legitimate figure, renewed adapted to the digital era (which you also criticize), of the public intellectual that everyone thought was gone forever after the death of Sartre, at least in Europe. Your counterintuitive interventions, your iconoclastic sarcasm, your position and attitude devoid of arrogance, your genuine socialist sentiment (combined with an "atheistic Christianity") make you one of the most important communist representatives and critics of recent times.

I have learned so much from each of your books! So much from each of your lectures! As a philosopher, focused on lecturing and on literature, with background on economics and history of economics, I'm unlike many of my colleagues who are afraid of your bravery and essayistic rage. In your essays I perceive much more depth and intelligence than in any other "peer-

reviewed” and non-peer-reviewed philosophy paper. Needless to say, you will find me a great admirer.

Notwithstanding, certain aspects of your position in the current pandemic have disappointed me. Some of your theoretical, political and existential attitudes strike me as too weak, as too undeserving of your critical and provocative disposition. I don't want to be misunderstood. From the beginning of the current health crisis it was you, probably along with Giorgio Agamben, who pointed out the significance of what was happening and what was to happen. Others were blind to the developing events and have remained in silence. I am thinking, above all, of another philosopher I respect and a great friend of yours: Alain Badiou. From the beginning, Badiou accepted the possible consequences of COVID-19 and called for compliance with all the measures imposed by the French government of Macron and the recommendations of the WHO. He accepted them without questioning, underestimating the political relevance and the possible social consequences. As if, suddenly, it was no longer the time of philosophy and thought, but only of science and instrumental reason which were, incidentally, criticized by the heterodox Marxism throughout the twentieth century.

You, on the other hand, in your irreverent and provocative way, compared the impact that the coronavirus would have on global capitalism with that of the mortal blow (Five Point Palm Exploding Heart) that Beatrix gave Bill at the end of the second part of the Quentin Tarantino movie *Kill Bill*. Likewise, you advocated for the development of a kind of "communism of disaster" to cope with the adverse effects of the pandemic and its possible future consequences. "There will be no return to normality," you even said early May, far ahead of the false hopes of the majority who expected a more or less rapid dissipation of the health crisis.

However, your position and ideas were ignored and, as you yourself recognized, quickly ridiculed. "Neither the end of capitalism nor global communism" seemed to be the spontaneous responsive consensus against your stance, resuming the renewed skepticism toward both your ideas and your general warnings about the growing pandemic. Even so, your interventions had different purposes to anyone willing to understand them (but instead of paying attention to them, they immediately attacked them and discarded them): 1) the warning of generalized health and

economic crises that would jeopardize the continuation of the capitalist accumulation process, as well as the daily life we were so accustomed to (thanks to decades of neoliberalism rule), and 2) the need to implement a form of common global response, under the aegis of international organizations, with the purpose of preventing unnecessary asymmetries and disputes linked to the logic of hegemonic nationalisms.

But the reality, as we can now see, has been somewhat different from what you thought. True, the economic crisis is here, in front of us, and it is being resented, especially, by the inhabitants of the less developed nations, particularly by their most impoverished and marginalized. In Mexico, my country, where more than 50% of the economically active population is dependent on informal work, more than 155 thousand family businesses had gone bankrupt by the beginning of August. This will undoubtedly swell in all ranges of informal economy, with unemployment and, sadly, crime. But capitalism did not disappear and will not disappear because of the pandemic. On the contrary, it will be led by new technological developments digital communication services such as Zoom, Google Meets, Blackboard , etc. and the impulse of the pharmaceutical industry. It is likely, even, that after this period of crisis which, perhaps, may last up to 2 or 3 years, there will follow a cycle of strong growth, similar to that experienced after the end of World War II. Nobody knows exactly, but there are signs that point in that direction.

On the other hand, unlike the hope for the development of a global common consciousness and the resulting international cooperation, what has been observed are two phenomena that are very far from the moderate illusion of the development of a “communism of disaster.” Those are: 1) The bureaucratic strengthening of the WHO which, based on a policy of fear and the endless projection of the pandemic constant warnings of its president, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, claims that even with a vaccine the virus will always remain here. This has established an international state of exception in which said organization is playing the role of a benevolent dictator who imposes rules for our own good and even scolds those who do not obey his commands. Case in point are young Spaniards, the "new homosexuals," as in the time of AIDS, whom he admonished for celebrating too soon the end of the pandemic and ordered them to comply with the sanitary rules. 2) The development of uncoordinated national strategies, some

tougher and stricter like in Colombia and Argentina, others softer and less restrictive as in Uruguay, others initially indifferent and later, adapted to international requirements as in the case of the United States and England and other isolationist and hermetic like the island countries New Zealand, Cuba, or Iceland. In the end, everything has centered in the hope of a vaccine which capable nations have promoted in coordination with institutes and private pharmaceutical companies, without taking into account the development times (at the beginning of the global outbreak, the WHO estimated that it would take 4 or 5 years to develop one). This scenario sketches a post-pandemic world in which the most powerful nations (i.e. Russia, China, United States, England, Germany) would define by themselves the actions to be taken without subordinating themselves to the WHO strategy which seems to want a never-ending pandemic to continue dictating the procedures to be followed throughout the world.

No global communism. The result is different: a "weak dictatorship," although the term "weak" could be questioned. What power, before the pandemic, could have imagined to globally stopping production, services, education, culture, sports, etc. with a single blow? In fact, there is lack of international coordination and enhanced nationalism based on the pride of developing a vaccine and on anticipating a post-pandemic imperialism.

Even so, there are persistent messages that there is not much to do other than accept everything is the way it is, that the restrictions are necessary and unavoidable and that there are no means to go back to the so-called "normality." These messages are inferred, in part, from your interventions throughout the pandemic and from your last book *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World*. This is precisely where my dissatisfaction arises: from your answers. And my disappointment is deep from your acquiescent position. Why accept what is imposed on us without a sound rationale? Why accept this dystopian reality of restrictions and deprivations derived from the pandemic? What is exceptional about this pandemic compared to others that humanity has suffered previously, even during the 20th century, so that nothing can ever be the same in the future? Shouldn't philosophy question this before accepting notions as they are imposed on us without pertinent consultations? Shouldn't we question, shouldn't we activate again our critical reasoning before promulgating compliance with the standards that are implemented worldwide, even realizing that there is only a minute level of ethical commitment and solidarity with others?

I surprise myself writing these questions to you, posing them to you, to you! You, who has spent decades questioning the generalized positions, and many times accepted by the Left of all dies, linked to the politically correct: environmental ideology, liberal feminism, the "fair trade" trap, post-colonial deception, and so on. So much, so much you have taught us. Didn't you cause an angry reaction from the Left a few years ago when you said that, if you could, you would vote for Trump in the 2016 United States elections? Weren't you the one who said that it was better to turn things around rather than to accept the liberal continuity of the American right? And now you are simply telling us to broadly accept lock-downs and restrictions, that we must submit to what is imposed on us, and that even you like the idea of isolating yourself, of retracting yourself as an anachorite, as if you were an old medieval monk! What happened?

