

Who Wanted Pandemic Lockdowns?

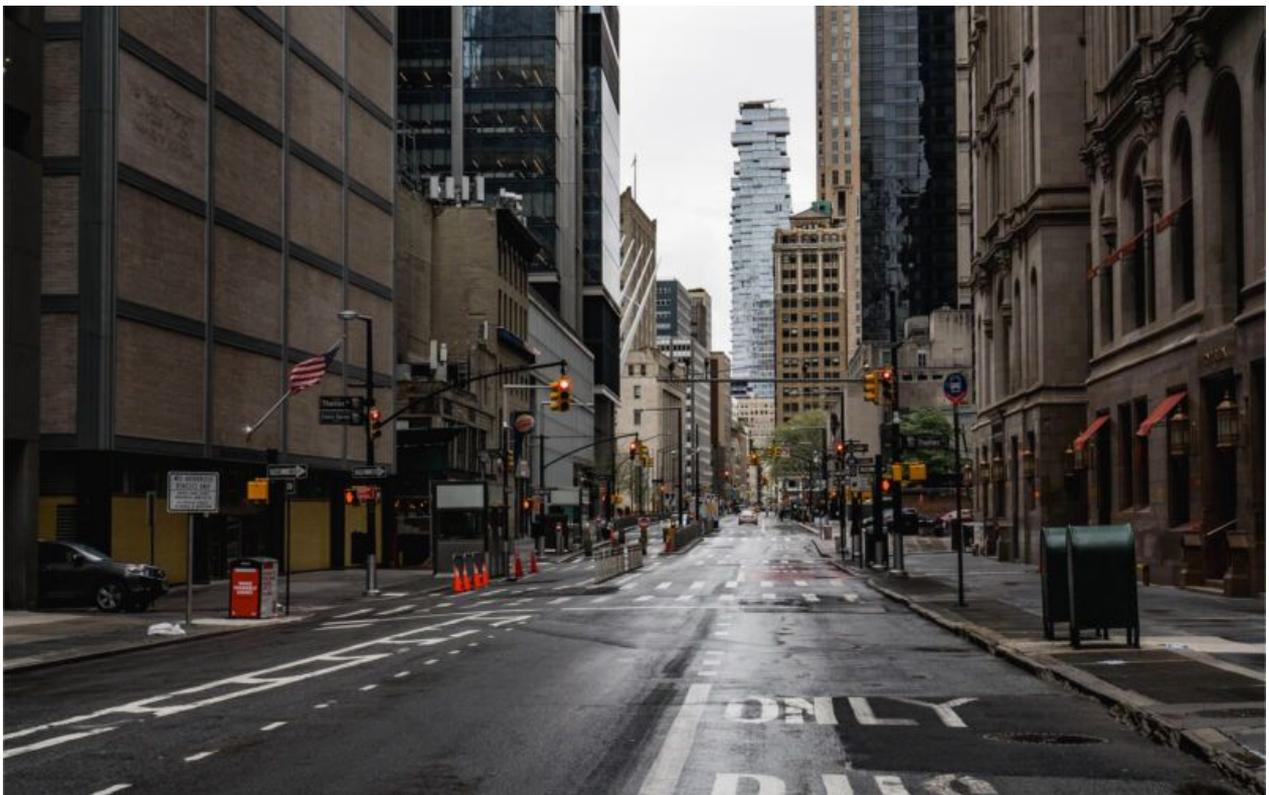
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People of the future will look back at these 11 months and be very confused. How could virtually the entire world have thrown out settled practices of civil, economic, and cultural liberties for a virus that resisted every attempt to control it?

This virus is not Ebola and it has come nowhere near approaching the death rates associated with H1N1 of 1918. By some measures, it's not been as deadly as 1957-58, a virus that came and went without much public attention at all. New pathogens are part of life, and there was and is nothing particularly unusual about this one.

The enduring question now and for many years to come will be: why? We all asked the question a thousand times, and it has been asked of us the same number of times. It is too early to say, and the answer will likely be similar to other epic events in history such as the Great War or the Fall of Rome.

The answer to the question why is: multiple causes. I'm not prepared to weigh them yet.

And yet, it seems reasonable to observe that many groups and sectors had a kind of hankering for a pandemic. They turned a widespread and mostly manageable pathogen – doctor/patient relationships and reasonable cautions on the part of the vulnerable – and converted it into the basis for a global panic that overthrew centuries of progress in law and liberty.

Among which:

1. The tech companies who became so enraptured with the digital world – and we can include online retailers in this – that they forgot all the people who cannot and do not want to live entirely outside the physical world.
2. The pharmaceutical companies with hundreds of billions of investment in labs and distribution circles who wanted to ply their wares in the midst of emergencies, in addition to the PCR testing industry.
3. Public health intellectuals who for at least a decade and a half had fallen for the romance of computer modelling and were itching to try out a new method for disease mitigation.
4. The mega-billionaire Bill Gates who found himself vexed by computer viruses that were wrecking his Windows operating system and thereby developed a passion for blocking viruses in general, while failing to understand the difference between biology and computer hardware.
5. Government officials who like to try out new uses of power.
6. Media companies who live on clicks and know with certainty that public panic is the best way to guarantee consumer attention, especially if they are locked at home with nothing else to do.

7. The Chinese government which was supremely annoyed at the Trump administration's trade policies and successfully trolled the West into believing that China nixed the virus through totalitarian controls.
8. Rabid opponents of the Trump administration, who had failed to wreck it through accusations of Russian collusion and then impeachment over a phone call to Ukraine, finally turned to creating tremendous social, economic, and political chaos by massively overblowing the severity of a widespread viral pathogen, which itself became a metaphor for the political infection they believed afflicted the country.
9. School teachers unions who have been wanting to strike for years in order to extract pay and benefits from the taxpayer but worried that doing so would turn their public against them; for them, lockdowns were the perfect excuse to find another way.
10. A ruling class population that has lost touch with people who cannot live on their computers, increasingly detached from the flow of life as it exists in the physical world and thereby failed to empathize with the suffering of others under lockdown.

No one interest group could have achieved this on its own. It required a perfect storm. It doesn't have to be a conspiracy much less a specific plot. It only requires that the right confluence of events present themselves in a way that prompts action and cooperation.

I might add one more push for pandemic that touches on a general philosophy of life. The world is overflowing these days with people who are consumed by ideology. They have a perception that something is fundamentally wrong with the world and are consumed with a burning passion to fix it. They long for big change, mighty drama, epic shifts in history. For them, the marginally improving world of bourgeois existence seems dull and uneventful. The pandemic was for them something exciting and momentous: it presented a chance for big change.

That we will look back with astonishment at what has happened to the world is a near certainty. The folly! And people of the future will never stop asking that great question of why. The answer is finally unsatisfying. It was a massive screw up by people and groups who wanted to try something completely new, none of whom were willing to bear responsibility for the results. It will be up to the rest of us to pick up the pieces and get life on the right track again.

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