

Book Review

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Žižek, Slavoj. *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*. OR Books, 2020. (126 Pages, paperback ISBN 978-1-68219-301-3, ebook ISBN 978-1-68219-246-7)

Slovenian Lacanian-Marxist Philosopher Slavoj Žižek has published his most recent work on the COVID-19 pandemic. It is quite timely, relevant, as well as ambitious. The book covers a wide variety of issues with primary focus on the origin and possible implication of the disease. The author argues that today probably we need more whistle-blowers like Julian Assange and Edward Snowden in order to know what has really happened inside China at the outbreak of the disaster. Therefore, he advocates this idea that if free speech were allowed in China, there would have been no pandemic. And he rightly points out that if the government of China could believe in its own people the situation would have been different. In the third chapter of the book he argues that today's situation is such that even if we recover from this disaster the world will never be the same again. He highlights that three key factors a) contemporary problems of refugees in the Middle East, b) the devilish presence of Putogon (a term he uses for President Erdogan and President Putin) and, c) the existence of this current pandemic has led Europe on the verge of a perfect storm.

Žižek also takes issue with (what he calls) Alt-right and fake-Left on the notion that this pandemic is some kind of hoax or having some social meaning. He also takes issue with Giorgio Agamben's idea that governments are somehow exaggerating the threat of the virus for legitimizing a true state of exception.¹ The author stresses that even if there is 'exaggerated panic' from the government side, it still justifies that the state should carry out some kind of social control in order to mitigate the danger. In other words, he backs the Chinese model of surveillance but with

the guarantee of freedom of speech and dissent. Therefore, he supports the idea that governments should exercise surveillance without the misuse of power.² At the same times he maintains that in these unprecedented times due to environmental degradation and low resources, there are possibilities of barbaric violence in some parts of the world. On the other hand, in the developed world he thinks a communism with human face would be highly encouraged.

One of the major themes of the book is to recognize the seriousness of the situation and its possible outcomes. Žižek informs us that the only possible way to face the challenge is to realize that world leaders should unite and develop a global health care system presided over by the World Health organization. As it is obvious that almost every crisis creates opportunities of some kind Žižek seems to argue that in the current disaster there is potential for communism (though not the one of 20th century type but the one) based on human cooperation. As he says: "it should be a disaster communism as an antidote to the disaster capitalism."³

Doubtlessly the author has carefully examined the situation, but a point of controversy can be made over the issue of surveillance. Despite the fact that lockdown and constant monitoring is the only viable solution of the pandemic (one can measure the success of China in this regard) but the potential misuse of power cannot be underestimated. Our experience of the past events, such as the institutional and legal regimes established in the post-9/11 era, are still fresh and disturbing for the people not only in the United States, but also in different other parts of the world. In short, the book is full of rich analogies and interesting allusions to many movies and anecdotes. It should be regarded a remarkable contribution in the academic debate on the Coronavirus pandemic.

Notes:

¹ p. 74

² Following the Kantian notion of "Obey (the laws of the State) but think, maintain the freedom of thought!" p.102

³ p. 103

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