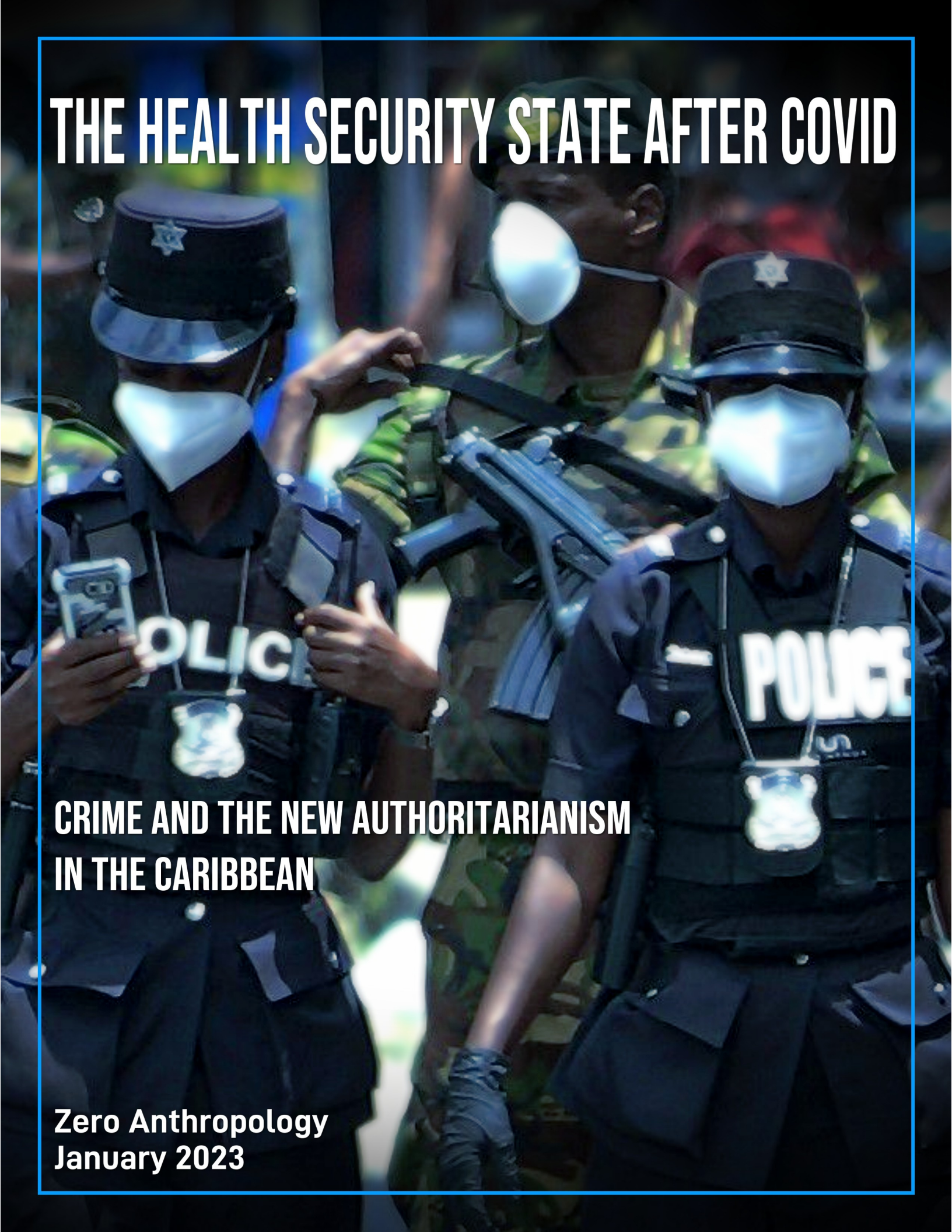


# THE HEALTH SECURITY STATE AFTER COVID

## CRIME AND THE NEW AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE CARIBBEAN

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# The Health Security State After Covid: *Crime and the New Authoritarianism in the Caribbean*

