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# Locked Down and Locking in the New Global Order

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*On 12 March, British PM Boris Johnson informed the public that families would continue to "lose loved ones before their time" as the coronavirus outbreak worsens. He added:*

> "We've all got to be clear, this is the worst public health crisis for a generation."

In a report, the Imperial College had warned of modelling that suggested over 500,000 would die from the virus in the UK. The lead author of the report, epidemiologist Neil Ferguson, has since revised the estimate downward to a maximum of 20,000 if current 'lockdown' measures work. Johnson seems to have based his statement on Ferguson's original figures.

Before addressing the belief that a lockdown will help the UK, it might be useful to turn to an ongoing public health crisis that receives scant media and government attention – because context is everything and responses that are proportionate to crises are important.

The silent public health crisis

In a new 29-page open letter to Fiona Godlee, editor-in-chief of the British Medical Journal, environmentalist Dr Rosemary Mason spends 11 pages documenting the spiralling rates of disease that she says (supported by numerous research studies cited) are largely the result of exposure to health-damaging agrochemicals, not least the world's most widely used weedkiller – glyphosate.

The amount of glyphosate-based herbicides sprayed by UK farmers on crops has gone from 226,762 kg in 1990 to 2,240,408 kg in 2016, a 10-fold increase. Mason discusses links between multiple pesticide residues (including glyphosate) in food and steady increases in the number of cancers both in the UK and worldwide as well as allergic diseases, chronic kidney disease, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, obesity and many other conditions.

Mason is at pains to stress that agrochemicals are a major contributory factor (or actual cause) for the spikes in these diseases and conditions. She says this is the real public health crisis affecting the UK (and the US). Each year, she argues, there are steady increases in the numbers of new cancers in the UK and increases in deaths from the same cancers, with no treatments making any difference to the numbers.

Of course, it would be unwise to lay all the blame at the door of the agrochemicals sector: we are subjected each day to a cocktail of toxic chemicals via household goods, food processing practices and food additives and environmental pollution. Yet there seems to be

a serious lack of action to interfere with corporate practices and profits on the part of public bodies, so much so that a report by the Corporate Europe Observatory said in 2014 that the then outgoing European Commission had become a willing servant of a corporate agenda.

In a 2017 report, Hilal Elver, UN Special rapporteur on the right to food, and UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and hazardous substances and wastes Baskut Tuncak were severely critical of the global corporations that manufacture pesticides, accusing them of the "systematic denial of harms", "aggressive, unethical marketing tactics" and heavy lobbying of governments which has "obstructed reforms and paralysed global pesticide restrictions".

The authors said that pesticides have catastrophic impacts on the environment, human health and society as a whole, including an estimated 200,000 deaths a year from acute poisoning.  They concluded that it is time to create a global process to transition toward safer and healthier food and agricultural production.

At the time, Elver said that, in order to tackle this issue, the power of the corporations must be addressed.

While there is currently much talk of the coronavirus placing immense strain on the NHS, Mason highlights that the health service is already creaking and that due to weakened immune systems brought about by the contaminated food we eat, any new virus could spell disaster for public health.

But do we see a 'lockdown' on the activities of the global agrochemical conglomerates? Not at all. As Mason has highlighted in her numerous reports, we see governments and public health bodies working hand in glove with the agrochemicals and pharmaceuticals manufacturers to ensure 'business as usual'. So, it might seem strange to many that the UK government is seemingly going out of its way (by stripping people of their freedoms) under the guise of a public health crisis but is all too willing to oversee a massive, ongoing one caused by the chemical pollution of our bodies.

Mason's emphasis on an ongoing public health crisis brought about by poisoned crops and food is but part of a wider story. And it must be stated that it is a 'silent' crisis because the mainstream media and various official reports in the UK have consistently ignored or downplayed the role of pesticides in fuelling this situation.

Systemic immiseration

Another part of the health crisis story involves ongoing austerity measures.

The current Conservative administration in the UK is carrying out policies that it says will protect the general population and older people in particular. This is in stark contrast to its record over the previous decade which demonstrates contempt for the most vulnerable in society.

In 2019, a leading UN poverty expert compared Conservative welfare policies to the creation of 19th-century workhouses and warned that unless austerity is ended, the UK's poorest people face lives that are "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". Philip Alston, the UN rapporteur on extreme poverty, accused ministers of being in a state of denial about the impact of policies. He accused them of the "systematic immiseration of a significant part of the British population".

In another 2019 report, it was claimed that more than 130,000 deaths in the UK since 2012 could have been prevented if improvements in public health policy had not stalled as a direct result of austerity cuts.

Over the past 10 years in the UK, there has been rising food poverty and increasing reliance on food banks, while the five richest families are now worth more than the poorest 20% and about a third of Britain's population lives in poverty.

Almost 18 million cannot afford adequate housing conditions; 12 million are too poor to engage in common social activities; one in three cannot afford to heat their homes adequately in winter; and four million children and adults are not properly fed (Britain's population is estimated at 63 to 64 million). Welfare cuts have pushed hundreds of thousands below the poverty line since 2012, including more than 300,000 children.

In the wake of a lockdown, we can only speculate about how a devastated economy might be exploited to further this 'austerity' agenda. With bailouts being promised to companies and many workers receiving public money to see them through the current crisis, this will need to be clawed back from somewhere. Will that be the excuse for defunding the NHS and handing it over to private healthcare companies with health insurance firms in tow? Are we to see a further deepening of the austerity agenda, let alone an extension of the surveillance state given the current lockdown measures which may not be fully rolled back?

The need for the current lockdown and the eradication of our freedoms has been questioned by some, not least Lord J. Sumption, former Supreme Court Justice. He has questioned the legitimacy of Boris Johnson's press conference/statement to deprive people of their liberty and has said:

> "There is a difference between law and official instructions. It is the difference between a democracy and a police state".

