

Threat of Pandemic Requires Crash Bio Defense Initiative

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche is the chairwoman of the Civil Rights Solidarity Party (BüSo) in Germany, which issued this as a leaflet, titled "Belshazzar's Handwriting on the Wall: A Biological Crash Program Is Urgent!" It has been translated from German.

Since the beginning of February, 13 more nations on three continents have announced the outbreak of bird flu, of the highly contagious strain H5N1. After the discovery of dead wild fowl on [the northern German island] Rügen and the neighboring territory, now the first European Union cases of infected commercial animals have appeared in Austria. According to information from the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 170 cases have been reported worldwide, in which human beings have been infected with this virus, and so far there have been 92 deaths; but the scientists also report that the virus, through the course of its mutation, has become more resistant and more dangerous. It is, in all probability, only a question of time, before the H5N1 virus mutates into a virus which can immediately be communicated from person to person, "growing together" with the normal flu virus.

Although no one can forecast the exact timing of an outbreak, many experts believe that there are clear signs that point to an immediately looming pandemic. Governments are now requested to act.

The Spanish flu of 1918 claimed between 20 and 50 million victims. The SARS epidemic of 2003 showed that today—much more so than in 1918, because of globalization and the greatly strengthened communication networks by air and other means—new biological agents can spread across the entire world in a matter of days. One must then proceed from the standpoint that the medical-care system will undergo

extreme stress, and the total economy will be crippled in its ability to function, as roughly 30% of the population and all employees can be infected.

What is now necessary is a total rethinking of the question of what constitutes the costs of maintaining health. The top-most priority must be the saving of human life.

Currently, we in the German republic have a schizophrenic situation. On the one side, there are thoroughly competent emergency plans for an outbreak of poultry diseases, infection with the bird-flu virus, and a threatening influenza pandemic; and the expert groups specially set up for this have oriented themselves toward the proposals of the WHO. To this end, considerable investments in fundamental medical science would be necessary to overcome the current bottlenecks, and achieve the vaccination of the population in the most rapid and complete way possible. For this, the capacity to handle the sick, under the conditions of the expected pandemic, must be expanded dramatically.

But the exact opposite trend is observable in reality. According to statements by the WHO, the number of community hospitals has been reduced since 1991 by more than 10%. The German Hospital Association in Berlin estimates that 15 to 30% of the approximately 2,200 community clinics will be closed in the coming 10 years. A major reason for this development is the use of the Diagnosis Related Groups, or DRGs, instituted in the framework of Germany's health "reform." With that, the compensation for care became converted to a number of lump-sums; that is, the hospital received only a lump-sum payment for a specified treatment, which remains the same, whether the patient gets well or not. If there are secondary infections, requiring the patient to remain in the hospital longer, the hospital must cover the costs, just as the resident doctor himself must pay, if he oversteps the budget

limits set by the health insurance.

As a result of this cost-accounting thinking, the victim in each case is the patient; he who is poor and cannot pay privately, is just out of luck. This trend must therefore be reversed, beginning with the appropriate construction of new capacity and new hospital beds, because millions of people will have to be cared for when the pandemic arrives.

If the H5N1 virus mutates into a flu virus that can be transmitted from person to person, there will still have to be a time of preparation, after the identification of the pandemic virus, before a suitable seed virus has been developed, and a sufficient amount of vaccine can be produced. From the time of the vaccine manufacture in the incubated hens' eggs, this time of preparation under optimal conditions would take at least three months. This means that all the necessary measures of preparation, which pertain to the manufacture, production, and distribution, have to be concluded now, to shorten the preparation time, to build sufficient production capacity, and to secure the soonest possible supply of an effective and safe vaccine for the pandemic.

A 'Biological Defense Initiative'

But we must do something else much more fundamental.

We need, on the international level, a "Biological Defense Initiative," that is, a comprehensive and thoroughgoing crash program for the investigation into *all* diseases and epidemics. For the WHO already warned, shortly after the turn of the century, that there was only a window of about ten years before a new biological holocaust would arrive, caused a combination of old and new pandemics. More than half of this timeframe has already expired. Yet, the WHO also neglected to make an adequate proposal for how such a scenario could be avoided.

We need a biological research program, which does not proceed from symptoms and cost-accounting thinking, but from the fundamental questions of what life really is, and how it can be protected and promoted in the best possible way. Thus we must proceed from an all-encompassing conception of the universe in the sense of the Russian scientist Vladimir Vernadsky, and inquire into the connection between the Biosphere and the Noösphere. Only if we proceed from a totally new definition of the question of life, can we find the necessary conceptual breakthroughs for the control of such diseases as AIDS, cancer, multiple sclerosis, and other sicknesses, which today are seen as incurable, or relatively incurable.

We need a complete rethinking. Because the threatened influenza pandemic produced by the bird flu is only a symptom of the misdevelopment, which has set in for some 40 years. Already, in the 1960s, we were headed systematically in the wrong direction, away from a society oriented toward production and scientific and technological progress, toward speculation and the utopia of a post-industrial services society. This misdevelopment has found its height, that is, rock-bottom, in globalization and its unrestrained maximization of profit. There have been pandemics before, it's true, but not the

mass animal husbandry escalating into a spreading pandemic, and the mass travel over many borders which exists today.

This paradigm shift in the wrong direction has brought us today to a point which can only be compared to the descent of mankind into a dark age like that of the 14th Century. Then, the collapse of the Bardi and Peruzzi banking houses coincided with the Black Death. Today the financial system associated with globalization finds itself in the end-phase of its collapse, and threatens to lead to a similar dark age.

Let us hope that it is not too late. If we mobilize the political will now, and realize the necessary crash program—that is, put all the required means in place to defend the life and health of humanity—there is a legitimate hope that we can overcome, or at least minimize the crisis. We must put man and the general welfare, not profit, in the center of economy, politics, and science, and thus put as many resources in place as are necessary. Because we cannot expect private companies and banks to do this, this initiative can only proceed from the state and governments.

The question of a new world financial system, a New Bretton Woods, will soon put itself on the agenda as the only alternative to total chaos. An emergency conference on the level of heads of state, in the tradition of Franklin D. Roosevelt, must take up a reorganization of the world financial system, and decide upon a new financial architecture, which puts credit at the disposal of the real economy and the interests of the general welfare. Lyndon LaRouche has stood for such a reorganization for many years, and there is support for it in many nations of the world, among parliamentarians and other institutions.

In the poem "Belshazzar" by Heinrich Heine (whose 150th death anniversary we commemorate this year), after the blasphemy by King Belshazzar, flaming writing appears on the wall. The bird flu is such flaming writing for us. But we don't need a magician to interpret it. We only need to do what it necessary.

This is not about panic-mongering, and this is not about whether the world soccer championship occurs in Germany or not, but about whether the human species is capable of implementing the necessary correctives in time, when our very existence is threatened by great dangers.

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