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## **Abstract**

The concept of “public health” and the practice of locking down, have been weaponized and enlisted in a broad and expanding service to the national security state. This case study focuses on Trinidad & Tobago, particularly between 2022 and 2023. The case involves a declaration by the government that it would be applying a “public health approach” to the “crime emergency”. Though what this meant in theory was not clearly articulated for the public, we have a much clearer idea from actual practice. The first implementation of this approach focused on locking down the entire scrap metal industry, which was the preserve of the informal economy that allowed around 25,000 persons to secure income from self-employment. One prospective end result is the state taking over the industry (which it has effectively done), and delivering it into the hands of powerful private interests with government connections. In the process, Trinidad & Tobago has much to teach us of the real meanings of “lockdowns,” their functions and aims, and the interests that are vested in them. This article outlines the key features of the “public health approach to crime” as consisting of: hierarchy, emergency, totalitarianism, lockdowns, indiscriminate punishment, economic intervention, and confiscation. This article asks us to be alert to lockdowns and public health as new tools used to construct a neo-feudal order of governance that would spell the end of democracy. Secondly, the article asks and addresses the question of what are the actual foci of state “protection”. Thirdly, the article situates “public health” in Trinidad within its historical context of colonial sanitation programs, and within the history of framing imperial interventions as therapeutic.

## **Keywords**

authoritarianism; Trinidad and Tobago; Caribbean; lockdowns; state of emergency

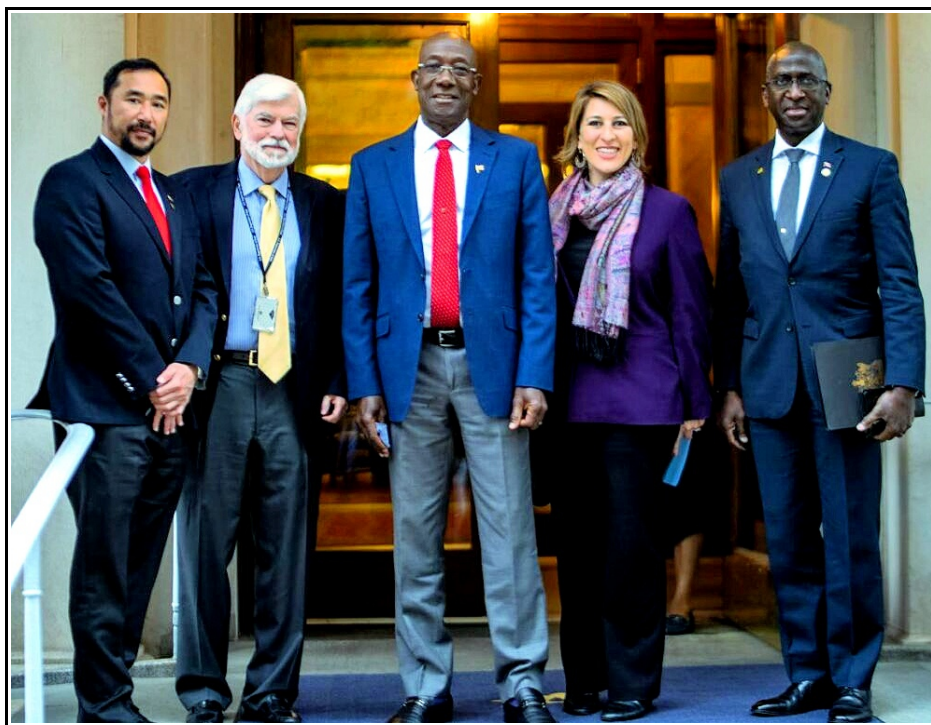


## PART 1

# DECLARING CRIME TO BE A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY: TRINIDAD & TOBAGO OUT FRONT

“**T**here are efforts being made to ensure that countries respond in the way that we are responding here in Trinidad & Tobago...We are a bit out front on it”. These were the words of Dr. Keith Rowley, the Prime Minister of Trinidad & Tobago, at his media conference on Monday, July 18, 2022. “The way that we are responding” refers to the application of a “public health approach” to a wider range of domains of social life. This comes as “public health,” globally, has become synonymous with lockdowns, confinement, curfews, states of emergency, and regimentation—in short, a program of [authoritarian rule with totalitarian ambitions](#). Rowley also stated that the initiative—treating crime as a public health emergency—would attract unspecified [international funding](#).