First of all, I would like to draw your attention to certain paradoxical divergences that have occurred with the pandemic. Doesn't it seem curious to you that the extreme right has been the only one to have expressed an open disagreement with the restrictive policies of the pandemic? And that it has been the only one that has even promoted certain forms of contempt in different nations, such as in Germany, Spain, United States and Italy? Of course, the extreme right, as it is commonly referred to, has its own "agenda," very close to the voracious dynamics of the most rapacious capitalist companies and is allied with unfortunate delusional positions such as those who talk about 5G, for example. However, it is the only one that has pointed out the lasting effects on life in general that decisions to confine whole populations, to end face-to-face education, cultural, entertainment and political acts, that is, demonstrations and acts of protest, to control our way of dressing, to prohibit going out, in short, by establishing a constant policy of surveillance and supervision, dislodging our freedom and infringing on basic human rights.

Was it not even said in the "Frankfurt School," reflecting on the events that led to the rise of the Nazi dictatorship, that any victory of fascism represented a lost opportunity for the Left? Has not the critical Left accepted too quickly the official version of the neoliberal power that this pandemic represents a brutal and insurmountable emergency and that we must accept all its restrictive consequences without protest? As if the international Left was now willing to

thoroughly accept all the restrictions and impositions that it refused to tolerate during the so-called "war on terror" inaugurated by George W. Bush. Do you remember that period?

At that time, like COVID-19 terrorism was no fiction. Indeed, terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS produced massive attacks, wars and savage, unnecessary invasions. To combat terrorism in the early 21st century the US government argued that, in order to defend their country, had the right to tap private telephone conversations, to arrest citizens without a prior court order (with only the suspicion that the individual participated, channeled or intervened, in any way, in a terrorist activity) and even imprison them indefinitely in prisons outside of any state jurisdiction (the case Guantánamo), interrogate them and torture them, as well as to intervene militarily in any nation that allegedly represented a threat to the citizens of the "free world"?

At some point did you or the North American or international Left argue that it was necessary to accept the "New World Order" imposed by the United States, that the state of emergency was already insurmountable and that the restrictions on freedom were necessary to preserve life and democracy? If this ever happened, I just don't remember it. On the contrary, you were one of the critical bastions of that *terrorist strategy against terrorism*, of that attack against freedoms with the supposed purpose of safeguarding them. It was you who, with impeccable critical argumentation, unmasked the logic behind the so-called "fight against terrorism," demonstrating in fascinating books like *Welcome to the desert of reality*, that the terror that had attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, threatened to continue attacking it, was nothing more than the ghost of its own international terrorism practiced relentlessly and for decades against all the countries of the world.

But now that an "invisible terrorist" invades us, you accept everything that it is said about it and, particularly, the measures to fight it. Now that the argument is no longer immediately political, but medical (although you yourself have never stopped recognizing that deep down, the problem is political), it seems that the Left accepts all the measures of neoliberal organizations in order to "survive." But, wasn't that also the argument for the fight against terrorism? As Agamben correctly explained (and whose arguments you and much of the 2020 intellectual world rejected

without even the slightest concern), it was a declaration of a total state of emergency and a maneuver to justify the worst atrocities. Indeed, the total state of emergency put precisely at risk the lives, liberties and democracies of the citizens of developed countries.

Question: what is the difference between an Islamic terrorist and SARS-CoV-2? It is not only that one is visible and the other invisible or that, despite the breakdown of the classical coordinates in political terms (because in the Islamic terrorism it was no longer about the classic division between Left and right, but about the confrontation between two types of conservatism), one is identifiable and locatable and the other is not, but rather that one corresponds to the immediate sphere of politics and raises doubts about the meaning of their combat, while the other, fully embedded in the field of indiscriminate biological destruction, that can kill everyone, generates an immediate response and a global consensus. All of us, even those of us who criticize the excessive response that was unleashed on a world scale to combat it, agree that the microorganism should be eliminated or at least controlled as soon as possible. There is no opposition in this regard. The democratic consensus is total. Or, to put it more clearly in a language that may evoke that of the largely forgotten Jean Baudrillard: SARS-CoV-2 is today the perfect terrorist (invisible, untraceable, situated between life and death, asymptomatic, fatal).

Do you realize what I'm trying to say? That the fight against SARS-CoV-2 and the disease it generates as it has been carried out so far is nothing more than the continuation, by other means, of the fight against terrorism on an international scale. The fight against SARS-CoV-2 is the continuation of the war against terrorism by health preservation means. And just as the enemy is more perfect, so is the controlling power that is built because it is concealed behind the parapet of sanitary measures. It is more perfect, more effective, more ideological. It is so effective and so perfect that even a brilliant mind like yours can't identify it and takes it for granted, as if the state of emergency were real and insurmountable. Wouldn't it be necessary in this case to have not one Žižek, but two or three to unmask the perverse logic of this new phase of ideological dominance in which even the most advanced critics surrender to the control and surveillance measures implemented by international organizations and local governments?

Let's speak honestly: almost no one was moved by the most recent terrorist attacks against civilian targets in different parts of the world, such as the limited attention that was paid worldwide to the recent and regrettable attacks in France and Austria. Little attention was diverted from media coverage of the US elections and the re-lock-downs in Europe. We had become accustomed and desensitized. The last great fear was triggered by the war against ISIS, supported and encouraged to a large extent by Saudi Arabia to further its objectives in the Middle East. But with the combat and practical annihilation, the last terror bastion of Middle Eastern apparently disappeared. Both ordinary people and the Western press had stopped giving much importance to news related to the fight against terrorism and its consequences, in terms of surveillance and state control, that derived from it. The last great victim of that time, Julian Assange (a friend of yours, whom you have defended in an exemplary way), was already on the way to experiencing imperialist revenge in a regrettable way and almost nobody, apart from you and a few others, continue appreciating relevance to the news...

And suddenly, out of nowhere the invisible terror appears. The novel coronavirus, the perfect excuse to exploit fear in its maximum expression with media hysteria on a massive, global scale. As in the worst monster or event of dystopian films, these permitted to justify everything: rupture of direct social relations, closure of economic, political, social, educational and cultural activities, cancellation of constitutional and human rights. Control in all realms, giving precise instructions on how to dress (use of facemasks), where to walk (pointing arrows everywhere), what to do and what not to do on the street, in supermarkets, in the few open public spaces, constant demand for perfect hygiene; temperature monitoring everywhere, curfews in Europe, etc. etc.

And how did people react? As if they had always been prepared for it, as if they wanted it, as if they still want more, much more protection and security. And how did the Left react? Submissive, accepting the situation as inevitable, full of fear, leaving any criticism for later. And you, from whom so many of us expected a critical word, a deconstruction of all this ideological manipulation, how did you react? Excuse the expression if it seems harsh, but you received the event almost celebrating it, as if the arrival of the catastrophe signaled the end of the “neoliberal party” (which is reminiscent of an old song by Cuban composer Carlos Puebla about the triumph

of the revolution: there he tells us about the great life that foreigners and wealthy people were living in Cuba before the revolutionary victory. Then, suddenly, he tells us in the chorus, Fidel Castro entered the scene: “Llegó el comandante y mandó a parar” (“The commander arrived and he ordered to stop it”). Here we would say about the event that closed down the indecent and obscene “neoliberal party”: “The coronavirus arrived and it ordered to stop it”).

