PANIC BUYING: When the parameters of one's existence contract to a weekly scurry round the supermarket, impulse buying just-in-case-ery stuff as if laying in for a siege, life becomes a series of non-events

We're a captive audience watching a tragedy play out

Anita ROBINSON

WELL – it looks like déjà vu all over again. What we thought was the whole show turns out to have been merely the first act. Because too many members of the cast misbehaved, we're all being kept in – a captive audience, so to speak, watching a tragedy unfold.

I managed to get my hair done before the shutters came down and now face the prospect of sleeping sitting up for the next four weeks, not to mention further outlay on jumbo aerosol cans of dry shampoo. Ho hum… it's boring the second time around. The novelty of infinite leisure has worn off, to be replaced by apathy, aimlessness and gloom. I'm very fond of my own company but one can have too much of a good thing. Besides, the public mood has changed. Apprehension and caution have been replaced by mulishness and resentment. There's no thrill in a long lie-in if you can do it any day. When the parameters of one's existence contract to a daily visit to the corner shop for the papers and a weekly scurry round the supermarket, impulse buying just-in-case-ery stuff as if laying in for a siege, life becomes a series of non-events. The bins go out more often than I do.

Unbelievably, there are still people too recklessly selfish to wear a mask for their own protection and that of others. Masks are a heart-scald and make everybody look like a rhinoceros. Ten minutes in a mask, my lipstick's stuck to it and the carefully applied cosmetic contouring of my non-existent cheekbones obliterated, but needs must when the devil Covid drives. Also, I have to feel my way round the local Spar these chilly mornings because my glasses steam up. Masks make people unrecognisable. I held a lengthy conversation with a vaguely familiar woman in the biscuit aisle. Only when we were parting and she called me by the wrong name did I realise she'd mistaken me for someone entirely different. I, of course, had no idea who she was at all. For women, masks have become a bit of a fashion statement. Daughter Dear sent me a couple of fancy ones, but I'm saving them for the social occasions unlikely to happen any time soon.

Unsurprisingly, many people have put on weight over the past months. My daily caffeine consumption is supporting the entire economy of Brazil and naturally, one needs a little something sweet as accompaniment. My greatest test of willpower is to keep on cooking. The daily temptation not to bother making a 'real dinner' grows stronger by the day, though I haven't yet strayed down the primrose path to perdition that is 'ready meals'. My shopping trolley load looks an impeccable example of nutritional balance, with the ice-cream Mars bars and chocolate eclairs cunningly concealed under the wholemeal bread, fresh vegetables and fruit. My greatest challenge? To eat all the perishable stuff before it walks out the door of its own accord. Nobody wants cauliflower days running no matter how imaginatively presented. And isn't it odd how one suddenly craves the only thing you don't have in the house?

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Time hangs heavily. Though individual days seem long, weekends rush up and take one unawares. The virtuous are spending every waking hour in worthwhile pursuits. I have an honours degree in doing nothing coupled with a chronic case of postponeitis. Lord, how I miss 'proper' shopping, viz. for shoes, clothes and cosmetics. Since I don't do online technology, all must be channeled through Daughter Dear, whose alarm at the frequency of processing orders elicits sardonic remarks such as "Where do you think you're going in that Mumma?" But oh, I do so love getting a parcel!

My phone bill is astronomical. With a wide circle of friends, who, like me, have been nowhere, done nothing and have little to talk about, we manage to do it at inordinate length. How did the previous generation endure six years of much greater privation during the Second World War? Are we Baby Boomers merely spineless, self-absorbed whingers about temporary inconvenience? Just our bad luck to live in sudden times.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 20 1920

Outrage over 'Reprisals'

SIR John Simon [former Liberal Minister] and Sir Horace Plunkett were the principal speakers at a meeting at the Central Hall, Westminster last night under the auspices of the London Liberal Federation. The object of the meeting was 'to protest against the present methods of Irish administration' and a resolution was submitted protesting against the whole policy of the Government in Ireland and especially against 'the methods of indiscriminate murder and destruction adopted by the armed forces of the Crown'. The motion called upon the Government to put an immediate stop to 'these acts of terrorism and violence'. Among those present were Lord MacDonnell [former Irish Under-Secretary], Sir Donald MacLean, MP [Liberal] and Mr G K Chesterton.

Proposing the resolution, Sir John Simon said the Prime Minister at Carnarvon had the audacity to pretend that reprisals in Ireland were nothing more than a kind of spontaneous self-defence – a sort of irregular unauthorised vengeance. He [Sir John] deliberately called it a policy of reprisals and the expression came from the interview which General Macready [the Irish GOC] gave to the American press. 'Soldiers and Constabulary are not responsible for the policy of a country,' added Sir John. 'It comes from their superiors.'

'In a single word, reprisal is frightfulness,' Sir John continued. 'To answer murder with murder, to answer outrage with terrorism, is not government – it is anarchy.' He recalled the recent events at Balbriggan, Trim and Mallow and said the most sinister fact was that motor lorries of armed men descended upon a town within a few hours of some Republican outrage. Did this not suggest that this was all part and parcel of an organised scheme? (Hear, hear.)

Bishops on British 'Atrocities'

THE Catholic hierarchy of Ireland yesterday issued a strong pronouncement on the state of the country. They declared that oppression was rampant and terrorism and partiality were the characteristics of the government. 'The flogging and massacre of civilians was rife and all this was perpetrated by the forces of the Crown who had established a reign of frightfulness which, for murdering the innocent and destroying their property, had only a parallel in the horrors of Turkish atrocities.'

By October 1920 the unbridled use of reprisals by the forces of the crown outraged opinion on both sides of the Irish Sea. At this London meeting Lloyd George's policy was denounced by the Liberal stateman, Sir John Simon and leading public figures. Their anger was matched by the condemnation of the Irish hierarchy who linked the policy to the toleration of anti-Catholic riots in the north and expulsion of 8,000 Catholic workers.

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