



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on April 6, 2020

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## Coronavirus: Freedom Is the Cure

As this is being written (the end of March), important nations of the world are on lockdown. Important states in America are on lockdown. Nearly 100 million Americans have been ordered not to leave their homes. Politicians in Israel have openly debated the possibility of eliminating all personal freedoms. Police and National Guard troops are going door-to-door in Rhode Island searching for contraband visitors (especially New Yorkers), raising the specter of martial law. It sounds impossibly apocalyptic, like something out of a bad sci-fi movie featuring the imminent arrival of inscrutable, implacable, and hostile aliens, but it's true.



And, it's poised at this writing to get even worse. According to *Haaretz*, Sigal Sadetsky, the head of Israel's public health services, made reference to the Chinese approach to handling the coronavirus pandemic in remarks to the Knesset Subcommittee on Intelligence and Secret Services. She told them, the paper reported, "that she believes 'everyone will do the same thing.'" Questioned about whether she was advocating a lockdown or curfew, her answer was chilling. "A lockdown and personal monitoring of people, and a total halt to personal freedom," she answered.

She may as well have been speaking for statisticians everywhere, including in America. As of this writing, the National Guard has been called out in 28 states, and many state governors have issued edicts forcing people to stay indoors. Across the country, businesses deemed not essential have been closed. Alarming, with the urging of Democrats in state governments and in Congress, the president activated the Defense Production Act, the 1950s Korean War-era law that empowers the executive branch of the federal government to take over some or all of the economy as it deems necessary to fight a crisis.

Around the world, with a very few notable exceptions, the response to COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, has been to abandon any pretense of freedom and free markets and to institute thoroughly socialist police states.

This is both ethically questionable and morally detestable. It certainly makes a mockery of the American Constitution, laughs in the face of the Declaration of Independence, and is a jackboot stepping on the face of the Founding Fathers.

Moreover, these moves to a socialist police state are going to fail. They are not going to produce a cure for COVID-19. More importantly still, they will destroy the economy, if not civilization as a whole. The entire span of history, especially the experience of the last 100 years, has proven that the flourishing of art, the advance of science, the decline in poverty and the growth in abundance, and, yes, the cure for disease, have been phenomena of the free and undirected activity of individuals in the market unencumbered by bureaucratic red tape and dictatorial meddling.



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By contrast, wherever massive government interventions have been tried, they have always ended in poverty, scarcity, and, all too often, mass death and genocide.

In trying to cure the COVID-19 with authoritarian socialism, our policymakers and politicians, and those like them around the world, are putting in place a course of treatment that will kill the patient. The disease may be eradicated, sure, but what's the point if the civilization is destroyed?

It is, without question, important that we stop the pandemic. But if we want to stop this pandemic and the next, the answer is more freedom and more of the prosperity that results from freedom. Using police-state tactics to shutter the economy and control the movement and activity of people creates a multitude of conditions that put lives at risk, including increased poverty, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, and more, all of which compound the dangers represented by disease. In contrast, an unencumbered society avoids these follow-on impacts while allowing need and opportunity, represented by demand for treatments and solutions, to promote entrepreneurship and innovation. In essence, freedom is the cure.

### **Socialist Scarcity**

If socialist economies promote advanced innovative solutions and economic outcomes, including those needed to fight disease, we should see evidence of this from past experiments with socialist systems. In fact, socialist regimented economies have been tried before, and several times at that. In fact, they have been tried and found wanting even under optimal natural and economic conditions.

The truth is, a socialist command economy cannot work. It generates graft and corruption while having a fundamental inability to supply even the basic needs of society.

That inability comes from the very nature of economic planning. Consider this on a small scale wherein *you* must decide what goods and services your neighbor needs and should have over the next 12 months. How much fuel should he have? How much food? What kind of food? How often should he have access to that food? What about education? Or entertainment? What technology should he have access to? As the planner for just one neighbor, these are the questions you need to answer. Then there is the matter of bias and emotion. What if your neighbor curses at you, or throws rocks or otherwise resists your plans? Might you take punitive action against your neighbor to teach him a lesson?