First, why did people accept the new situation so meekly, with such desire to cooperate? Terror alone doesn't explain everything, although of course it is the foundation. Of all human passions, said Hobbes, fear is the most powerful; and the most powerful fear is the fear of death. If one fears death, and especially near death, one is willing to do anything to obtain a pinch of security. Isn't that just what differentiates the philosophical attitude from the ordinary attitude? Did not Platonic Socrates define, in the *Phaedo*, philosophy as a kind of "preparation for death" and, later, Heidegger, the possibility of an authentic act, as one that starts from the assumption of being-towards-death? To overcome the fear of death is to free yourself from any possible human chain. But the matter is more complex...

The more we learn about the virus, the clearer it becomes that it does not attack everyone equally and is not equally serious in all cases. Those most affected, those most likely to develop a fatal disease, are two groups: 1) people over 65 years-of- age and 2) people with certain comorbidities, especially hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular problems, chronic respiratory illness and obesity. Children practically do not exhibit any symptom and in young people the disease is a thousand times less harmful than in older adults. Why, then, did almost everyone accept the measures as a whole without protesting, without denouncing the suppression of collective freedoms and rights? For an ideological reason you were the best to explain decades ago: the individual and social need to "wash away the blame" and, in profound terms, to stop feeling responsible for what happens.

"Let's take care of each other," is the motto under which deprivation of liberty and blatant state coercion have been accepted in all spheres of society. It is no longer a question, as in the heyday of the neoliberal era (the greedy 1980s, as Doris Lessing once called it), the *sauve qui peut*, although deep down it remains the same. It is no longer the “*sauve qui peut la vie*,” but rather the

“sauve qui peut son âme.” We are dealing with the same ideology that maintains the official environmentalism: the responsibility belongs to all, or better, to each one of us. Each one of us must learn to moderate our consumption, to not litter, to recycle, to make use of alternative energies and non-polluting vehicles, etc., etc. Didn't you explain to us a thousand times that in places like Starbucks paying for an "organic" cup of coffee for a greater amount than that of "regular" coffee was the price paid for cleaning one's conscience and stop worrying about the world? Isn't it similar to what's happening now with the use of facemasks? Anyone who wears a facemask (even if it is improperly worn, even if it is not known how to use it despite all the medical advice and propaganda) feels calm because that person “does take care of others, is concerned about others.” It does not matter that, as has been clarified hundreds, thousands of times by specialists and institutions and the WHO itself, it is not necessary to wear facemasks outdoors and even in well-ventilated and spacious closed spaces. It is recommended only indoors where ventilation is poor and where there is no possibility of keeping social distance. It does not matter that it has become clear (as did a Japanese study) that the facemasks that have been in abundance for months and that millions of people worn them to “protect” themselves are of absolutely no use (The Guardian, “Face shields ineffective at trapping aerosols, says Japanese supercomputer,” Sep 22, 2020). It does not matter that it has been pointed out that in a randomized clinical study involving almost 5 thousand people that, ultimately, facemasks do not reduce SARS-CoV-2 infection rate, but suggests a non-statistical significant lesser degrees of self-protection (Bundgaard, H., Bundgaard, J. S., Raaschou-Pedersen, D. E. T., et al. (2020). Effectiveness of Adding a Mask Recommendation to Other Public Health Measures to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Infection in Danish Mask Wearers: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, November 18, 2020 <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-6817>). It does not matter that the WHO itself does not recommend its use in children under 6 years-of-age and that it makes optional its use in children between the ages of 6 and 12. Nothing matters: the facemask today is the price to pay to have a clear conscience, to feel that we are doing something for the world in the fight against the pandemic.

(By the way, to better clarify how a facemask should be used, the authorities of my country published on the measures to make a truly correct use of it. I transcribe them below, asking you: do you think that you or any of your acquaintances, other than a doctor, has complied with these

instructions? The indications are as follows: 1) wash your hands and sanitize them with antibacterial gel before putting on the facemask; 2) the thick part of the seams corresponds to the internal part and must cover the mouth and nose (it must not be used as a necklace or placed in contact with the hair); 3) this internal part, which makes contact with the nostrils, should not be touched with the hands, but the facemask should be held by the side straps to fit the ears; 4) during the entire time of use, the facemask must never be touched with the fingers; 5) before removing the facemask, the hands must be sanitized again; 6) when taking it off, in no way you should touch the outer part, which is the one that has been exposed and is potentially contaminated; 7) once it has been removed, if it is a surgical facemask (whose duration, in correct use, does not exceed 4 hours), it must be immediately discarded, after being stored in a plastic bag; 8) if the facemask is of fabric material, it must not be bent or put inside pants pockets or jacket pockets, as it can be contaminated as the inside part directly covered nose and mouth; 9) After being used, the facemask should be washed and boiled for at least one minute, and later applied with a sodium hypochlorite solution to inactivate the virus, rinsing it later to avoid toxicity towards the person... Healthcare personnel and even physicians do not follow these guidelines. In addition, if follow, these indications serve to limit, never to eliminate transmission of the virus. They do not in any way protect against personal contagion, precisely because they do not seal the space between the edges of the facemask and the skin of the face, always allowing a microscopic virus to pass).

Don't you think it is curious the derivation of circumstances around a facemask? For decades the West has mocked, ridiculed and criticized Islamic women who wear burkas to "protect themselves" from the stares of others (or, rather, to protect the macho-males from the "overflowing" desire that would trigger seeing directly a woman's face; to protect them from the "erotic contagion" that such vision could cause in themselves). These jokes, plus many others against their religion (including political cartoons), have been the cause of outbursts of fury on the part of terrorist groups that, on occasions, have used this justification to commit violent and unjustifiable attacks. You also pointed out, in the context of this topic, that it seemed that Islamic terrorists and their leaders were obsessed with Western culture, that were attentive to all its expressions, insomuch that they could not even put up with a "stupid cartoon." That obsession, you taught us, was the best example of Muslim assimilation into the Western world. Couldn't we

now think the same of ourselves? Weren't we the ones who were obsessed with Muslim culture, manifested in the ridicule against burkas and veils, because deep down we wanted to imitate them? Didn't we want to cover our faces once and for all, hide the shame of what it means to be human, to be an individual, capable of joy, love, celebration, as well as infection, disease and contagion? Didn't the virus help to grant us these wishes once and for all: to end the extreme period of excessive celebration of the neoliberal era; to cease the glorification of the consumer society and the alleged "individual liberty"; to finish the repressive desublimation that Marcuse once spoke of? All that was to be followed by an era of shame to even show our faces, to get close to others, to coexist, to attend public spaces, to buy and consume goods. What a ridicule, what a mockery, what a derision, what astuteness of reason!

Second, why as a whole did the global Left accept all the sanitary measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, including total lock-downs, confinements, freezing economic activities, massive closing of schools and universities, the cancellation of cultural activities and all kinds of sports and entertainment shows, as well as curfews and excessive digital and police surveillance, that is, control measures that greatly exceed those quite "moderate" measures imposed by George W. Bush in his "war on terror"? Why?