Journalist Peter Hitchens says a newspaper headline for what Sumption says might be – 'Former Supreme Court justice says Johnson measures lead towards police state' or 'TOP JUDGE WARNS OF POLICE STATE'.

But, as Hitchens implies, such headlines do not appear. Indeed, where is the questioning in the mainstream media or among politicians about any of this? To date, there have been a few isolated voices, with Hitchens himself being one.

In his recent articles, Hitchens has questioned the need for the stripping of the public's rights and freedoms under the pretext of a perceived coronavirus pandemic. He has referred to esteemed scientists who question the need for and efficacy of 'social distancing' and keeping the public under virtual 'house arrest'.

An open Letter from Dr. Sucharit Bhakdi, emeritus professor of medical microbiology at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, to Angela Merkel calls for an urgent reassessment of Germany's lockdown response to Covid-19. Then there is Dr Ioannidis, a professor of medicine and professor of epidemiology and population health at Stanford University. He argues that we have made such decisions on the basis of unreliable data. These two scientists are not alone. On the OffGuardian website, two articles have appeared which present the views of 22 experts who question policies and/or the data that is being cited

about the coronavirus.

Shift in balance of power

Professor Michel Chossudovsky has looked at who could ultimately benefit from current events and concludes that certain pharmaceutical companies could be (are already) major beneficiaries as they receive lavish funding to develop vaccines. He asks whether we can trust the main actors behind what could amount to a multibillion dollar global (compulsory) vaccination (surveillance) project.

The issue of increased government surveillance has also been prominent in various analyses of the ongoing situation, not least in pushing the world further towards cashless societies (under the pretext that cash passes on viruses) whereby our every transaction is digitally monitored and a person's virtual money could be declared null and void if a government so decides. Many discussions have implicated the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in this – an entity that for some time has been promoting the roll-out of global vaccine programmes and a global 'war on cash'.

For instance, financial journalist Norbert Haring notes that the Gates Foundation and US state-financial interests had an early pivotal role in pushing for the 2016 demonestisation policy with the aim of pushing India further towards a cashless society. However, the policy caused immense damage to the economy and the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions in India who rely on cash in their everyday activities.

But that does not matter to those who roll out such policies. What matters is securing control over global payments and the ability to monitor and block them. Control food you control people. Control digital payments (and remove cash), you can control and monitor everything a country and its citizens do and pay for.

India has now also implemented a lockdown on its population and tens of millions of migrant workers have been returning to their villages. If there is a risk of corona virus infection, masses of people congregating in close proximity then returning to the countryside does not bode well.

Indeed, the impact of lockdowns and social isolation could have more harm than the effects of the coronavirus itself in terms of hunger, depression, suicides and the overall deterioration of the health of older people who are having operations delayed and who are stuck indoors with little social interaction or physical movement.

If current events show us anything, it is that fear is a powerful weapon for securing hegemony. Any government can manipulate fear about certain things while conveniently ignoring real dangers that a population faces. In a recent article, author and researcher Robert J Burrowes says:

> "… if we were seriously concerned about our world, the gravest and longest-standing health crisis on the planet is the one that starves to death 100,000 people each day. No panic about that, of course. And no action either."

And, of course, each day we live with the very real danger of dying a horrific death because of the thousands of nuclear missiles that hang over our heads. But this is not up for discussion. The media and politicians say nothing. Fear perception can be deliberately

managed, while Walter Lippmann's concept of the 'bewildered herd' cowers on cue and demands the government to further strip its rights under the guise of safety.

Does the discussion thus far mean that those who question the mainstream narrative surrounding the coronavirus are in denial of potential dangers and deaths that have been attributed to the virus? Not at all. But perspective and proportionate responses are everything and healthy debate should still take place, especially when our fundamental freedoms are at stake.

Unfortunately, many of those who would ordinarily question power and authority have meekly fallen into line: those in the UK who would not usually accept anything at face value that Boris Johnson or his ministers say, are now all too easily willing to accept the data and the government narrative. This is perplexing as both the government and the mainstream media have serious trust deficits (putting it mildly) if we look at their false narratives in numerous areas, including chemical attacks in Syria, 'Russian aggression', baseless smear campaigns directed at Jeremy Corbyn and WMDs in Iraq.

What will emerge from current events is anyone's guess. Some authors like economist and geopolitical analyst Peter Koenig have presented disturbing scenarios for a future authoritarian world order under the control of powerful state-corporate partners. Whatever the eventual outcome, financial institutions, pharmaceuticals companies and large corporations will capitalise on current events to extend their profits, control and influence.

Major corporations are already in line for massive bailouts despite them having kept workers' wages low and lining the pockets of top executives and shareholders by spending zero-interest money on stock buy backs. And World Bank Group President David Malpass has stated that poorer countries will be 'helped' to get back on their feet – on the condition that further neoliberal reforms and the undermining of public services are implemented and become further embedded:

> "Countries will need to implement structural reforms to help shorten the time to recovery and create confidence that the recovery can be strong. For those countries that have excessive regulations, subsidies, licensing regimes, trade protection or litigiousness as obstacles, we will work with them to foster markets, choice and faster growth prospects during the recovery."

In the face of economic crisis and stagnation at home, this seems like an ideal opportunity for Western capital to further open up and loot economies abroad. In effect, the coronavirus provides cover for the further entrenchment of dependency and dispossession. Global conglomerates will be able to hollow out the remnants of nation state sovereignty, while ordinary people's rights and ability to organise and challenge the corporate hijack of economies and livelihoods will be undermined by the intensified, globalised system of surveillance that beckons.

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*Colin Todhunter is a frequent contributor to Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research.*

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