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Swine flu: “They Organized the Panic”. Inquiry into the Role of Big Pharma and WHO by Council of Europe

Bruno Odent interviews Dr. Wolfgang Wodarg

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In-depth Report: THE H1N1 SWINE FLU PANDEMIC

New Development: The German President of the Health Committee of the Council of Europe, Wolfgang Wodarg, is issuing accusations against the pharmaceutical lobbies and the governments. He has intitiated the start of an investigation by that body concerning the role played by the pharmaceutical in the campaign of panic about the virus.

Ex-member of the SPD, Wolfgang Wodarg is a doctor and epidemiologist. His request for a commission of inquiry into the role of pharmaceutical companies in the management of swine flu outbreak by WHO and the nation states was granted unanimously by the members of the Health Committee of the Council of Europe...

What made you suspicious about the influence of pharmaceutical companies had on the decisions being taken in respect of swine flu?

Wolfgang Wodarg. We are facing a major failure of national institutions responsible for warning about risks and responding in case a pandemic occurs. In April when the first alarm came from Mexico I was very surprised at the figures furnished by the World Health Organization (WHO) to justify the declaration of a pandemic. I was immediately suspicious: the numbers were very low and the alarm level very high. There were not even into a thousand patients when there was already talk of the pandemic of the century. And the alert was decreed extreme based on the fact that the virus was new. But the characteristic of influenza disease is to develop very quickly with viruses which take on new forms each time, by dwelling in new hosts, animal, human etc.

There was nothing new in itself to that. Each year a new virus of this “flu” type appears. In reality there was no reason to sound the alarm at this level. This was only possible because in early May the WHO changed its definition of a pandemic. Before that date there had to be not only a disease which had broke out in several countries at once but also one that had very serious consequences with the number of deaths above the usual average. This aspect was removed from the new definition, to retain the rate of spread of disease as the only criteria. And they claimed that the virus was dangerous because people had not been able to develop immunity against it. Which was false for this virus. Because it was observed that people aged over 60 years already had antibodies. That is to say they had already been in

contact with similar viruses. That is why also there are virtually no people aged over 60 who have developed the disease. Yet those were the people who were recommended to be vaccinated quickly.

Among the things that aroused my suspicions there was therefore on one side this determination to sound the alarm. And on the other side, some curious facts. Such as, for example, the recommendation by WHO to carry out two injections for vaccines. That had never been done before. There was no scientific justification for this. There was also the recommendation to use only special patented vaccines. There was however no reason for not adding, as it is done every year, specific antiviral particles of this new H1N1 virus, "completing" the vaccine used for seasonal influenza. This was not done because they preferred to use patented vaccine materials that major laboratories had designed and manufactured to be ready in case of a pandemic developing. And by proceeding in this way they did not hesitate to endanger the persons vaccinated.

What danger?

Wolfgang Wodarg. To provide products rapidly, adjuvants were used in some vaccines, whose effects have not been adequately tested. In other words, they wanted absolutely to use these new patented products instead of developing vaccines according to traditional methods of production which are much simpler, more reliable and less costly. There was no medical reason for this. It was only for marketing purposes.

How could anyone justify that?

Wolfgang Wodarg. To understand we must return to the episode of avian influenza from 2005 to 2006. It was then that new international plans were defined for dealing with a pandemic alarm. These plans were officially developed to ensure rapid manufacturing of vaccines in case of an alert. This led to negotiations between pharmaceutical companies and governments. On the one hand the labs committed themselves to keep ready to develop the preparations, on the other hand, states assured them they would buy them all. After this strange deal the pharmaceutical industry took no economic risk by engaging in new fabrications. And it was sure to touch the jack pot in the case of a pandemic outbreak.

Do you disagree with the diagnoses and even the potential severity of influenza A?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Yes, it's just a normal kind of flu. It does not cause a tenth of deaths caused by the classic seasonal flu. All that mattered and that led to the great campaign of panic which we have seen was that it was a golden opportunity for representatives from labs who knew they would hit the jackpot in the case of a pandemic being declared.

Those are very serious accusations you're making. How was such a process made possible within the WHO?

Wolfgang Wodarg. A group of people in the WHO is associated very closely with the pharmaceutical industry.

Will the investigation by the Council of Europe also work in this direction?

Wolfgang Wodarg. We want to clarify everything that brought about this massive operation of disinformation. We want to know who made decisions, on the basis of what evidence and precisely how the influence of the pharmaceutical industry came to bear on the decision-making. And the time has come at last for us to make demands on governments. The purpose of the inquiry is so that there are no more false alarms of this type in the future. So that the people may rely on the analysis and the expertise of national and international public institutions. The latter are now discredited, because millions of people have been vaccinated with products with inherent possible health risks. This was not necessary. It has also led to a considerable mismanagement of public money.

Do you have any concrete figures on the extent of this mismanagement?

Wolfgang Wodarg. In Germany it comes to 700 million euros. But it is very difficult to know the exact figures because we are talking on one side about vaccines resold to foreign countries and most firms do not communicate due to the principle of respect for "business secret" regarding the amounts in contracts concluded with States and any indemnification clauses contained therein.