Except for a few naive people who thought this global sanitary crisis would be a matter of weeks or a couple of months, it relentlessly became clear to everyone that this was not a phenomenon that would not end soon. Not so much for the data we now have, nor the constant threats from WHO and national and international health organizations insisting that not even a vaccine will stop the dynamics of the pandemic. The vast majority of people believe that this will be a long-lasting crisis, for years, along with the measures. Here is where my earlier question becomes more sensible: how is it possible that, knowing that this can go on for years that some measures can remain imposed? How is it possible, knowing that a kind of permanent state of exception can be established, in which confinements, curfews and extreme police surveillance will be constant? How is it possible, I repeat, that the Left does not organize, does not protest, does not oppose what is visibly promulgated as the construction of a world health dictatorship under multiple political flags from different nations? Why?

The only answer I can think of is that the Left, despite all the events of the 20th century, continues to move generally under old parameters, under outdated or surpassed criteria that remain seriously questionable. Its materialistic rationalism has not been challenged, even taking into account the original ideals of the Enlightenment, the development of science in its positivist aspect, despite all the regrets, its position has not been deeply questioned (at least, not by the groupings leftist politics, although several highly regarded critical intellectuals have done so for a long time). It seems that it was useless to validate, since the beginning of the 20th century, the complimentary alliance between the development of science and advanced technology with the mass destruction processes (in the introduction of *Spheres III*, Peter Sloterdijk points out that the 20th century XX truly began on April 22, 1915, when the German army launched the first massive gas attack against French and Algerian troops on Ypres, Belgium), as well as, later, with the most sophisticated mechanisms of control, concentration and human extermination.

Warning: I'm not saying that science should be ignored. Not at all. What I am saying is that, after everything that has happened throughout the 20th century, and with the ecological awareness developed over the last 50 years regarding the degree of environmental destruction, one cannot have the naive belief in "the objectivity and neutrality of the science at the service of humanity." It is evident that said objectivity becomes significant in relation to the development, use and implementation that certain political bodies make to achieve certain ends. The ideal of science is damaged from the moment the general implications of its development are not considered in the science itself and in the society and institutions in which the derived technologies are applied. Any critical intellectual like you is well aware of that. If science at its roots is not questioned regarding its "objectivity" and "neutrality," it can serve from its origin, that is, from its conception and birth, to any political purpose of the most diverse sign.

Thus, by accepting without question the positivism of the sciences (whether they exact, natural or medical), the Left recedes to the horizon of the mechanistic materialism of the late 18th century and incapacitates itself to face the challenges posed by the contemporary world. The Left cannot even understand the depth of the materialist dialectical proposal (something already rejected, for example, by Badiou, a notable contemporary philosopher), for which there is no human event that is not related, in diachronic and synchronic terms, with the era in which was

originated and developed; that all expression of our reality is intertwined in conscious and unconscious processes of reproduction and surpassing its historical period. Much less can the Left then understand the criticism of the naive vision of the unlimited development of the productive forces (as originally proposed by the Critical Theory), which does not deny the connection between the historicity of human existence in its entirety and the technological progress, but that turns against it (to deepen it, to rescue it from the “underage”) the tools developed in its critique of capitalist modernity.

And that positivist imperfection, that ancient burden that the Left carries on its back, impedes it from comprehending something that Marx had already understood in his youth, from his criticism of Feuerbach, from his very first thesis: mechanistic and sensory materialism only conceives of reality as an object of contemplation, from passivity, but not, like idealism, as activity, praxis, participation in the construction of reality itself. Reality is never the narrated event (in this case, the existence of the new coronavirus and the pandemic), but the attitude towards it, the very creation of the scenario before which we conceive ourselves, at this precise moment, as merely reactive objects, as if the situation could not have been otherwise (source of all ideology: I will return to this point a little later).

But idealism contributes something else, something that materialists, including dialecticians, have tended to deny, and that authors generally regarded rightwing or who "flirt" with the right have not stopped insisting: that human life must not only be conceived as the source of the activity that endows matter with a conscious sense, as the global meaning of its organization, but as something that transcends it and that ultimately can be in conflict with it, in a constant and unsurmountable fight. Human life is alive because refuses to accept the limitations that matter imposes on it, because is conscious of the lack (the wound, as Kafka would call it) that opens our thoughts to the beyond, of what can be otherwise in another manner, in another form. That is the source of all conception about human dignity, which can be formulated in religious terms or not, it doesn't matter. A free educated, critical man, or who values his existence in a certain way and who is committed to his existence in the sense in which Heidegger himself conveyed in *Being and time*, a being who cannot be intimidated by death, who will face it and who will overcome fear in order to defend life in its most valuable sense. Reformulating Bataille's concept, it could

be that human dignity is the reaffirmation of life even in the face of imminent death. This does not mean however, that I propose something like a surrender to death or clinging to maintain our insane way of life despite everything else being destroyed, even ourselves or the majority of humanity. What I am saying is that, before embracing fear and accepting everything that governments, institutions, companies and medical science tell us (used as an ideological vanguard), we ascertain our core values and not be willing to yield them so rapidly, even in the face of terrifying threat of death. If there are core values of our existence, let's reflect what they are before we abandon them indefinitely. That is because once we surrender them, they may not come back for long, or ever.

Shouldn't we then, demand from the Left (demand from ourselves) a reformulation of its existential and political position in the face of reality, precisely because today it has been shown that in the face of threat of death, in the face of a global disease of global reach (not even the deadliest plague or epidemic), the Left is ready to abandon all of its principles, all of its values, all the triumphs it has accumulated during centuries of struggle, at least since the French Revolution: the right to widespread education, to political protests, to culture, to peaceful collective coexistence without restrictions, to freedom of expression, to the enjoyment of friendship and pleasures of the flesh, to cooperation and struggle, to the simplest right to dress as one wants and desires, etc. All these achievements were not, from their origin, inalienable principles of capitalist power (as the ideologues of the system like to say when they defend it as the "kingdom of freedom," for example Mario Vargas Llosa or Bernard-Henri Lévy), but rights that were wrested from the system after centuries of struggle and that although, as critics of capitalism love to point out, are part of a "formal freedom" of the contemporary mode of production, a freedom that has been absorbed by the Cultural Industry and its ideological control devices are the basis for any "real freedom." Because there is no real freedom without a formal freedom. It is not a question of losing one because the other isn't ensured, but to recover what already exists to exacerbate it, to surpass it and revolutionize it in its currently existing form. Shouldn't this be the principle of any dialectical thinker who still boasts of being one?

(To give you an example, rock concerts were not allowed in Mexico until the 1980s. Before that, they were forbidden, and young people had to gather clandestinely in certain areas called "Funky

Holes" as a means to vindicate their right to popular music, collective coexistence and celebration. Today, without giving it a second thought, it is commanded that this right is suspended indefinitely, until the authorities decide when it is plausible to resume it).

