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The Truth Behind the Images of Army Trucks in Bergamo

Was this shocking scene from the Corona era a perfidious staged event?

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They were probably some of the most iconic and gruesome images of the coronavirus pandemic: military trucks driving through the night in long lines, loaded with the coffins of the supposedly countless victims in Bergamo. These scenes hit the world like a tsunami of fear. They were shown everywhere, across all media channels, and they fuelled a feeling of absolute helplessness in the face of an invisible enemy. I, too, still remember this feeling well.

Commentators outdid each other with descriptions of the tragedy: a country at its limit, the catastrophe overwhelming even the military. No more capacity for the dead in the local crematoriums. A macabre image that seared itself into the collective memory – and at the same time provided the justification for draconian measures. Lockdowns, school closures, contact bans – hardly anyone dared to object in the face of the dramatic scenes from Bergamo.

But now, almost four years later, suspicions are growing that this shocking image was more staged than real. A hearing of the Italian COVID-19 Commission of Inquiry on 19 November 2024 sheds a whole new light on the scenes from Bergamo. Antonio Porto of OSA Polizia, a

high-ranking official, revealed a detail that seems so incredible as to be hard to believe: each of the military trucks was transporting only a single coffin.

What? These kilometre-long columns, which suggested overcrowded capacities, were in fact grotesquely inefficiently loaded? What at first glance appeared to be a logistically necessary operation could turn out to have been a perfidious PR stunt designed not to uphold the dignity of the deceased but to instil maximum fear in the population. At the hearing, Antonio Porto asked the question that many are now asking: 'What did they want to convey to the population with these images?'

Technically, each of these military trucks could have transported several coffins. According to the commission of inquiry, the loading area of the trucks used is 4.255 metres long and 2.20 metres wide – enough space to load at least six to eight standard coffins measuring 1.90 x 0.70 metres. Nevertheless, it was apparently deliberately decided to load each truck with only a single coffin. Why? This question remains unanswered.

The images of Bergamo played a central role in the media and political staging of the pandemic. They were a wake-up call, a dramatic symbol used by politicians worldwide to justify their measures. But now it turns out that this image may not have been a spontaneous document of the crisis, but a deliberately choreographed event designed to achieve maximum emotional impact. The question is who directed this – and to what end.

These new revelations raise serious questions. If the images from Bergamo, which were presented to us all as an unadulterated testimony to the tragedy, were in fact the result of a staging, what does that say about the integrity of all pandemic reporting? And how much of what we have experienced in recent years has been similarly staged? These questions are not just academic. They have the explosive power to destroy even the remnants of trust in the media, politics and institutions that some people still have. This makes it likely that the resistance to the urgently needed investigation will be all the more fierce.

The response to the revelations from Italy has so far been – unsurprisingly – scant. Neither the Italian government nor those responsible for the operations at the time have yet commented on the allegations. Even international media outlets, which broadcast the images in an endless loop at the time, are largely silent. Not to mention the German media. But this silence will not be sustainable in the long run. Citizens have a right to know whether they were manipulated at the time – and if so, by whom.

The images from Bergamo could go down in the annals as one of the biggest media scandals in modern history. They show how easily mass influence can be exerted with emotionally charged images – an effect that was apparently deliberately used by politicians and the media. But this scandal has the potential to permanently destroy what little trust remains in the responsible institutions. And in a democracy, trust is or was, until not so long ago, the most valuable asset. If this trust is finally lost, even among those who still have some, society faces much greater damage than the virus – and even the measures taken against it – could ever have caused.

What remains is bewilderment. We thought we had the worst behind us, but the bits and pieces of the truth about the Corona period that are now coming to light are bewildering. What else are we going to learn? And what is being covered up? If it is confirmed that the images from Bergamo were manipulated or staged, it would be an unprecedented fraud against the public.

Those responsible must now provide answers. The public has a right to know what was really behind the images from Bergamo – and not only behind these. And they have a right to demand tough consequences at long last – for all those who have abused this trust.

There is also a ray of hope on the horizon. With the Trump administration currently being reshaped in the US, there is a fresh wind blowing that gives hope for clarification. Figures such as Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has already appeared at one of the Berlin Querdenker demos against the coronavirus policy, or the signatories of the Barrington Declaration, who have campaigned against lockdowns and for a differentiated approach to combating the pandemic, are designated for influential posts – as health minister and head of the supreme health authority. This shows that the days of uncritical acceptance are over.

If this new awareness movement really does pick up speed, Karl Lauterbach and other protagonists of German coronavirus policy such as Christian Drosten will have their work cut out. A transatlantic wave of transparency could also reach Germany – and raise the long-overdue questions that no one has wanted to ask so far.

One thing is certain: the Germans have so far hardly proved on their own that they are able to critically examine their own coronavirus past (and other things). It will probably take an external impulse to get the ball rolling. But if this impulse comes, it could change a lot in this country too – and ensure that those responsible are finally held to account. In clean proceedings under the rule of law – but without official favouritism and judicial blindness!

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