Now, expand this to a nation and put bureaucrats in charge. There is no way central economic planning could work adequately, even for just one year for a set of two neighbors. When expanded to the size of an entire nation, the possibility of successful planning drops to zero.

This is because central planning does away with supply and demand in the market, and with that eliminates price. Prices are the means by which those in need of goods and services signal how much they need, and prices are used by producers to determine what to supply. When some product or service works well or is badly needed or desired, demand for that item rises. If the demand rises relative to supply, then the price increases for that item accordingly. This information is noted by suppliers who then, seeing an opportunity, bring to market either additional supply or new products that will also meet that demand. The information conveyed by prices about potential opportunities in the market also provides incentive for innovation in the pursuit of better means of production, more effective products, or even more efficient means of storage and delivery of products. The result of all this activity, mediated by equilibrium-seeking between supply and demand and signaled by prices in the market, is a growth in availability of goods and services, along with a rich and growing prosperity to be



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enjoyed by all.

None of this happens, or it happens very poorly, in a socialist command economy. The result is always scarcity, poverty, hunger, and, all too often, death.

The greatest example of this is the experience of the Soviet Union. From 1918 to 1992, the Soviet Union was the world's leading socialist state. Contrary to Soviet propaganda, it suffered regular shortages of goods and services. The 1970s, economically, were the best of times for the Soviet people. And yet the system of socialized planning regularly resulted in shortages.

Former *New York Times* reporter Hendrick Smith witnessed the situation for himself while living in Moscow, the wealthiest of Soviet cities. In his book *The Russians*, he described the shortages Muscovites lived with at the time.

Smith noted that in the mid-1970s, there existed an “enormous gulf between the daily ordeal of the Russian shopper and the easy life-style of Americans. My Russian friends were amused to hear about American suburban housewives getting into the station wagon and dashing off to the supermarket or shopping center for groceries a couple of times a week. For they usually walked to the stores every day for food, often quite a long way, and had to go to several shops — one for bread, another for milk products, a third for meat and so on.”

The reason for the difficulty in procuring groceries and other products, Smith explained, was because of the planned economy.

“In spite of the various tinkering reforms,” Smith wrote, “the Soviet economy still operates by Plan from above rather than in response to consumer demand from below and this produces a lopsided assortment of goods. Goods are produced to fill the Plan, not to sell. Sometimes the anomalies are baffling. Leningrad can be overstocked with cross-country skis and yet go several months without soap for washing dishes. In the Armenian capital of Yerevan, I found an ample supply of accordions but local people complained they had gone for weeks without ordinary kitchen spoons.”

Worse than being unable to provide a normal selection of basic goods and services even during periods of relative peace and prosperity is the outcome of socialist planning when it goes aggressively off the rails for ideological purposes.

The Khmer Rouge of Cambodia offers one such example. To create a thoroughly centrally planned economy, the country's communist leaders “evacuated” the cities, killing anyone who resisted, and forced formerly urban residents into hard labor on collective farms. Millions of innocent people died as a result.

Famine and mass death caused by socialistic government intervention is a recurring theme of the 20th century. It happened again in the mid-1980s in Ethiopia, when the government forcibly moved farmers from areas of the north to areas of the south of the nation, disrupting harvests and worsening the effects of army worms and drought. Victims were interviewed for *Cultural Survival Quarterly* in 1985.

“Ninety-five percent of the famine victims who fled to the Sudan before the end of 1984 reported that in their villages the Ethiopian army had burned crops in the fields and grain they had harvested. The army, they said, never stole the grain, it simply destroyed it,” *Cultural Survival* reported.

The journal also reported, “The majority of those interviewed who had fled the resettlement camps claimed that they had not personally been hard hit by the famine. On average, those from Tigre who



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were interviewed claimed that they had produced 80% of their subsistence, cereal needs in 1984. In addition, on average, these 'famine' victims had had more than 22 head of livestock at the time of their resettlement. One man said he was taken by the army while he was selling mangoes he had grown on his irrigated farm; another claimed to have been taken from his farm while he was threshing grain."

### **Fight Pandemics With Prosperity**

In contrast to socialist interventions that return civilization to the stone age, respect for natural freedoms and liberties, and the economic activity of a bureaucratically unencumbered free people, results in the rapid improvement of health and welfare, as further experience over the last 200 years demonstrates.