Third and final, why have you, the greatest critic of contemporary capitalism and its ideological effects, accepted so easily the inexorability "objective" of the pandemic phenomenon, rather than to note all the control mechanisms that accompany it when nobody knows for how long they will remain in our entire world? Why did you choose to see this event as an "opportunity" to develop a "disaster communism" instead of realizing that, by canceling the fundamental principles and rights on which the Left is based (the capacity of collaboration, of revolutionary cooperation or of transforming reality), what we are experiencing is a process of cancellation of all opportunities for change as a whole? How is it possible that you haven't seen this or, at least, that you haven't highlighted it?

My answer in this case, is that you tend to see this as a consequence of your conception of the so-called "Christian Atheism" that you have long defended as one of the central features of your political-philosophical proposal. There is undoubtedly an interesting, paradoxical position in this that rattles the clichés about the Christian religion and its worship of the "beyond," since you vindicate the strong community roots of that tradition and reinterpret, from the Gospels, Christ's message about the *holy spirit* as the reaffirmation of its permanence in collective coexistence, in the immanence of community power, from which submission to the invisibility of the "beyond" is no longer necessary, because God the father, Christ and the holy spirit are vindicated in the "here" where the alliance among human beings is ratified. And you of course, not only remained neutral, but rather conceptualize the community alliance as a legitimate principle of struggle and division against those who oppose it or seek to subdue it. Christ is also, in this case, the Christ of war, of division, or as the Spanish poet Antonio Machado put it: "the one who was in the sea."

So far so good. But something is forgotten; something that Nietzsche pointed out countless times and that, despite the distance that separate us from this great thinker, despite the criticism that must be made of his concepts of aristocratism and superiority, despite the Renaissance and elitist roots of "Superman," one cannot neglect: Christianity, especially in its Pauline version (which

you recover as the first attempt to universalize and make the evangelical word of Christ effective), is not just a vindication of the underprivileged, the marginalized and the poor, but of misery itself, of marginalization and poverty; not a call to overcome these conditions, but to make them eternal (the opposite of any revolutionary purpose that Marx came to have in mind). I quote what Nietzsche says in paragraph 51 of the Antichrist (and notice how Nietzsche speaks precisely of disease and epidemic): "Christianity finds sickness necessary, just as the Greek spirit had need of a superabundance of health—the actual ulterior purpose of the whole system of salvation of the church is to make people ill. And the church itself—doesn't it set up a Catholic lunatic asylum as the ultimate ideal?—The whole earth as a madhouse?—The sort of religious man that the church wants is a typical *décadent*; the moment at which a religious crisis dominates a people is always marked by epidemics of nervous disorder; the "inner world" of the religious man is so much like the "inner world" of the overstrung and exhausted that it is difficult to distinguish between them; the "highest" states of mind, held up before mankind by Christianity as of supreme worth, are actually epileptoid in form" (F. W. Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, translated by H. L. Menecken, Alfred A. Knopf, 1924).

Christianity needs misery, disease, poverty, anguish, and madness to rule. In principle, Christianity is not a religion to save the wretched from their situation, but to perpetuate misery and disease as a means of establishing and ratifying its power. And I am not referring, of course, to the institution, but to the essence of its doctrine. Christianity is an eulogy to misery and disease: a religion of scarcity and poverty.

Here is where my first critique of your concept of "disaster communism " or "wartime communism" comes in. It is another way of saying "misery communism," "scarcity communism," *primitive or premodern communism*; that is to say, the vindication of a principle of unity based on urgency, on necessity and not on freedom that builds its own necessity as an affirmation of life. It is an urgent need that establishes the slavery of forced cooperation. Just the opposite of the whole modern communist proposal in its most advanced sense!

But why the apology for a circumstance of absolute scarcity at a time when, with much less than half of the world 's food production, it would be possible to overcome world hunger with the

mere intention of doing so? Why assume a *miserabilistic* position when the technological means exist to transform the current situation and establish a state of relative abundance for all? Just because of a pandemic that is not the worst that humanity has suffered? It seems that here, Comrade Žižek, you are more willing to think about an apocalyptic situation (i.e. end of the world), which you have criticized so much in several cultural platforms (mainly cinematographic), before considering a more modest and concrete proposal: that of modifying the form of production and distribution of the world's wealth so that there is no misery.

Of course I know the theoretical background of your proposal: the distrust of the discourse of abundance and the unlimited productive forces that Marxism sustained throughout the 20th century. I understand that criticism that shows the limitations of the progressive-rationalist perspective, especially when facing a global ecological deterioration. I understand it. But this interpretation of Marxism finds its foundation in a deficient understanding of what the notion of productive forces mean in Marx, mainly held by Jürgen Habermas and before him, sketched by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. As expressed by these last authors almost at the end of the first chapter of that book ("The concept of Enlightenment"), for Marx, "the relationship of necessity to the realm of freedom was therefore treated as merely quantitative, mechanical," which would end with converting socialism into a totalitarian project, of subordination of nature, in its broadest sense, to the civilizing project, and "by absorbing socialism along with freedom" (Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, 2002, 32-33). This idea, barely suggested at the end of the mentioned chapter, was recovered and uncritically amplified by Habermas (in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* for example) to support, from there, his critique of the Marxian position as a whole; that is, as a theoretical horizon coupled with the most naive progressivism and the unstoppable praise for the unlimited development of the productive forces.

All this criticism fits very well with almost all of the official Marxism of the 20th century, with vulgar Marxism, which was criticized so much by members of the Frankfurt School, but it has little or nothing to do with Marx's original thought. It's not that I'm trying to defend the idea of an "authentic Marx" or "original" because eventually, everything the authors write will always be

subject to interpretation and to criticism, but I do emphasize that we must pay close attention and read certain concepts before deconstructing them thoughtlessly. This is precisely what has been done with the notion of *productive forces* that Marx fully developed in his masterpiece: *Capital*. There, in chapter 13 of the first volume, he points out that the primordial productive force is *human cooperation* with the objective of producing something or solving a productive problem (whether of first necessity or not; for example, the pyramids of Egypt). And not only that, but it also explicitly indicates the difference between the mechanical union of separated and isolated individuals and the new power or force that is generated when collective cooperation is set in motion. Because I consider it important to support my argument, I quote a passage from that chapter: “Just as the offensive power of a squadron of cavalry, or the defensive power of a regiment of infantry is essentially different from the sum of the offensive or defensive powers of the individual cavalry or infantry soldiers taken separately, so the sum total **of the mechanical forces** exerted by isolated workmen differs from **the social force that is developed**, when many hands take part simultaneously in one and the same undivided operation, such as raising a heavy weight, turning a winch, or removing an obstacle”(*Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, Book One: The Process of Production of Capital, chapter 13, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, Progress Publishers, p. 229. **Bold characters** are mine).