Many readers may be ready to minimize what happens in a small, distant, Third World island republic. Yet, in his own words, Rowley revealed that Trinidad is being used as a test case, as a lab—and it would not be the first time that “developed countries” used the periphery as their laboratory. Outside interests will be studying Trinidad, and applying the lessons to a broader range of countries. Unfortunately, many North American readers only start to pay attention to what happens in such nations when they explode, like Sri Lanka.



*Illustration 1: Keith Rowley (centre); Chris Dodd (left of Rowley); Barbara Feinstein (right of Rowley)*

“Efforts being made to ensure” that Trinidad’s response succeeds, with the promise of “international funding,” was revealed by Rowley only on his return to Trinidad after an extended absence abroad—which lasted from [June 6 to June 30, 2022](#). He was away in the US for weeks, both prior to and following the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles in June, allegedly for some unspecified “[medical tests](#)” (about which Rowley said almost nothing on his return to Trinidad). Previously, in April, Rowley met in Washington, DC, with former [US Senator Chris Dodd](#), who

serves as a special adviser to Joe Biden. There Rowley also met with the US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Barbara Feinstein. Rowley met Dodd again in Barbados, when the latter

headed a US congressional delegation to Barbados, for a meeting of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Dodd also served as Biden’s special adviser to the 2022 Summit of the Americas. The reported subject of these discussions between Dodd and Rowley was, in broad terms, crime. [Just two days](#) after his return to Trinidad, Rowley was off again to another CARICOM summit, in Suriname.

Before leaving for Suriname on July 2nd, Rowley made his [first comment](#) that **violence would be treated as a public health emergency**. Apparently this was done without even consulting with his own Minister of National Security, who [claimed to have heard no such remark](#), and angrily, insultingly assailed anyone who claimed such words had been spoken (as they had been, on camera, in front of journalists). Then Rowley returned, and confirmed his own statement, and expanded upon on it.

Rowley has experience with blindsiding his own ministers. Thus he also announced the end of mask mandates, just a day after his Health Minister asserted that mask mandates would end at no point in the foreseeable future.

But if the Minister of National Security was apparently surprised to hear about violence being defined as a public health emergency, it was because the idea was not one whose origin was local. The idea did not stem from thinking internal to the government. Rowley flew in from overseas, dropped the announcement, flew out again, and then returned to develop his statement (a little) further.

## A Public Health Approach: Policing, Militarization, Re-education

[Signalling a “crisis,”](#) Rowley spoke of the “dramatic escalation in criminal conduct in the country,” during his July 18 press conference. [He said](#) that he had met with the heads of the Police and Defense Force, and other elements of National Security, during a recent [cabinet retreat](#) that preceded the now notorious press conference. The prime minister, as Chair of the National Security Committee, said that “certain decisions were made, much of which I cannot disclose with you in public”. What was disclosed is that **the military was going to be engaged, domestically**. The language the prime minister used was appropriately coded for a local audience: [he said](#) that the Police affirmed that “illegal quarrying” was responsible for sustained funding of criminal activity. One group in particular has been accused of dominating illegal quarrying in Trinidad: the [Jama’at al-Muslimeen](#), which for decades has been at the receiving end of abuse from the state.

Yet domestic counterinsurgency was not the only plane on which Rowley focused his sights. He expanded to include, “[criminal behaviour from our young people](#)”—while conveniently omitting any mention of the much more costly and damaging [white collar crime](#) and corruption that are rampant, as they have been for decades. (Even at the time of writing, the ongoing scandal of the corruption surrounding the construction of the international airport at Piarco was still in the news, where hundreds of millions of US dollars were spent over budget, for an airport that resembles a modest warehouse. The Attorney General now prosecuting the case, previously worked on the defendant’s side.)

Like China’s Zero-Covid strategy, Rowley announced that the “elimination” of all crime, and motivations for crime, was the aim of his new policy. The even broader aim was the creation of a new and improved citizenry.

