A March Miscellany

With Spring around the corner, ***CIB Chairman Edward Spalton*** *reflects on the mixture of good cheer and civil liberties concerns brought by recent COVID-19 vaccine developments.*

OFFICIALLY Spring is not yet sprung, but the lengthening days and the return of children to school with the partial relaxation of the COVID lockdown have raised spirits somewhat. It is not an entirely rational thing, but it will no longer be criminal for two consenting adults to meet in a park and drink coffee together (presumably whilst observing social distancing!). Of course, there are downs as well as ups, but an article in the *Daily Telegraph* (2 March) cheered me up considerably.

Titled 'For Germans, Britain is now the grown-up', the article was by the German journalist and author Thomas Kielinger, who was a a long serving correspondent for *Die Welt*. Kielinger compared the successful British vaccination campaign with the muddle and delay in Germany. He pointed out that Angela Merkel has been forced to call successive summits with the quarrelsome governments of the 16 Laender (provinces).

> *'The turmoil has been exacerbated by the AstraZeneca debacle. Following a rumour that the vaccine was useless for the over 65s, a whopping 85% of the 1.5 million doses available in Germany is being stored unused….*
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> *'Initially this played well among Germans who by nature pivot towards worrying endlessly; there is a beautiful moniker for it, "Bedenkentraeger", or "doubt carriers". But now the overload of scientific disputation has led to an atmosphere of utter helplessness as people veer between resignation and feisty incredulity….*

> *‘But a multitude of authorities are all competing for prominence and even the family doctor is not allowed to administer the jab.’*

He goes on, ‘Nobody waxes enthusiastic about the EU any more, and the notion of ever closer union has evaporated.’

Previously, Germans thought of Brexit as an act of extreme, self-inflicted harm. Now they are not so sure:

> *‘Over 20 million British people have been vaccinated since December, compared with around 4 million in Germany, which is the larger population by about 15 million. Eat your gloomy predictions, ye staunch anti-Brexiteers! No wonder Germany’s Bild, Europe’s largest circulation tabloid, is growing more excited by the day.. “We envy you British,” was the headline last week… To use Johnsonian rhetoric, “Germany vacillates, Britain vaccinates”.’*

Regardless of one’s views about the government’s undoubted massive mismanagement of the pandemic or of the efficacy (or otherwise) of vaccination, it is a refreshing change to hear of an official programme of the British government (any official programme) which is proceeding with speed and efficiency, noticeable even in Germany!

There is every reason to be suspicious of powerful international organisations and the motives of the people who run them. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has come in for a great deal of criticism recently. No doubt it has assisted in the achievement of many worthwhile improvements in public health over the years, but from 1947 its first Director General, Brock Chisholm, had ambitions which most people would regard as very sinister:

> *‘To achieve world government, it is necessary to remove from the minds of men their individualism, loyalty to family, tradition, national patriotism and religious dogmas. The re-interpretation and eventually eradication of*

> *the concept of right and wrong which has been the basis of child training, and the substitution of intelligent rational thinking for faith in the certainties of old people, these are the belated objectives of practically all effective psychotherapy.'*

Doubtless Dr Chisholm recruited people who shared his views, and we have no means of knowing how far this world view has cascaded down to this generation in this and other organisations; but, as we look at what is happening in the world, we can hazard an occasional guess! The WHO is 'the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations system' and was set up to be responsible for 'shaping the health research agenda'. It is not a purely publicly funded group, but rather is part-financed by large pharmaceutical companies and Bill Gates.

Those who, like Lord Sumption, are worried about the suppression of civil liberties under the guise of health protection, are wary of the use of vaccination records to create a global system of biometric ID. This is potentially part of an authoritarian mission to 'build back better'. The government has expressed interest in the likelihood of a system which is emerging for the creation of an 'interoperable digital identity market'.

There is nothing new in countries demanding vaccinations for incoming travellers. It is the potential universality of such a system and its abuse for authoritarian purposes which gives rise to justifiable fears.

Some existing abuses might be avoided. In *The Spectator* (6 March), a Mr Richard Clayton wrote of how things could be circumvented in Africa:

> *'One of my colleagues went to visit a client in Rwanda. On arrival at Kigali airport, it transpired that he wasn't in possession of the correct vaccination certificate. He was*

> *then offered the required injection but the facilities looked less than salubrious. A stand-off ensued, which was eventually resolved when the client's "fixer", who was waiting for my colleague, was summoned and promptly took the injection "on behalf" of my colleague to the evident satisfaction of all parties.'*

I had not heard of vaccination by proxy before!

It is not new for British people to be wary of prod-nose officialdom. When a census was proposed in 1753, William Thompson (MP for York) saw it as, "the most effective engine of rapacity and oppression that was ever used against an injured people," and threatened to order his servants to show the census enumerators, 'the discipline of my horse pond.'

Perhaps the census is now seen as harmless, but in 1951 Sir Ernest Benn was fined £5 with 2 guineas costs for refusing to fill in the form. His counsel explained that Sir Ernest hated, 'with a passionate hatred the encroachment of government activity.' Sir Ernest was uncle to that redoubtable independence campaigner Tony Benn. (See Christopher Howse's article 'The Census', *The Spectator*, 6 March 2021).

Other equally passionate haters of the encroachment of government activity are now resisting the present abuses of authority in combating the pandemic, and girding themselves to fight the greater potential for world-wide bossiness which is likely to emerge from it.