According to Marx, contrary to what is usually purported about his thesis, the concept of productive forces does not have anything to do in first instance, with a technical, technological, objectivist or mechanistic vision. The original productive force is human cooperation, the collective capability to create, to conserve and to transform the world (which is precisely what is being confined today, what is being isolated, separated, subjected to a principle of distancing and fracture). For this reason, the idea of the development of potentially unlimited productive forces, as Marx himself elaborated at the end of Volume III of *Capital* (and since the time of *The German Ideology*), has nothing to do with a simple quantitative and mechanical development of those forces, but with the organic development of the human capacity for cooperation, which capitalism itself castrates and stops. Remember the core idea of the *Communist Manifesto* around this concept: although capitalism emerged in the world scenario as the historical mode of production that bases its dominance on the constant development of the productive forces (exploitation of relative and extraordinary surplus value), this is viable only if these productive

forces yield a profit, otherwise it inhibits its development and it becomes a limiting factor. In the end, capitalism is the great deterrent to the development of alternative productive forces (please consider the way in which, for more than 5 decades, any attempt to universalize development and implementation of “green” technologies such as solar technologies or those not fossil-fuel-based has been discouraged). Capitalism works not by producing abundance, but by limiting it, by generating in the end a kind of “artificial scarcity,” a state of generalized *rarity* (as Sartre named it in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*), instead of exploiting the possibility of creating global abundance.

All this does not mean, however, that Marx was a worshiper of the subject and its unlimited capacity to transform the world at will to the point of converting it from its cooperative capacity, into his own “image” (following the idea that Heidegger developed in his well-known essay *The Age of the World Picture*). Indeed, Marx himself in the *Capital* noted that work itself is not the full source of wealth, but only when is done in conjunction with nature. Following the language of the English philosopher and economist William Petty in a once celebrated but now forgotten passage about the origin of wealth from the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx wrote: “Labour is the father of wealth; the earth is its mother.” It may be that you dislike the term (because it could remind you of “mother earth”), but this passage from *Capital* had political consequences. Recall the *Critique of the Gotha Program*? There, Marx mercilessly criticized the original German Social Democratic Party program: “labour is not the source of all wealth” for “nature is just as much the source of use values,” pointing out that this concept (“labour as source of all wealth”) came from the bourgeoisie praising “alienated labour” as the origin of all kinds of wealth, leading to contempt, subordination and destruction of nature.

Consequently, from Marx’s point of view a true conception of development of productive forces necessarily involve care and integration of nature and the environment, as its destruction and long-lasting damage, as is now happening, would result not in the creation of abundance, but just the opposite, total scarcity. Living in real abundance and thus, enabling a communist collective experience would mean building an exponentially enhanced historical space of world cooperation along with an objective development of ecological technologies which, in turn, would provide the possibility of an effective fulfilment of global needs (not only basic, but also

political, cultural and recreational) respectful of natural cycles, well-coordinated with them and learning from them for a better mutual collaboration (recognizing that it would never be completely harmonious or peaceful, as is proposed by ecological or postcolonial ideological desires).

A utopia? It may be, I don't deny it, but it is not the one that was attempted to be built in the 20th century under the Leninist slogan of “soviet power plus electrification.” There is in Marx, and in other great socialist authors of last century (e.g. Ernst Bloch, Kostas Axelos, Henri Lefébvre, Marcuse, Bolívar Echeverría, etc., to name just a few), an authentic reflection on the possibility of developing another type of technique. All this to conclude the following: there is no reason to abandon the Marxist idea of an unlimited development of productive forces as a material basis to foster the construction of a free and abundant post-capitalist society. To assume the opposite, to name this construct “communism of disaster” or of “misery” is to promote the perennial conditions of artificial scarcity (in the sense outlined above) that capitalism itself does not tire to generate and reproduce to oppress as well as to improve a system of power and control.

Now, introducing a new theme, it is necessary to draw attention to something else that is behind the notion of “disaster communism” and that has to do directly with the issue of the current pandemic. In this case we need to highlight such terminology in the context of what we are currently experiencing. That is, the global outbreak is effectively and objectively (in the words of the WHO, all institutions and official media) a catastrophe of monumental proportions, which inevitable justifies the measures that have been taken to circumvent, contain, combat, or overcome it. And it is here where all the ideological force of the new world order is being imposed on us, right in front of our eyes. From here everything is justified.

Again (and because the prevailing ideological inertia imposes to emphasize it again and again), the existence of the virus, the presence of the pandemic and its global reach are not being denied. This is real. But that does not mean that it has to be necessarily assumed as a catastrophe of immeasurable dimensions. What has led to the catastrophe of enormous dimensions are the responses and the measures taken; the extreme measures were taken as if there hadn't been any other option. Please understand me: I am not making any call for indifference or cynicism like

Trump or Bolsonaro (characters with whom anyone who tries to propose something different is always compared to), but trying to outline other options that would not have implied a high degree of intrusion from the state and corporate systems of control over the lives of all people in the world. (By the way, it is worth mentioning it even once: have you noticed the shamelessness with which the term “denier” is used to classify all those who question, even minimally, the measures adopted by the different countries in their *Fight* against the pandemic? Those people are compared to Holocaust deniers! Good heavens!).

Was there a different option from the beginning? Maybe not from the beginning, but when some facts about the novel coronavirus began to become clear as I already mentioned above. And I am not saying it, but numerous experts on the subject led by three world-renowned infectious disease epidemiologists who have signed a declaration, along with many other international physicians and scientists. The objective of declaration is to propose a new way of manage the pandemic without generating so much long-term negative economic impact (especially against the working classes) as well as political, educational, cultural and psychological damages, as those that have generated the measures of confinement and restriction of activities. Although it didn't prompt enough attention is a historic document that will serve to point in the future, yes there were people who thought about different options and that the measures taken by virtually everyone did not necessarily have to be so. The document is called the “Great Barrington Declaration” and was written by Dr. Martin Kulldorf (Harvard), Dr. Sunetra Gupta (Oxford), and Dr. Jay Bhattacharya (Stanford). (I am aware of the criticisms against it and will address them after summarizing the proposal).

The “Declaration of Great Barrington,” signed and published in Massachusetts, USA, proposes a change of approach in relation to the measures to contain the pandemic followed so far by the absolute majority of all countries (lock-down, confinement, isolation and social distancing) and the development and implementation of a strategy that the epidemiologists who wrote it called “focused protection.” This strategy consists of focusing attention on the protection of the most vulnerable sectors of the population (which, as is known today, are represented by the elderly and individuals with chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, respiratory illness and heart problems) while other people, with little probability of developing a fatal disease, are allowed to

live a normal life and thus generating in a few months the so-called “herd immunity,” in such a way that in a not very long period of time the other vulnerable sectors could be reincorporated to normalized life, which would be protected by the new generalized immunity. According to the signatories, this strategy would save more lives than those achieved by confinements, since these cannot be strictly enforced in 100% of the population and end up impacting everyone equally, generating more deaths in the most vulnerable individuals.

It is not exposing all sectors to the massive contagion of the virus in an egalitarian return to normality (as proposed by Trump, Bolsonaro and at least at the beginning by Boris Johnson), but to protect the most vulnerable and focus on decreasing fatality rates. However, despite these specifications there are 3 main criticisms: 1) its origin, 2) its “unrealistic” budget and 3) its “lack of ethics.” I elaborate on the three points in that same order.