Here are some of the key remarks from the video file that is available [here](#):

“I did say recently, that with respect to breaking the cycle, and stemming the flow of new recruits into the criminal element and the flush of criminal behaviour from our young people

who form significant parts of these minorities that are terrorizing the country—that to break that cycle, that it is the Government’s intention to **declare violent crime as a public health issue**, because violence across the society is now the norm: from domestic violence, violence in schools, violence of person against persons, armed responses for everything, and of course the gains to be had from criminal conduct, where lives are lost and property being destroyed and stolen, and so on—a whole plethora of violent, unacceptable conduct....**We will focus on it as a public health issue, even before we have been able to flesh it out and present it to the country....**

“The intention is to have—in the context of this issue being raised in this way—that we develop a national plan of action. And that plan of action will be **driven by a public health approach**. And that approach will involve the defining of the problem....We will identify the causes, and the risk factors. We will design a response, and we will test the interventions that we are going to make, and we will implement and scale-up the effective interventions, and support continuous evaluation.

“The objective here is to enter the youth population, at various levels, and to begin a line of education which should steer people away from participation or being desensitized by crime and criminal activity. We believe that if we do that effectively, we would begin to **generate a wave of people who will reject crime**, or be in a position to respond to it—**from the personal, through the home, through the school, into the wider community**. In short, **preparing a better citizenry**”.

The Ministries of Health and Social Development will co-chair this “exercise,” overseen by the Office of the Prime Minister, plus the Ministry of National Security, the Trinidad & Tobago Police Service, the Ministry of Sport & Community Development, the Ministry of Education, and the Tobago House of Assembly. This is what US counterinsurgency strategists called a “whole of government approach,” which is needed to achieve “full spectrum dominance”.

This team, the prime minister stated in revealing language, “will be free to **co-opt experts**”—because in reality, this is what most experts tend to do: they serve to uphold the ambitions and interests of their sponsors. He also anticipated support from both CARICOM and the World Health Organization’s regional partner, the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO).

## **Masked and Blinded**

When the Minister of Health, Terence Deyalsingh, was asked on July 20 for details about his ministry’s work on the above plan—he had nothing to say except for [a sentence](#) confirming the ministry would be involved.

Even that was more than his response to a rare question about the ministry monitoring adverse reactions to the injections: he did not even acknowledge the question. He devoted half his time to reprimanding Trinidadians for letting a vast number of Pfizer doses go to waste, thus removing the country from the list of recipients of donations; the other half of the time he spent praising the “intelligence” of those still wearing masks, despite the end of the mask mandate.

Delivering his remarks while masked (as always), one has to wonder what Deyalsingh will do when—to fight crime—all masks will be completely banned. At present, violent crimes including murder occur in broad daylight and the perpetrators remain unidentifiable thanks to masking.

Interestingly, Trinidad has two contradictory laws: [one which requires masking](#), and an older one ([from 1872](#)) that absolutely prohibits all masking outside of festival periods (Section 5[5]: “Any person who appears in public masked or otherwise disguised except during a public festival at which he is authorised to do so by Regulations under subsection (2) is liable to a fine of one thousand dollars and to imprisonment for six months”). The 2020 law appears to have been passed without knowledge of the preceding 1872 law, which it contradicts.

## Why Now?

**Crime is not new in the history of Trinidad & Tobago**—many history [books](#), journal articles, and dissertations have already been written about it, for generations now. Trinidad, along with Jamaica and Guyana, is reputed to be among the “[most violent](#)” societies in the Caribbean. Crime is the stuff of legends and fear. Upper middle class Trinidadians sometimes asked me how I coped with “all the crime”—in one instance I was asked this as we sat at night in an open terrace overlooking a large floodlit park, where men gathered to play late night football, a picture of peace. Sacha Ann Geer explains their complex in better, more academic terms, in the abstract to her [doctoral dissertation](#):

“upper middle and upper classes increasingly assert, re-create and negotiate their class position with reference to changing informal rules of ‘safe’ behaviour and movement in reference to this conjured ‘bad man’. Home spaces are created and fortified against those construed as ‘risky’. Informal rules of appropriate ‘safe’ behaviour are negotiated and emerge through endless talk of crime. This talk re-imagines and reifies nearly all lower classes as ‘risky’ and the conclusions of this talk invariably lead to greater attempted isolation of upper classes from lower classes”.

This is not to say that crime does not exist in Trinidad. Broadly speaking, Trinidad has a per capita murder rate which exceeds that of Chicago.