In his book *The Mainspring of Human Progress*, Henry Grady Weaver, who was head of customer research for General Motors in the years immediately after the cataclysm of World War II, described the massive change brought about by economic freedom in the West over the preceding century and a half:

For thousands of years under the Old World concept of a static economy, operating under bureaucratic control, human beings lived in hunger, filth, and disease. They worked ceaselessly at back-breaking drudgery to keep life in wretched bodies. They died young. For thousands of years, when not fighting wars, they managed to build pigsty shelters, to sow grain, cook meat, yoke oxen, and chain slaves to mills and oars.

Then in this New World, in a brief period of 160 years, Americans created an entirely different mode of life, with improvements and advances in the scale of living beyond the utmost imaginings of all preceding ages. Americans have disproved the pagan superstition of a static universe and have given new meaning to the word progress.

If our progress is to continue, it is important that we do not forget the things which have brought us thus far.

In fact, we can see the productive power of the free market at work even under the current pandemic lockdown conditions imposed by government bureaucrats today.

Because there is such an obvious demand for products and services to fight the coronavirus, many of the remaining companies that have been allowed to continue operating under despotic government lockdown orders have devoted their productive capacity and research and development teams to developing solutions and providing needed supplies:

- American tissue paper producers are operating mills at full capacity to supply the heightened demand for toilet paper due to fear of shortages caused by government quarantines, curfews, and lockdowns. "We try to make as much as we can right now," Patty Prats, senior communications manager at Georgia Pacific, told WAFB 9 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. According to the channel, the company's mill in Zachary, Louisiana, has "stepped up production on the toilet paper side by 120% just to keep up with demand."
- Canon USA, the American branch of Japanese imaging and industrial giant Canon, has begun work on a rapid test for COVID-19. On March 19, the company "announced the start of development of a rapid genetic testing system for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)." Canon has extensive experience in developing similar rapid test technologies for use in testing for both Ebola virus and Zika virus.
- On March 4, Japanese biopharmaceutical giant Takeda announced that it was pursuing a blood



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plasma-based treatment for those suffering from COVID-19. In a press release, the company announced that it would “share with members of the United States Congress that it is initiating the development of an anti-SARS-CoV-2 polyclonal hyperimmune globulin (H-IG) to treat high-risk individuals with COVID-19.”

- Gilead Sciences is moving forward with COVID-19-related trials for its antiviral drug remdesivir. The drug has shown promise, according to the company, against MERS and SARS that are similar to SARS-CoV-2, the cause of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The company notes that it “has initiated two Phase 3 clinical studies to evaluate the safety and efficacy of remdesivir in adults diagnosed with COVID-19 following the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) rapid review and acceptance of Gilead’s investigational new drug (IND) filing.”

- Regeneron, a U.S. biotechnology firm, announced on March 17, 2020 that it had made important advances in developing an antibody treatment for COVID-19. According to the company, “Regeneron scientists have now isolated hundreds of virus-neutralizing, fully human antibodies from the company’s VelocImmune® mice, which have been genetically-modified to have a human immune system. Regeneron has also isolated antibodies from humans who have recovered from COVID-19, in order to maximize the pool of potentially potent antibodies. From this large pool of candidates, Regeneron will select the top two antibodies for a ‘cocktail’ treatment based on potency and binding ability to the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, as well as other desirable qualities. Using a multi-antibody approach allows for targeting of different parts of the virus and may help protect against multiple viral variants.” The company used similar technology earlier to develop a successful treatment for Ebola.

- Pharmaceutical giant Sanofi has announced that it is working with Regeneron on another treatment for COVID-19. According to a Sanofi press release, the two companies have “started a clinical program evaluating Kevzara® (sarilumab) in patients hospitalized with severe COVID-19. Kevzara is a fully-human monoclonal antibody that inhibits the interleukin-6 (IL-6) pathway by binding and blocking the IL-6 receptor. IL-6 may play a role in driving the overactive inflammatory response in the lungs of patients who are severely or critically ill with COVID-19 infection.”