1) The “Great Barrington Declaration” was drafted at the headquarters of the *American Institute for Economic Research*, a libertarian *Think Tank* clearly related to ultra-conservative sectors of the U.S. Despite the fact that none of the 3 experts is associated with conservative or right-wing groups, the attacks for the support they have received from the aforementioned private institutions are doubtful, especially when it is well known that 9.8% of the total financing of WHO is contributed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Interestingly, when this is pointed out the response is that those who mention it participate in a kind of “conspiracy theory.” But that is not the case when the other relationship is established. Why? Because like everything else in the ideological and Manichean world we live in, some are considered “bad businessmen” and others “good businessmen.” If one who finances an institution is liberal, then there is no problem; but if the one financing is a conservative or a libertarian, then it is tantamount to a crime against humanity. The Left has to go beyond this point of view for the simple reason that there has not been a globally relevant medical proposal that has not been otherwise funded directly or indirectly by private institutions and foundations. And indeed, there are no “good” or “bad” entrepreneurs because all, to varying degrees, respond to the logic of their own economic and political interests (nothing to do with their personal attitude towards life or with their greater or lesser sympathy towards social causes). This is important to understand in order to be able to

judge what is proposed more rationally. There are two different views of how to do things. Let's judge on that basis, without being naive.

2) It has been argued that it is unrealistic to apply the idea of a separation between vulnerable and not vulnerable people to decrease the fatality rate, quickly create herd immunity and return to normality. And this is argued, above all, thinking that there are multigenerational families living in the same home. Again, it is curious that this is perceived as unreal when, on the other hand, what was implemented early this year was then simply unimaginable and impossible: to shut down practically the entire operation of the world economy, stop political, educational, recreational and cultural activities, establish massive control, surveillance and confinement mechanisms to a large proportion of the world's population. Could it not be possible in a few months to perform a census of the vulnerable population and establish policies for their protection in order to reduce fatality rates? Due to the economic conditions of our contemporary societies, a 100% confinement is not logistically realistic and will always fail. Thus, it is more advisable to protect the weakest. Wouldn't that be more Christian than exposing us all together? Isn't it more perverse to maintain the hypocritical argument that "safety depends on everyone" when we go out to work or commute, with or without facemasks, and therefore we will continue to infect ourselves and the most vulnerable will continue to be harmed?

3) The core point of the Barrington Declaration debate upheld by the WHO is that promoting "herd immunity" is "scientifically and ethically reprehensible." Here the arguments reach their maximum ideological expression. Of course, as I said above, no one is encouraging people to be directly infected or to organize events for that purpose. Nor is a kind of indifference to disease spreading. What is simply stated is that it is necessary to change the strategy: to focus on reducing fatality rates rather than reducing infections, since for most people the disease is only slightly more morbid than the common flu. Because, as Dr. Martin Kulldorf has repeatedly explained, herd immunity will happen; it is a scientific fact as irrefutable as the law of gravity. The main issue is how and when it will happen. It is about protecting the most vulnerable and helping others to resume their daily activities as normal as possible. It is, according to the idea of these 3 renowned epidemiologists, to decrease the number of deaths and accelerate the end of the pandemic. Wouldn't that be more desirable? But that option is immediately branded

“scientifically and ethically reprehensible.” That is, thinking outside of what the WHO and the national and international medical organizations and institutions have orchestrated to implement is simply not acceptable. Here some questions I already published elsewhere:

“Scientifically and ethically reprehensible? Is the massive application of lockdowns and the general closure of entire sectors of the economy scientifically and ethically acceptable, with all employment implications that this entails, as well as offices, courts, tribunals, schools, universities, museums, small businesses, etc.? Are the impositions of a social distance that implies cancellation of political events, demonstrations, cultural and recreational events, collective celebrations, peaceful coexistence, etc. socially, judicially and ethically commendable? Is the vastly unexplored short- and long-term psychological damage to children and the youth medically and ethically admirable? Is the indefinite suppression of people's constitutional rights, as well as their individual guarantees, ethical (which are not a gift from the state political power or from “capitalist democracies,” but rather historical achievements of the different peoples in the process of construction of their identity)? Is the estimated increase, according to the UN, of 130 million more people at risk of going hungry, humane or ethical? Is the projected estimate that more than 24 million students, from primary to university, will drop out of their studies and the long-term economic and social inequalities implications worldwide, fair and ethical? Is it ethical, in terms of health, to completely neglect attention to other diseases, causing “lower vaccination rates, worsening cardiovascular disease outcomes, lower cancer detections and deterioration of mental health” as noted the Great Barrington Declaration? Is it ethical to expose only workers who cannot stop working for society to stay alive or those who, as happens widely in underdeveloped countries, depend on informal, day-to-day subsistence jobs as they cannot stop working because they lack a fixed salary or a stable income? Is it ethical to conceive of society as a mere biological entity that must be made to survive instead of understanding it as a complex totality, in which biological, economic, political, legal, social, psychological and cultural aspects are inseparable, indiscernible? Is all this ethical?”

Comrade Žižek, the confinement and social distancing measures to fight the pandemic, as well as the imposition of a so-called “new normality” (now normality is “new” and is established by the nation States), has been introduced into our contemporary and future existence the idea that

living with and interacting with other human beings is dangerous and potentially deadly. All these reinforces the tendencies to isolation and desocialization typical of mercantile and capitalist systems based on private property. Was it not pointed out at the beginning of the health crisis when the first major anti-racist demonstrations took place in the U.S. after the murder of George Floyd (May 26 of this year) that it was because of these demonstrations that contagion had soared in that country? Isn't the best argument for political demobilization to state that protests are "contagious"? Fortunately, although few, political protests against injustices have continued and increased in various parts of the world.

Finally, to begin to sketch the end of this lengthy letter, you have pointed out in various interviews that the contemporary pandemic phenomenon was the result of today's globalized world, but that for example, a disease that could have begun 60 or 70 years ago in a town in China wouldn't have been acknowledge as such, because it would not have expanded as the new coronavirus pandemic did. But comrade Žižek, your assumption as expressed is simply false, unrealistic. In fact, in the 20th century there were several global outbreaks and one pandemic that were global in scope and far more deadly than the present one. The difference between those and the current one is not so much the scope, but the response that was given and the extreme measures that were taken to introduce a new system of world control. Let's see.

First of all, as you know, we must point out the pandemic called "Spanish influenza" or "Spanish flu" actually started in Kansas where "patient zero" was diagnosed. A hypothesis-by Dr. Claud Hannoun, a Spanish influenza researcher, proposed that the actual origin of the 1918 Influenza pandemic, that is, the first strain of the virus, was likely to have come from China, mutating in America somewhere near Boston before spreading to soldiers in the Western Front during World War One, causing the pandemic (Tsoucalas et al., *European Journal of Clinical and Biomedical Sciences* 2016; 2(4): 23-28). Other hypotheses suggesting the origins in Spain, Kansas and Brest have been also proposed by other researchers (Crosby AW. *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003). Historian Mark O. Humphries has pointed out that the virus may have been introduced to Europe and the United States by the transfer of 96,000 Chinese workers mobilized behind British and French military lines (Humphries, Mark Osborne. "Paths of infection: The First World War and the origins of the

1918 influenza pandemic.” War in History 21, no. 1 (2014): 55-81). Thus, a virus of Chinese origin more than 100 years ago may have been the cause of one of the worst pandemics in human history. Certainly, at that time the European States, the USA and the whole world were at war, but at the conclusion of the pandemic nothing was changed permanently in terms of health surveillance. Moreover, there were advances in the processes of detecting and managing diseases.

