

Pandemic Aftermath (2)

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A cataclysmic pandemic does not end with everything going back to the world as it was. The Bubonic Plague in Europe led to changes in religion (distrust in Catholicism opening protesting sects, Protestantism); changes in work, serfdom giving way to free labor; urbanization and the rise of a middle class challenged monarchy; and older superstitions giving way to the birth of modern science.

Successive epidemics compelled crowded cities to clean up. Scientific improvements permitted us to identify "germs," a better explanation than "bad air." These epidemics further advanced the discipline of medicine with the first improvements than Roman medicine.

The Spanish Flu had a strange aftermath: amnesia. Nobody wanted to talk about it. People not only really mourned the deaths, but just plunged into a world of self-indulgence and refusal to recognize that malignant forces were simmering abroad (Communism and Nazism).

There are movements simmering in our midst to make some real transformations in behaviors and beliefs that may be the first paradigm changes since the corporate Capitalist system, that has made our lives prosperous and comfortable. But suddenly, facing a year of isolation in our homes, we began to see the flaws in our former systems.

Work Ethic. The Capitalist work ethic required putting work before family. People spent long days commuting to and from their work places, put in long days, and for those who wanted to reap the financial benefits of moving up the ladder of leadership, they had to put in the hours. This work ethic had consequences: as women entered the same industries as men, children lost important oversight. Commuting became a daily irritant of wasted time, in addition to creating air pollution because of the petrochemicals burning in cars and planes.

The system of evaluating and rewarding certain kinds of labor over others met a big challenge. We learned how many lower paid workers had become "essential:" nurses, housecleaners, senior caretakers, delivery people, and mothers. The pandemic revealed the dissonance between "women's work" and equitable pay.

The pandemic also furloughed many workers to work from home, using the rapidly advancing technology of computers and Zoom meetings. While the workplace will not be surrendered, at least partial work from home is devastating the business real estate market in office space. Remote conferencing has also impacted air travel and hospitality industries.

Remote working is possible for some jobs, letting people move from stressful cities into in small towns, formerly depopulating. Rural America may well have a comeback with new, highly educated families. It may also lure immigrant populations who will farm and create small businesses to serve the affluent residents. This may well transform our politics: small towns may no longer be exclusively conservative Republican.

Our Medical Non-System. Medical care should no longer depend upon employers. We have seen that when jobs closed down during the pandemic, people lost their medical coverage. We have also seen how badly the entire pandemic was handled by a disinterested, incompetent president and his party, and the patchwork state systems that had no central direction. We need to join the rest of the developed world and create a national system.

The Green Movement. The Capitalist system that worked so well at making millions of people comfortable has been forced to consider the cost. Industrial food, which provides more than enough calories, does not provide adequate nutrition. Millions of lower income citizens suffer from diseases in numbers that the affluent do not: obesity, diabetes, cancers (bad diet and polluted air and water), and children whose abilities are thwarted by deprivation.

The Green Movement is illustrative of a change in values: perhaps love of each other and the other species that share our planet. Competition is inevitable, but should not be a blood sport. Cooperation may become the dominant work element, and certainly a better one for domestic life as well.

We are entering a new world in which there will be support for reducing global

warming, ending our dependence on petrochemical energy, and perhaps renewing our appreciation of each other, family and neighbors. We may well be entering one of the most creative times in human history.

686 words

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