

The Citizen Is Back

By [Prof. Yakov M. Rabkin](#)

Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

Global Research, April 14, 2020

'Once the pandemic subsides, vital conclusions must be drawn and implemented. Many citizens have become painfully aware that the invisible hand of the market is no more than a useless extremity, as the sacrosanct laws of supply and demand have failed them. So did profit-driven globalization'.

The pandemic, which engendered a planetary panic, and the ensuing financial and economic crisis have shown that many governments, including those of 'developed countries', were unprepared to handle the emergency. Our [Republican movement](#) offered a [rational and timely solution](#) by creating the Civil Solidarity Headquarters and proposed a range of necessary and operational measures.

The planet has a chance to change for the better, argue insightful intellectuals and conscientious citizens. We present the opinion of Professor Yakov M. Rabkin of the University of Montreal (Canada), expert of [the Studrespublika Final-2015](#) who is often invited to share his thoughts with us.

This view has impacted our world, with the current Covid-19 crisis further highlighting Margaret Thatcher's words, commonly referred to as the Iron Lady. She was one of the apostles of privatization and the shrinking of the state. She also preached by example and countless have followed. The state has shrunk in most Western countries, and, a few years after she uttered those words, her gospel found true believers in the former socialist countries. On both sides of the demolished Berlin Wall one saw massive transfers of wealth from the public sector to private hands. Tax cuts and privatization resulted in considerably weakened states, poorer financially and logistically than major companies.

When forest fires were raging around Moscow in the summer of 2010, causing thousands of deaths from suffocation, some people recalled that a specialized Federal forestry service had been disbanded under Yeltsin. It used to employ 70 000 forest rangers who identified and put out fires. In the United States, the Global Health Security and Biodefense team on the National Security Council staff was disbanded under Trump.

But the problem is more serious than the personalities involved. The state used to protect the citizens from abuses of the private sector. This is how anti-trust legislation came about over a century ago. Labour laws, unemployment insurance, and consumer protection followed. These social rights, stronger in Europe, and weaker in the United States, were part of the defense of capitalism in the context of the Cold War. When the Soviet Union began to wilt, powerful private interests realized that they no longer needed 'a capitalism with a human face'. They embarked on massive dismantling of social rights in capitalist countries.

One of these rights is health. A cursory look at the number of [beds per capita](#) reveals four leaders: Japan, South Korea, Russia and Germany. Italy is 25th, Spain 27th, the United States 31st. This ominously correlates with the dynamics of the current pandemic. The four leading countries not only have more beds but they were fast to recognize and react to the oncoming peril.

Contrary to Thatcher's belief, people cannot look after themselves when Covid-19 strikes. They turn to their respective states in search of protection from the pandemic. Some states rose up to the task and some clearly failed. It matters little whether the state is democratic or authoritarian. What *does* matter is its ability to protect its citizens in case of emergency.



Some states turned out to be unprepared for emergencies, experiencing tragic shortages of medical supplies. In imitation of the private sector, they came to depend on long supply lines for most essential products, becoming a pale replica of a private enterprise.

Once the pandemic subsides, vital conclusions must be drawn and implemented. Many citizens have become painfully aware that the invisible hand of the market is no more than a useless extremity, as the sacrosanct laws of supply and demand have failed them. So did profit-driven globalization.

Citizens should reclaim their status of citizens after being reduced to that of 'customers'. This ubiquitous term borrowed from the world of business has merged citizens, passengers, students, patients and many others into an amorphous mass of 'customers'. We all know that words have power.

But words can also take power away. This power must be returned to the citizens, the only ones capable of freeing the state from the control of the private sector. The state must resume its primary function of [protector of the citizen](#) and acquire adequate means to do so.

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