These are just a few of the actions being taken by private companies and their dedicated scientists, engineers, and production workers to bring needed resources to bear on the problems posed by the novel coronavirus. That they have not needed government direction, oversight, or control to undertake these efforts demonstrates that government is not the solution to the pandemic.

It’s worth noting that in several of these examples, the companies noted that trials and efforts now under way were made possible by efforts to cut through government regulations that would otherwise prove to be roadblocks to rapid innovation. George D. Yancopoulos, co-founder and chief scientific officer for Regeneron, for example, noted that his company and Sanofi “have worked closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, otherwise known as the FDA and BARDA,” to get trials under way quickly.

Even doctors have needed to get regulation out of the way to save patients. In an interview with former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani posted to the mayor’s YouTube channel on March 28, Dr. Vladimir Zelenko of the Jewish community of Kiryas Yoel just outside of New York City described his success in treating COVID-19 patients with a drug cocktail of hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin, and zinc. Using this combination, he told Mayor Giuliani, “I’ve had zero patients die, zero patients intubated, and I have





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currently three patients admitted to the hospital with pneumonia, but they are not intubated and I think they'll be fine." Asked by Giuliani how many patients with COVID-19 he'd treated so far, he replied, "I think 450-500." Moreover, he noted, "Many doctors are coming on board, they're having similar results." He also noted: "This treatment costs \$20." But to make it available required getting government out of the way, something Dr. Zelenko in his comments credited President Trump with doing. The FDA was asked in March by President Trump to "take a closer look at as to whether an expanded use approach ... could be done," said FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn. The FDA subsequently approved the use of hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine for COVID-19 treatment.

These and other examples raise an important question: How much more work and innovation might be done to benefit all of human society if so many millions were not locked down by government authorities? And the corollary question: How much damage will be done by these government actions?

This question was asked by John P.A. Ioannidis, professor of medicine, of epidemiology and population health, of biomedical data science, and of statistics at Stanford University. In an essay for the medical news website Stat, Ioannidis noted: "One of the bottom lines is that we don't know how long social distancing measures and lockdowns can be maintained without major consequences to the economy, society, and mental health," he wrote. "Unpredictable evolutions may ensue, including financial crisis, unrest, civil strife, war, and a meltdown of the social fabric."

He concluded with an ominous warning. With "lockdowns of months, if not years, life largely stops, short-term and long-term consequences are entirely unknown, and billions, not just millions, of lives may be eventually at stake."

This, too, was the warning decades ago from Henry Grady Weaver. "We have moved a long way from the Stone Age," he noted while pointing out that "without the tools of production, human beings would sink back into a state of barbarism."

COVID-19 is dangerous to some, sends many to hospitals, and causes only mild symptoms in most people. Yet authorities have taken drastic, civilization-altering steps to counter it, putting at risk millions of lives and livelihoods, taking away the "tools of production," and threatening indeed to send the world back to the stone age.

This is not the way to cure the pandemic, but is a way only to multiply the force of its impact.

The idea has been set up by propaganda in the press and by demagogic politicians, and accepted by a frightened population, that we face a deadly dichotomy: We can save people by shutting down and putting "essential" businesses under the control of government, or we can reopen with business as usual and cause the deaths of millions. This is an oversimplification at best, and a pernicious lie at worst.

A free people, engaged in economic operations in a free market, has proven, without question and over centuries, to be the greatest engine of innovation and prosperity possible. By contrast, government control stifles production and squelches innovation. Even safety is risked by governments in ways that private enterprise would never consider. Here in the United States, for example, government programs have purposely infected men with syphilis as part of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment (without informed consent, the CDC has admitted), injected people with radioactive isotopes to study the effect of radiation (as documented in the book *The Plutonium Files* by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Eileen Welsome), and conducted the now notorious MK-ULTRA mind-control experiments with LSD. It is



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unlikely in the extreme that any private enterprise would have done these things, or gotten away with them had they tried. Government, meanwhile, carried out these experiments for years, decades in one case, and tried to keep them covered up.

In facing the coronavirus crisis, it is important not to underestimate the value of freedom and overestimate the efficacy of government action. In fact, if we really want a cure, get government out of the way and let the world's billions get back to their lives and work.

In the end, it will be freedom that provides the cure.

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