

COVID-19: Time for Bold Action – But be Careful

by Phillip W. Weiss

This is the time for bold action. But bold action requires bold leadership and bold leadership is what is lacking. But in times like these, new leaders do emerge, and when they do, we will know it. Recently a certain governor of a certain state said that having to choose either the economy or the lockdown is a false choice, in that both options are interconnected. In one respect, this official was correct. A strong economy will provide the material resources needed to control and defeat the virus. Likewise, a robust effort to control and contain the virus will allow the economy to recover. However, solutions as to how to achieve both objectives simultaneously continue to allude us. There is no blueprint or road map to follow. Each governor, authorized to take emergency actions, must plot his or her own course. Thus, every governor is entering uncharted territory that may contain many hidden pitfalls.

This is no game. Lives are on the line and political fortunes are to be won or lost. Because of the COVID-19 virus, new names are emerging on the national political scene. New careers are being made while old careers stall. The politics of the nation is changing rapidly. New rules are replacing old rules that are now obsolete. The voters crave for security. They will gravitate to the leader who they believe can deliver on their promises.

Empty promises will not suffice. Recriminations will mean nothing. With millions unemployed and what is worse, deemed unessential, the stability of the

nation is at risk. Millions of people and their families are now official rejects, and nobody likes to feel rejected. Millions of people who were being paid to provide labor are now told that their labor was expendable, that it was a sham, a mere luxury that nobody really needed. What a terrible message to send to any worker and what a terrible message to receive.

So, who is essential? In the capitalist system labor is overhead, the cost of which the capitalist wants to reduce, if possible, to zero. Thus, in our culture, all workers are expendable. The capitalist system demands increased productivity. That means producing more commodities and services with fewer workers or, if possible, with NO workers. That does not mean that all human labor is destined to disappear. There will always be a need for humans to perform services that a machine cannot yet do. However, the emergence of the COVID-19 virus has finally forced us to confront the unpleasant and inconvenient fact that our economic system cannot guarantee steady employment for everyone. No job is secure. No income is guaranteed. Our future is one of economic uncertainty. Do not rely on Marxism to provide a way out. The theory of surplus value is irrelevant in a society that considers every human worker expendable and replaceable.

Norms of social conduct that we took for granted are now under scrutiny. The handshake, the pat on the back, a meal with family and friends, a day at the ballpark, attending a show, and other similar forms of human interactions that provide us comfort and facilitate bonding are now a source of anxiety. Anxiety is a catalyst for change, and change, though necessary and inevitable, is never

easy and often is dreadful. Change means having to give up old ways for new ways. The old ways provide us with a comfort zone. Nobody wants their comfort zone to be rattled. But sooner or later our comfort zone does get rattled, and change occurs. We can either resist it or embrace it. Either way the result is the same.

We are subject to economic and social forces that are beyond our ability to control. These forces operate according to rules that we cannot even begin to fathom. Some try to make sense out of these forces, but all their efforts fail. Some even try to impose their theories on others, with disastrous results. Beware of the politician who claims to have all the answers. That, however, is easier said than done. People are craving for answers, and when someone comes forward and offers an answer, people will respond. They hope it is the right answer, the one that will deliver the security and peace of mind that all of us want, even if it based on an illusion.

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