

15-Minutes Lockdown. “Immobilize the Greater Part of Humanity”

Turning into a system: a permanent state of emergency

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Supposedly completely innovative and revolutionary projects, announced today as a part of the Even Braver and Newer World, not only already existed, but in previous stages have been fiercely destroyed and eradicated, as unnecessary obstacles in the way of progress.

Who really blew up public transport?

The same people who today forbid us to use private cars, previously effectively limited and eliminated public transport. Bus and train lines subjected to commercialisation and privatisation ceased to function as public services, in practice forcing people to change to their own cars, which was joyfully applauded by the car industry.

Now this is a time for bicycle and moped manufacturers to take their share of the accumulation, but we are to believe that this particular industry is based on voluntary cooperatives of hippie koala bears, and is not the same business as others, with equally large lobbying funds and access to councilors' and mayors' wallets. Unfortunately, the drivers hunting will not automatically resurrect bus and railway lines.

Blocking of cities is not accompanied by the reconstruction of public transport, on the contrary, in fact it is often hindered as well, because no bus or tram will fly over these empty, concrete hectares, created in the city centres, with no cars, but with no people either. Forasmuch the real purpose is not to replace one form of transport for another, but to actually immobilise the greater part of humanity.

Herbivores

Now in the Eastern Europe we have lot of critics of the city centres transformation, which

has started exactly after 1990 and escalated with joining EU. Well, fine, but who the hell actually turned these town districts into stone and concrete deserts? Who uprooted the trees and bushes for years growing in the communal squares, '*because bums may hang out there?*'

Who wanted them to be *modern and European*, because for sure not the locals, but the same elite, who now pretend to be so *close to nature and green liking*? They destroyed greenery that had existed for generations, and now they claim to have invented green squares and lawns! And again, old and natural greenery disturbs, but trees must be planted in pots in the middle of the streets, as it was done for millions of pounds in the UK town during the pandemic. In fact, it is social engineering, not ecology and environmentally friendly urban planning.

We already had green, friendly neighbourhood units.

The recently fashionable vision of the '*15-Minute Cities*' has a similarly alienating character. Its inhabitants may be able to go for a soy latte on foot, but the barista who will prepare that for them and the cleaner who will take care of the mess in their apartments will have to travel for hours with three electric bus transfers to these oases of modern, green brave happiness. What is more, the idea itself is completely unrelated to European urban planning, being a reaction to the American cities problems, which for nearly a hundred years had been divided into strictly separated zones of residence, business, industry and entertainment, what resulted in the need to move farther and farther within heavy traffic and with restrictive highway code.

Meanwhile, the situation on the Old Continent, including its Eastern part, was completely different. What is more, analogous concepts were already being implemented, and it was just when Americans began to close themselves in their suburbs. European cities are full of model housing estates ('*Neighbourhood Units*'), erected since the 1930s, and in Eastern Europe especially in the 1970s. In the middle of such (often centrally built) sectors there were general stores, service outlets, community and activity centres, schools, kindergartens, health centres, pharmacies, churches etc. In a word, there have been everything that is considered necessary so that the local community does not have to move to the city centre. Such districts were often designed as areas closed to cars, with access roads, parking lots and garages on the outskirts.

In the West, however, with the progress of financialisation and deregulation, i.e. from the 1980s, and in Eastern Europe after 1990, care was taken to ensure that these areas were especially degenerated, disgusted and subjected to commercialisation. Libraries and activity centres were closed, local shops could not withstand the competition of hypermarkets and shopping malls, local gastronomy gave way first to fast food chains, and now to delivery.

Even schools have been closed and demolished to create great educational conglomerates, far from places of residence and teaching children to first stand in traffic jams to get to them. Again, no ignorant, medieval, traditionalist fascists did this. It has been a work of progress, associated in the West with the triumph of the Reaganomics and Thatcherism, and in the East with the victory of anti-communism and peripheralisation. Today, ideologically motivated, urban planners are eager to play on the longing for '*a nice locality and a familiar lady in a neighbourhood store*'. Then why they have destroyed that when we already had it?!

These already successfully existing 15-Minute Cities have been smashed either as ‘relics of communism’ or ‘unnecessary elements of overprotectiveness of the state’ and now the same, 100 years old Clarence Perry’s concept is presented as a great discovery of the Zero-Growth-World. Only today’s ones have one more minor improvement: they are CLOSED. Really closed, with entry limits to individual zones and common-sense convenience replaced by a system of bans, as it happened exemplarily in Oxford and Sheffield and what will probably await us all over time.

However, some naive people get trapped again. ‘*Oh my, the rat race is over, we’ll be living local again!*’ they repeat mindlessly, as if global social engineering has brought anything other than greater repression, increased surveillance, and intensified exploitation in the interests of the Top 1%. Hello, did you just fall off Mars? Where have you been for the last three years, haven’t you noticed that we have already been successfully tested on how to shut us down? Can’t you see the difference between a local neighbourhood you do not need to leave and the one you must not leave? Don’t you have any associations about the world, where your car can be immobilised from the outside, energy in your house can be remotely blocked and the entire sector you are assigned to can be isolated? You are right, the rat race is over, rat labs will suffice for the system’s survival.

The Eloi’s cities of and the Morlocks’ services

The COVID lockdowns rehearsed the reality of cities and whole countries completely closed. Since we did not protest then, let’s not be surprised that the test from 2020-22 is now turning into a system: a permanent state of emergency, for a good start in transport, or rather the lack of it, as well as in housing. That vision comes directly from the stories of the Eloi and Morlocks and it is easy to guess which group most of us belongs to.

Well, on the other hand let’s not worry too much. It may be just a 15-minute flattening the curve...

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Konrad Rękas is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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