**No evidence has been supplied by the authorities to show an increase in a range of crimes, let alone such an extraordinary increase that it merits being called an “emergency”.** What there is, instead, is a *sense* of an increase, one created by the obsessive sharing of gory videos on social media, and in the alternative and establishment media. Seemingly everyone has had a hand in creating this atmosphere. On the other hand, with the greatly increased impoverishment caused by the “pandemic” lockdowns, it would be expected that at least economic crimes would rise (i.e., theft, burglary, muggings, etc.), and though numbers are not readily available, popular commentary suggests that this has also increased. The murder rate has also increased—even if the prime minister himself failed to provide any specifics when he first made his “public health emergency” announcement.

**Crime has been abundantly sensationalized in Trinidad.** The local newspapers and television stations latched onto the persistence of a colonial discourse that depicted locals as savage beasts, incapable of self-rule. They splash screens and spray front pages with bloody scenes of bullet-riddled corpses—and this has been true for decades. It is a decidedly colonial discourse that persists around crime, one rooted in images of “unruly savages,” “brutish negroes,” and “untrustworthy Hindoostanis”.



Ghoulish voyeurism has been accentuated by the advent of “social media” and the wider spread of first cell phones, then smart phones. Competing media, in the form of online television channels such as Synergy TV, have provided platforms for hungry hosts keen to sensationalize, in order to attract viewers and of course commercial sponsors.

What also happened in the period around July of 2022, as the lockdowns ended and almost all restrictions were lifted, was a spate of (social)media sensationalism about violence among returning school children. Such videos existed over a decade ago, when cell phones came into wider use. Today videos circulate of large, elaborate confrontations between schoolgirls, resembling sporting events; of a young boy leaping into the air and landing on the back of his victim—a veritable circus of beatings...and then it all faded out. After that, we saw videos of home invasions, shootings in streets, robberies. Panic is pervasive again.

Covid panic and crime panic easily blend into each other. Indeed, one prominent local online television program, Ian Alleyne’s nightly “[Crime Watch](#),” featured the “Covid death toll” on the upper left side of the screen, and the “Murder toll” on the upper right:



“Government must do something!” is the popular cry. Even [social media activists](#) and [opponents](#) of Rowley’s government, have been among the loudest to call on government to act, as they continue to lionize the former acting Police Commissioner, Gary Griffith, in a vain attempt to elevate him as a hero. They sidle up to the police on their programs, “Ey! How yuh goin’ pa’dner!” This despite having vigorously condemned, criticized, and protested 2.5 years of lockdowns, curfews, and policing of citizens in the name of “Covid management”. And when “the government” finally *does something*, that creates even more reason for further complaint. Those professing exasperation about crime and demanding government action, are not very different from those that were in a panic about Covid and who demanded government action.

Trinidadian society is one in which reform, action, beneficence, and justice are all still widely seen as only flowing from the state. We can argue that this is a lethal cultural flaw. Mass dependency on the state

has been normalized. When the state acts, however and whenever it chooses to act, it acts already on a basis of imputed legitimacy. Even those superficially libertarian critics have learned the game: “I will fix it!” promises an aspiring leader when speaking of the mess which the country faces.

What one never hears instead is: “Who will fix it? *You* will fix it!” That does not win electoral campaigns. But it does guide revolutions. Revolution, however, is also alien to the world of Anglophone ex-colonies—the United States being a notable exception. Thus the “do for yourself” mentality is not one that has been widely inculcated by Trinidadian institutions.

What has also pervaded countless radio talk show episodes, call-in programs on television, and endless letters to editors over the decades in Trinidad, are common Christian-inspired dogmas of **morality, values, and family life**. Crime is reduced to the desperate actions of members of the lumpenproletariat—specifically urban, Afro-Trinidadian youth. Then crime is personalized, as the failure of parents to instill the right values in their children (building on the stereotype of broken black families). Crime is a sign of personal, moral failings—which spares the socio-economic system of any culpability, and whitewashes the far bigger sins of those higher up in the predatory food chain.

Thus almost never is there a focus on social conditions, on inequality, and the oppressive smog of consumerism, in popular discussions in the media. Poor people are schooled by the social system that teaches them the value of acquisition of luxuries as the ultimate proof of achievement, status, and self-actualization. Commercials on television, radio, and billboards, all boast of the modern lifestyle of luxury and comfort, symbolized by expensive *things*, and the act of *getting more things*. Extreme inequalities in wealth and income continue to grow at the same time. Invidious comparison becomes almost impossible to avoid.