Will the work of "lobbying" by pharma companies on the National Institutes of Health also be dealt with by the investigation of the Council of Europe?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Yes we will examine the attitude of institutions like the Robert Koch Institute in Germany or Pasteur in France who should in fact have advised their governments from a critical standpoint. In some countries certain institutions have done so. In Finland and Poland, for example, critical voices were raised to say: "we do not need that.

Has the tremendous global operation of disinformation also been possible because the pharmaceutical industry had "representatives" even within the governments of the most powerful countries?

Wolfgang Wodarg. As regards the ministries, that seems to me to be obvious. I can not explain how specialists, very smart people who know the problems of the influenza disease by heart, did not notice what was happening.

So what happened?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Without going as far as saying direct corruption, which I am certain does exist, there were many ways for labs to exercise their influence over decisions. A very concrete example, is how Klaus Stöhr, who was the head of the epidemiological department of the WHO at the time of bird flu, and who therefore prepared the plans to cope with a pandemic that I mentioned above, in the meantime had become a top executive of the company Novartis. And similar links between Glaxo and Baxter, etc. and influential members of the WHO. These large firms have "their people" in the cogs and then they pull strings so that the right policy decisions are taken. That is to say, the ones that will allow them to pump as much money from taxpayers.

But if your survey succeeds, will it not be a support for citizens to insist their governments demand accountability from these large groups?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Yes, you're right, this is one of the major issues related to this investigation. States could indeed take advantage of this to contest contracts drawn up in, let us say, improper conditions. If it can be shown that it was under the influence of firms that the process was initiated then they will have to be push to ask for reimbursement. But that's just the financial side, there is also the human side, persons who were vaccinated with products that were inadequately tested.

So what kind of risk have these healthy people unknowingly taken by getting vaccinated?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Again, the vaccines were developed too quickly, some adjuvants were insufficiently tested. But there is worse to come. The vaccine developed by Novartis was produced in a bioreactor from cancerous cells. A technique that had never been used until now.

Why, I'm obviously not an expert, but how can one claim to make a vaccine from diseased cells?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Normally one uses chicken eggs on which viruses are grown. We need in fact to work on living cells. Because viruses can only multiply in this way and so do, by definition, the virus preparations that go with it. But this process has a big flaw, it is slow and it takes a lot of eggs. And it is long and complex technically. Another potentially excellent technique is to grow the virus in living cells in bioreactors. This requires cells which grow and divide very quickly. It's a bit like the method used to culture yogurt, which is also produced in a bio-reactor. but in this context the cell was so upset in its environment and its growth that it grows like a cancer cell. And it is on these rapidly multiplying cells that they grow the virus. But to manufacture the vaccine the virus must be re-extracted from these cells on which they were implanted. And it can therefore happen that during the manufacturing process of the vaccine, residue of cancerous cells remain in the preparation. In the same way as it happens in conventional manufacturing with eggs. Thus we know that in the case of a classic influenza vaccination, side effects can occur in people who are allergic to egg albumin found in egg white. It can not be excluded that proteins, remains of a cancer cell present in a vaccine produced by bio-reactor, may generate a tumour on the person vaccinated. According to a true principle of precaution, before such a product is allowed on the market, there should therefore be 100% certainty that such effects are actually excluded.

And wasn't this done?

Wolfgang Wodarg. It was not. The EMEA (European Medicines Agency), an institution under the responsibility of the European Commissioner for Economic Affairs, based in London, which gives permission to release vaccines on the market in Europe, gave the green light for commercializing this product arguing, namely, that this mode of manufacture was not a "significant" risk. This was very differently appreciated by many experts here in Germany and by an independent drug institution, which instead sounded the alert and voiced their objections. I took these warnings seriously. I studied the case and intervened in the context of the Bundestag health committee of which I was a member so that the vaccine would not be used in Germany. I made it known that I was certainly not opposed to the development of vaccines with this technique. But first it had to have a total guarantee of innocuousness. The product has therefore not been used in Germany where the government terminated the contract with Novartis.

What is the name of this vaccine?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Obta flu.

But that means that in other European countries like France the product can be marketed without any problem?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Yes, it obtained permission from EMEA and can be used anywhere in the EU.

What alternative do you intend to propose so that further scandals of this type are avoided?

Wolfgang Wodarg. The WHO should be more transparent, so we know clearly who decides and what type of relationship exists between participants in the organization. It should also be flanked by at least one elected chamber, which should be able to react very critically and where everyone can express themselves. This enhanced public scrutiny is essential.

Isn't the question of another system capable of handling a matter which is in fact a common good for citizens across the planet coming to the surface?

Wolfgang Wodarg. Can we go on allowing the production of vaccines and the conduct of these productions to organizations whose goal is to win as much money as possible? Or is the production of vaccines not something that States must absolutely monitor and implement themselves? That's why I think we should abandon the system of patents on vaccines. That is to say, the possibility of monopolization of vaccine production by a large group. For this option requires that we sacrifice thousands of lives, simply in the name of respect for these monopoly rights. You're right, that particular claim has become evident for me.

Interview by Bruno Odent translated into English by Carolyn Dunning.

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