But let's put the Spanish flu pandemic aside. There are at least three others of wide international reach in the 20th century before HIV: 1) the 1957-58 *Asian flu* (originated again in China), which killed more than 1 million people worldwide, 2) the 1968-69 *Hong Kong flu* (again China), which caused nearly 1 million deaths, and 3) the 1977 *Russian flu*, for which there is no clear death count.

Did you hear in 1968, in the heat of the world student movements, of the pandemic that was shaking the world that in the U.S. alone (when the accounting of the dead was not as accurate as it is now and remains imprecise), caused more than 100 thousand deaths? Did you know that the Woodstock festival, symbol of youth rebellion and new love and cultural ways of relating, was held when the pandemic was still in full force and maybe at its peak? Can you imagine what would have happened globally if contemporary measures had been taken to contain that *pandemic*? I invite you to reflect for a moment, as you usually do, in a retrospective and counterfactual film: we are in 1968, in the middle of a great pandemic; Nations, alarmed by the fact, begin to take measures of confinement and censorship of social coexistence, especially the youth. Meetings, protests, mass mobilizations are prohibited. Neither popular concerts like the one at Woodstock or similar expressions take place. Don't you think it would be an interesting exercise to try to understand **what did not happen** in 2020? Perhaps the anti-racist protests in the U.S. could have reached a higher level, with a greater capacity to question the system. But we won't know that anymore. Probably you need to think of another counterfactual movie about this year.

Comrade Žižek, I am approaching the end. I poured a lot of thoughts and many arguments to think the pandemic contemporary phenomenon under an alternative light and try to vindicate, from the Left perspective, a critique of the new control order that has been drafted. It seems to me that this critical position cannot be left to the right. The pandemic and the fight against it has drowned us in such a dynamic that we now believe that what happened (what is still happening) could not have been otherwise. It is as if now something seems evident to us that in the recent past was not: that we must avoid illness and death at all costs, that it is preferable to be under lockdown, to confine ourselves, to isolate ourselves, to submit to curfews, to avoid social contact (avoid social contact!) rather than running the minimum risk of getting sick and perishing. As if there had not always been from immemorial times and at this very moment hundreds of other diseases that could cause death and that we do not pay attention because we are obsessed with SARS-CoV-2. And not just communicable and no communicable diseases, but different everyday phenomena that kill as much or more than the new coronavirus.

To provide you with some data, according to WHO annually 1 million 300 thousand people die in traffic accidents and between 20 and 50 million suffer non-fatal injuries derived from those same accidents, which means a daily average of 3,562 deaths and between 54,794 and 136,986 injuries (why not a daily count of these cases made and publicized massively to the public?). If you think clearheaded, there is a way to put an immediate end to these horrifying figures: stop world transit right now. Let's have no more cars. In this way, no one would die from traffic accidents or be scarred for life as a result. But no one comes up with such an idea. To absolutely stop the world traffic of automobiles would be to annihilate modern societies which depend on human and merchandise transfers to survive. Are road deaths worth less than COVID-19 deaths? Obviously not. All deaths are worth the same and are suffered the same. Why in one scenario there is a will to paralyze society's life society and not in another? And keep in mind that deaths from car and road accidents increase every year and there is no future vaccine that can cure us of this tragedy. But the only response was to develop and promote a better road culture. Why was it decided instead to paralyze the lives of all societies due to the pandemic which will translate into greater poverty, unemployment, inequality, ignorance, diminished rights and, finally, more deaths?

Comrade Žižek, here is the scenario with which we have found ourselves this calamitous 2020: entire industries and shops closed; massive stoppage of school and university activities as well as their subsequent readjustment to the digital format; impediment of the free development, coexistence and mental health of children (perhaps the most affected in the long-term with mandatory use of facemasks, repeated confinements and social distancing measures); closing offices and re-functionalization of medical services for the exclusive care of patients suffering from COVID-19 (which has triggered a widespread neglect of other diseases); closing of political, cultural and recreational events; Confinement of millions of people with consequent psychological sequela that, in countries like Japan has prompted higher suicide rates, and in countries like mine, Mexico, has precipitated an increase in sexual abuse and child molestation along with a severe economic crisis, exponential growth of unemployment and, from there poverty, uncertainty and crime; significant setbacks in educational progress at all levels, etc. etc. Does this scenario seem more worth living than another way of facing the crisis, without such massive impact on the entire world population?

Without a doubt the world must change. The old normality in which we found ourselves was far from dignified and far from fair to most people. But what has begun to be built in its place is by no means a more desirable or preferable situation; not even to mention “communism of disaster.” No, what has been built is a *state police*. We are currently living in a state of control and surveillance increasingly similar to Orwell’s story in his work *1984*. We are even living in a developing global state with a neolanguage, a twisted Newspeak or “*Covidspeak*”¹: “New normality,” “Social distancing,” “Reproduction number,” “Self-isolate,” “Shelter in place,” “Healthy distancing,” “elbow bump,” “Self-quarantine,” “Rona” (U.S. for coronavirus), “Quaz” (Australia for quarantine), “Sanny” (Australia for sanitizer), “Covidiot” (someone who ignores public safety recommendations), “Maskne” (an acne outbreak caused by facial coverings), “zoombombing” (when strangers intrude on video conferences), “quarantini” (a cocktail consumed in isolation), in German “Hamsterkauf” (panic buying) or “Öffnungsdiskussionsorgien” (‘orgies of discussion’ to describe the seemingly endless policy debates over reopening), or the commands “Stay-at-home order” (U.S.), “Movement control

¹ I owed this word, along with part other terms described below to a suggestion of my dear friend Javier Enriquez Serralde, M.D., Ph.D. (epidemiologist and immunologist) and writer who translated this letter.

order” (Malaysia), “enhanced community quarantine” (Philippines), or “¡Cuidémonos entre todos!” (Mexico for let’s take care among all of us).”

To end I propose something to you. For a long time, to criticize the contemporary ideological constructs, you have resorted to the superb film by John Carpenter *They live*, in which the main character discovers a pair of sunglasses capable of showing the world the way it truly is. The character notices that both the media and the government are comprised of subliminal messages meant to keep the population subdued. Hidden messages that are behind advertising products and apparently harmless merchandise. The character realizes that behind the money and its main symbol (the dollar) can be read: “I am your God.” Likewise, hidden in the advertisements, there are phrases such as: “Obey” or “Get married and reproduce” and many others. I’m sure you remember it well. What I’m proposing is that we do the thought experiment of putting on said sunglasses at this moment and experience what we are really told behind those repeated statements (apparently harmless, apparently noble and naive) throughout this pandemic. What I can see is the following: “New normality” means “Permanent state of exception.” “Healthy distance” means “Distrust the others, separate yourself from others.” “Covidiot” means “Rebellious against the State.” “Stay at home” means “Isolate yourself.” “Break off contacts and cooperation with the others.” “Let’s take care of each other!” means clearly “Beware of Others!” “The others are a source of disease and contagion!” What can you see, dear comrade Žižek?

With admiration and respect forever,

Carlos Herrera de la Fuente.