The situation of inequality was made even worse by the lockdowns: businesses were shut down; employees were laid off; and there was minimal, if any, social support for huge numbers of workers who were immediately plunged into dire poverty for the sake of a “virus” whose real death toll is almost as minimal as the murder death toll. When businesses that survived reopened, workers faced new barriers: submit to mandatory “vaccination” or else shoulder the cost of extremely expensive PCR tests themselves—an illegal requirement that was imposed with impunity.

Trinidad & Tobago is a country that has for generations exported oil, natural gas, fertilizers, and steel—and yet two thirds of the country’s homes lack access to pipe-borne drinking water. Capital flows upwards and outwards.

Thanks to the lockdowns, there will be thousands more joining the “criminal” ranks after two years of school closures that thrust children from working class homes into complete oblivion. Not having laptops and/or expensive Internet connections, and lacking government support, those without the money to pay were simply left out of “online schooling”.

The “public health” approach to “crime” is a situation that has been largely produced by the “public health” approach to Covid. Both privilege police work. Curfews, lockdowns, and rolling states of emergency characterize both. The main difference might be the changed status of the mask.

## Why a Public Health Approach?

There is no single, universally accepted definition of “public health”. The [\*Encyclopædia Britannica\*](#) defines the concept as, “the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting physical



and mental health, sanitation, personal hygiene, control of infectious diseases, and organization of health services”. While violent crime may challenge the goal of “prolonging life” for some, it is clear that this definition does not place emphasis on deliberate, non-medical, non-biological factors. Even so, as one continues reading that article and the history of “public health,” one notes the **constant expansion** of the areas incorporated into the concept, the development of state programs, the work of international organizations, and the vesting of multiple interests focused on labour productivity, urban conditions, and international mobility. It is not, in terms of power, an innocent concept. The same source also presents an almost open-ended definition of “health” itself: “health, in humans, [is] the extent of an individual’s continuing physical, emotional, mental, and social ability to cope with his or her environment”. This too opens the door to non-biological and non-medical factors. The “social ability” to adapt to one’s environment potentially raises the issue of “deviance” from a society’s accepted norms.

The [Government of Canada](#) presents a definition that is potentially even more amorphous, where “public health” is,

“an organized activity of society to promote, protect, improve, and when necessary, restore the health of individuals, specified groups, or the entire population. It is a combination of sciences, skills, and values that function through collective societal activities and involve programs, services, and institutions aimed at protecting and improving the health of all people. The term ‘public health’ can describe a concept, a social institution, a set of scientific and professional disciplines and technologies, and a form of practice. It is a way of thinking, a set of disciplines, an institution of society, and a manner of practice”.

The Canadian government has no definition of “health” in its glossary. There appears to be something taken-for-granted about the term “health”. Where the encyclopedia article above emphasizes *promotion*, the Canadian government adds *protection*. In practice the latter means that an entire protection racket has engulfed “public health” and sped its merger with Big Pharma and the security state.

The [Canadian Public Health Association](#) has a definition that opens the doors widely to include certain other factors, such as potentially crime. For the CPHA, “public health” is “the organized effort of society to keep people healthy and prevent injury, illness and premature death”. To the extent that violent crime causes injury and can lead to premature death, crime would seem to be relevant. The [American Public Health Association](#) offers almost the same definitional scope.

The [University of Pittsburgh’s School of Public Health](#) defines “public health” as, “the science of protecting the safety and improving the health of communities through education, policy making and research for disease and injury prevention”. Again, we can note the openings provided by the concern with “safety” and “injury prevention”—violent crime impacts on both.

The [CDC Foundation](#) outlines “public health” as, “the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities. This work is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing and responding to infectious diseases. Overall, public health is concerned with protecting the health of entire populations. These populations can be as small as a local neighborhood, or as big as an entire country or region of the world”.

