

From the Health Crisis to the Democratic Crisis: Remarks by a True Believer in Free and Open Society*

Václav Klaus

Many thanks for the invitation. It is great to be in Vienna at the end of January as if nothing happened. The Vienna Congress Com.Sulthas become a part of our lives and of our calendar, at least for some of us. Many thanks to David Ungar-Klein for succeeding to push this year's Vienna Congress through, in spite of all the adversity, hurdles and obstacles connected with the corona epidemic. In the last couple of months, all of us have been receiving letters with cancelations of all scheduled conferences and seminars. The fact that we are meeting here today is – given the circumstances – almost unbelievable. Once again, many thanks to all who made it possible.

To prepare, organize and carry out the Congress has always been a great achievement and in the present days of the artificially created panic, confusion and chaos even more so. **I deliberately mention the man-made factors rather than the Covid-19 epidemic.** There is no doubt that the consequences of the politically motivated restrictive measures are bigger, deeper and more dangerous than the threat connected with the medical aspects of corona epidemic.

This is for me a crucial point. Let me explain why I see it that way. Saying this is, of course, politically highly incorrect and many loud exponents of the coronavirus apocalyptic doctrine would no doubt classify it as disinformation.

In my book with the title “**Quarantine**”¹, published back in April 2020, I stressed that I am **more afraid of the people** who would try to abuse the epidemic to suppress freedom and democracy **than of the virus itself.** I warned that “**the consequences of the politically chosen form of therapy would be bigger than the consequences of the illness itself**”. Having said that I also dared express my fear that “**the epidemic would open the door to a huge expansion of government intervention into our lives**”.

Now, twelve months after the arrival of SARS-CoV-2 into Europe and ten months after the publication of my book, we have more data, more explanatory hypotheses and theories, as well as a more extensive experience, yet I don't see a need to change these original statements of mine.

*The 18th Vienna Congress Com.Sult, introductory notes at the panel “From the Health Crisis to the Democratic Crisis”, Vienna, February 1, 2021.

¹Klaus V., et al, Karanténa, IVK, Prague, April, 2020 (in Czech).

When selecting the title of this panel, the organizers of our Congress expressed an obligatory optimism based on the well-known German proverb which I heard for the first time – accidentally in this room – some twenty-five years ago: “Optimismus ist Pflicht”. The title “From the Health Crisis to the Democratic Crisis” is unfortunately inadequate when describing the situation in January 2021. **We do not go through a democratic crisis these days. What we experience is a brutal suppression of democracy, something non-existent on our continent since the fall of communism.**

The extensively used flat restrictions, quarantines and lockdowns have not been successful in eliminating the coronavirus, yet their collateral ill effects have been very dramatically endangering the main building blocks of our free society. I don't underestimate (or play down) the huge death toll of the covid epidemic in all our countries but I am not ready to accept a strange and suspicious silence about the other side of the coin – the severe costs manifested in the deterioration of our way of life (and of the lives of entire nations), the enormous economic costs, the impact the chosen policies have had on public finances, on education, on the psychological health of all of us, not to speak about the deteriorating quality of our political, social and economic systems.

I don't belong among those who suggest making technocratic measurements of the costs of a human life, but I resolutely disagree with the attempts to refuse to accept and face the unpleasant trade-off between competing goals of human society. It is not a demonstration of morality to argue that such trade-offs do not exist. To disregard their existence is absolutely immoral. The implicit, not openly discussed trade-offs are much worse than the explicit ones and gatherings like this one should say it loud.

I would like to make it clear that I am not a friend of conspiracy theories as regards the origin of the epidemic even though I am able to understand the reasons why they came into being – the obviously unconvincing form and style of official explanations of the epidemic. However, the conspiracy theories deny the nature of complicated interrelations of social phenomena studied by respectable social sciences for centuries.

I see the covid epidemic and its accompanying political, economic and social costs **as a synergy of destructive ideas and ideologies and of strong political and business interests.** Their advocates are interested in the weakening of human freedom and of free markets, in the weakening of these two most important mechanisms that

serve as a guarantee of the quality of life in modern societies. This synergy is strong enough to trigger an avalanche which consequently seriously damages our fragile and vulnerable societies.

Its success is made possible by **the fear of the silent majority** of our fellow-citizens on the one hand and by **the aggressiveness and radical ambitions** of the modern political left on the other. The NewLeft is the product of a mutation of the old socialist ideas with the new progressivistic stances of aggressive environmentalism, violent genderism, unrelenting global warming alarmism, and utopian egalitarianism.

Due to it, Covid-19 created a new opportunity for the victory of dangerous progressivism. In a short booklet I published at the beginning of October 2020, I raised the following question: **Is Covid-19 a mere illness or rather an instrument for a radical transformation of human society?**² I am afraid the second point is correct. The undergoing radical transformation of human society is not the result of covid, but of covidism.

We have to fight covidism and to start thinking and behaving rationally and courageously. The advocacy of quarantines, lockdowns and other forms of non-functioning restrictive measures should not be regarded as the embodiment of responsibility and good-heartedness. It is very often only an easy opportunism, if not a non-committal cowardice. The silent majority should speak out. The sooner, the better.

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² Klaus, V., Weigl, J., Covid-19 pouhá nemoc, nebo instrument k přeměně společnosti?, IVK, Prague, Newsletter Plus, October 2020 (in Czech).