

COVID-19: The Crisis Continues

by Phillip W. Weiss

On April 23, 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo reported that 2.7 million persons in New York State are infected with the coronavirus. In New York City almost 22 percent of the population is infected. If Governor Cuomo is correct, this makes the continuation of the lockdown which is destroying the economy seem even more pointless, futile, and grotesque. The purpose of the lockdown was to contain the virus. Instead, it has spread.

The COVID-19 virus has stigmatized New York City. After the events of the past few weeks, which has thrust New York City into the center of a worldwide pandemic to which New York City is now inexorably linked, how many people will want to visit New York City, or move to New York City, or invest in New York City? And how many people will feel comfortable welcoming a visitor or business from New York City? Millions of people reside inside the so-called epicenter of what is arguably the most virus-infested place on the planet. Many are infected with the virus and do not even know it. What are they supposed to do? How are they supposed to get on with their lives? If all of them get tested for the virus, how can they be certain that the test results, from newly developed procedures that are not fully vetted, are reliable? These are not mere abstract questions. Rather, these are practical concerns with serious sociological, psychological, political, and economic implications that require thoughtful consideration.

Now, a few comments about healthcare workers. Since the start of the crisis, public officials and celebrities have been lavishing heaps of praise for the dedication and bravery of the healthcare workers who, working with the medical doctors, provide critically important services to the patients infected with the COVID-19 virus as well as to patients with other serious medical diseases and conditions. However, it had to take a national emergency for healthcare workers to finally gain the recognition and praise they richly deserve.¹

There are some who argue that the COVID-19 pandemic is part of a plot to target certain populations for destruction. While the origins and purpose of the COVID-19 pandemic is open to debate, one feature of the crisis that is established beyond all doubt is the role played by the media in spreading fear and terror.

Below are a few published headlines:

Markets Spiral as Globe Shudders Over Virus – New York Times, March 10, 2020

The day the sports world stopped – New York Post, March 12, 2020

Great Blight Way – New York Post, March 17, 2020

Pressure on Trump as Millions are Kept Home - New York Times, March 21, 2020

Ground Zero – New York Daily News, March 22, 2020

Code Red – New York Post, March 23, 2020

After a Grim Forecast, Trump Extends Limits – New York Times, March 30, 2020

Braced for the Worst – New York Post, April 5, 2020

These alarmist headlines, laced with inflammatory words, achieved the desired result, which was to spread fear of the virus and thereby make the public receptive

¹ The author of this essay is a former healthcare worker.

to an unprecedented series of sweeping directives to reshape social behavior. As a result, people wear face masks, practice “social distancing,” and tolerate serious inconveniences, hardships, and deprivations, behaviors that normally the public would never accept.² Despite the success of this media campaign, the virus is still with us and according to the National Institute of Health will continue to be with us at least through the fall of 2020.

So far, the COVID-19 crisis has produced the following:

1. Reduction in air pollution.
2. Reduction in vehicular congestion.
3. Reduction in pedestrian traffic.
4. Increased opportunity for persons to reassess personal priorities.
5. Increased appreciation of workers heretofore taken for granted.
6. Increased recognition of the power of government, aided by the media, to engage in mass social engineering.
7. Increased recognition of the brittle and fragile nature of the economy.
8. Increased awareness of the relationship of the individual to society.
9. Increased recognition of the power of government to raise and spend astronomical sums of money in a matter of days.
10. Increased recognition of the willingness of government to selectively shut down entire sectors of the economy to achieve a perceived greater good.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the idea of the government directing entire industries to shut their doors and lock out their customers would have seemed preposterous. That is not the case anymore. Direct governmental management of the economy is now a fact. The question is whether it is here to

² This fear became apparent in an episode that took place in a bank lobby in New York City. A man and a woman entered the bank to use an ATM machine. Before using the machine, the man produced a metal cannister, apparently containing an aerosol disinfectant, and frantically proceeded to spray all the ATM machines and much of the interior of the lobby.

stay. This is not about a mere expansion of the government's power to regulate, that is, to enact general rules of conduct to ensure a fair playing field and protect the public from abusive practices. Rather, this is about a new and unprecedented effort of governmental authority to impose direct control of the day to day operations of the economy, the operation of which was heretofore the purview of the private sector and the marketplace.

Political management of the economy was tried in the Soviet Union.³ Imposed on an unwilling nation by a radical regime led by a cadre of ruthless political fanatics determined to keep power at all costs, it took seventy-four years for the Soviet people to finally free themselves from that system. To this day, the people in the Soviet Union's successor state, Russia, are still struggling to undo the damage caused by seventy-four years of politically driven centralized economic planning which produced shortages of everything except bureaucracy, paperwork, militarism, propaganda, political show trials, and gulags. Let us not use the COVID-19 virus as a pretext to repeat a failed political and economic experiment. One Soviet Union was enough. Let us not create another Soviet Union in the United States.

Sources:

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<https://norabelrose.com/2018/10/28/why-the-soviet-union-failed/>

³ In Germany, the Nazi Party also imposed central control of the economy through the Four Year Plan. However, the purpose of that plan was not to abolish the private sector but to rearm Germany.

<https://www.libertynation.com/why-socialism-failed-soviet-union/>

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