

## After COVID-19 is an Alternative Society Possible?

This comes from an interesting editorial by Richard Horton published May 30 in The Lancet. He asks how do we make sense of this pandemic? He quotes the first interpretations from Slavoj Žižek a prolific philosopher and cultural theorist who has produced a volume of reflections.

- Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World.

Žižek does not believe that the epidemic will make society wiser. He believes “we should resist the temptation to treat the ongoing epidemic as something that has a deeper meaning”.

However, despite these cautions the question to be answered is asked by Richard Horton “what is wrong with our system that we were caught unprepared by the catastrophe despite scientists warning us about it for years”.

Horton goes on to suggest we must accept that the coronavirus epidemic itself is clearly not just a biological phenomenon which affects humans: To understand its spread, one has to consider human cultural choices – economy and global trades, the thick network of international relations, ideological mechanisms of fear and panic.”

Žižek discusses China and says “China thwarts the freedoms of its citizens.” He endorses the view of Li Wenliang, the ophthalmologist who was censored by Wuhan authorities for sharing information about the new SARS-CoV-2 virus and who later died from COVID-19. Li Wenliang said there should be more than one voice in a healthy society and without an open space for citizens’ critical reactions to circulate, mutual trust between the people and the state is impossible to sustain.

Žižek then turns his attentions to the future “even horrible events can have unpredictable positive consequence”. He wonders whether there is a possibility of an alternate society, one that promotes global solidarity and cooperation and he wonders whether “coronavirus will also compel us to re-invent Communism based on trust in the people and in science, not a Soviet-style Communism but an idealised solidarity between people”. He feels that Communism imposed by the necessities of their survival would result in radical change and he feels that COVID-19 is the catalyst to bring this change.

Žižek goes on to hypothesise that this pandemic, which has precipitated a state of medical war, could usher in some kind of global healthcare network. He also feels that lockdowns have enforced solitude, time to think about the sense or nonsense of our predicament. This of course does not take into account citizens who are unfortunately in circumstances which do not allow thought and happy solitude.

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