

# WITH GANDHI AGAINST CORONA

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“*B*izarre alliance: With Gandhi and violent offenders against Corona and the government” a German newspaper headlined a report referring to numerous demonstrations in Berlin which oppose the Covid-19 measures and the vaccination program of the German government.

As in many parts of Europe and the world, supporters and opposers of the measures fighting Covid-19 are facing each other diametrically. While the ones get vaccinated and support lockdowns and limitations of free movement and travel and stick to the observance of distance- and hygiene rules, the others evaluate these measures as widely overdrawn and disproportional.

They view these as a welcome means for enforcing one-sided upheavals motivated by interest under the pretext of Corona, with which the majority of mankind perspectively can be controlled and manipulated even more efficiently. It is a controversy with many variables that particularly unites numerous different, but always ideologically based approaches.

Also Gandhi marches in those protest movements - larger than life-sized portraits on posters and banners are carried through the streets of the German capital. After Gandhi had been defined more through his historic significance than his current relevance in Europe for the past decades, his ideas of non-violent resistance are now referred

to by the opponents of governmental measures for legitimization of their protests.

German photographer Anja Bohnhof who has extensively dealt with Gandhiji's biography and his political ideas in her long term project “Tracking Gandhi”, which is received internationally as a book and an exhibition project, in an interview with the Austrian historic Dr Werner Koroschitz who occupies himself among others with the memory culture and the reworking of totalitarian Austrian and European systems in numerous publications and exhibitions.

A.B.: The well-known Austrian newspaper “Der Standard” recently reported about G's negative attitude to vaccination and transferred this to anti-vaccinationists during the Covid-19 pandemic. How far do you find this equation legitimate?

W.K.: Mahatma Gandhi's rejection of vaccination stated in 1924 is indeed a bit disconcerting, especially as his argumentation contra vaccination against the spreading smallpox disease may indeed be assigned to the irrational area of esoteric. Nevertheless it doesn't appear legitimate to transfer his statements done nearly a hundred years ago to the current pandemic, particularly as Gandhi always focused on human welfare as a whole.

A.B.: Doesn't this mean in final consequence that none of any statements given by a historic,

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significant personality can serve as an orientation at present?

W.K.: No, arguably it is not like that. When I simply think of Karl Marx's social analysis or Gandhi's ideas as a freedom fighter: Their societal ideas still possess great potential and socio-political explosive power nowadays. But we still experience the instrumentalisation of historic personalities or groups of persons for doubtful ideologies.

When "Covid-19 opponents" nowadays label themselves as the Jews of yesterday it is as unacceptable as the statement of a protest speaker on stage claiming in tears to feel like SS. The equalisation with millions of Jews persecuted, displaced and killed during National Socialism or with German resistance fighter SS who was sentenced to die and eliminated for her commitment to humanity by the National Socialists is not only illegitimate, but also condemnable.

W.K.: What do you think about how far Gandhi's views nowadays serve the anti-vaccinationists as a guidance for their activities?

A.B.: Innerly I feel struggled to even think about this. Any kind of absorption seems to me as a non-legitimate act of occupancy. I think there are indeed reasons for justifying a critical questioning of some governmental measures as well as publically expressing protest against them. But then please with my own arguments. These should be powerful and convincing to persist in discourse.

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An argumentative recourse to historic personalities rarely works in such contexts as it mostly is too selective and shortened. How little the anti-vaccinationists have even dealt with Gandhi in this case can be easily derived, as they don't carry his portrait through the streets to argue with his views concerning vaccination which probably only the fewest of them even know, but to ennoble the public demonstrations against the governmental measures as a non-violent fight in Gandhi's sense.

This appears to me similarly presumptuous as comparing oneself to resistance fighters during World War 2. What the famous author Stefan Zweig calls it: “Any gesture of resistance that doesn't include any risks and has no impact is nothing but craving for validation.” You can evaluate the participation in protests against the Covid-19 measures as you like, but exposing yourself to the risk of political prosecution in a democratic system as in Germany is currently not noticeable for me.

I think a cautious and ongoing, currently oriented interpretation of historically significant writings and roads of life seems to be an appropriate way to find an adequate handle to keep this precious companion alive at present, far from personal cult and ideologic abuse. This starts with religious writings and not at last ends with Gandhi.

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