In discussing the “[social determinants of health](#)” (SDH) the World Health Organization includes “working life conditions,” “social inclusion,” and “structural conflict,” each of which opens the door to

inclusion of “crime” as a determinant of health. The WHO adds: “addressing SDH appropriately is fundamental for improving health and reducing longstanding inequities in health, which requires action by all sectors and civil society”. Health is not just a matter for doctors, clinics, and hospitals, in other words (assuming that any of these are properly concerned with health normally). But when it comes to defining a “[public health emergency of international concern](#),” the WHO does not have a broad definition at all: it is exclusively focused on the spread of disease.

What I am trying to demonstrate here—and not in defense of Rowley, but as a critique of “public health” itself—is that Rowley is neither as far off base, nor as “stupid” as some of his Trinidadian critics assert. While not a single definition of public health ever explicitly mentions anything such as “crime” or “violence,” violent crime can still be viewed as a relevant factor, and Rowley is not wrong in having his attention drawn to such openings. Indeed, in terms of public health’s history of constant **expansion of areas of operation**, the **accumulation and centralization of power**, and the **commanding role of the state** (embedded in a network of international relations), and the state’s partnership with the health industry, Rowley and his foreign backers are simply continuing along the same trajectory, extending the dotted line onwards and upwards.

What Rowley outlined for Trinidad, is precisely where “public health” and “public health emergencies” are going and where they threaten to take us. “Public health” boils down to a hierarchical system that subordinates the public to the dictates of the state and the profit-seeking of industry.

At the same time that Rowley was speaking in Trinidad, in Washington the discussion was whether Biden should formally declare “climate change” to be an “emergency,” while the EU commission is declaring a gas emergency. Emergency is now the norm, and emergencies create needy subjects, which artificially creates a demand for intervention by self-appointed saviours and protectors.

## Governance in Post-Liberal Post-Democracies

Is it the case that “liberal democracy” has somehow failed? This is the perspective I had adopted for several years. It now seems more plausible that the concept of liberal democracy was hijacked and arrested almost from the start, in order to reflect and secure the dominant interests of the time. It then became ossified. Liberal democracy, like the Westminster-derived systems across the Commonwealth, appears to have finally come to an end, even if the outer display of that system continues as if it were a pre-programmed routine. The system where politics is monopolized by parties, and political participation is taken away from the people, has clearly lent itself to venting tremendous injustices and even cruelty against citizens, as we have seen and experienced far too often these past three years. A system of coordinated and organized abuse such as this can only produce a “public health” that is equally abusive and distorted.

Instead, if by liberal democracy we mean a free and open competition of ideas and interests, in something akin to an open market, where all individuals are equally free to participate in making the decisions that affect their lives, then liberal democracy in the Commonwealth has not so much failed as it has never been tried.

What we have in Trinidad & Tobago, as in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK, is what should more accurately be classified as a post-liberal, post-democratic form of governance that is known simply as authoritarianism. In authoritarian systems, governance lurches from one declared “**crisis**” to another. Most of the crises are either invented by the ruling regime, which arrogates to itself the sole right

to define reality, or they are in fact the outcomes of regime policies—but with *blame always transferred to the people*. Also in authoritarian systems, governance privileges rule by “**emergency**,” because emergencies can be used to quell debates, freeze opposition, hound dissidents, and extract tribute. Perpetual states of emergency, which is what we now have had since at least 9/11, are last-ditch attempts to stave off the eventual collapse of a system of gross inequalities in wealth and power.

### Is “Public Health” Itself the Crime?

It would be difficult to find scholarly literature that argues that “public health itself is a crime,” not even after the past three years. “Public health” is almost universally (mis)understood to be “a good thing,” and understandably so, because the makers of meaning have appropriated certain signs and symbols to advance the project of their bosses, and they are able to convince most people that real benefits have been had thanks to “public health,” any iatrogenesis aside.

What “public health” and the “public health system” have revealed themselves to be during the past three years of pandemicism is: **a system of command and control, that imposes obligations and erases rights, and which operates by policing words and conduct.** [Bad medicine](#) is now a hallmark of its practice, and some outside of the academic environment would argue that has always been its hallmark.

No wonder then that Rowley would appropriate an opportunistically selective, blame-transferring scheme like a “public health emergency,” to address “crime”. He knows all too well from recent experience [all the wonderful authority, privileges, and power](#) that a “public health emergency” delivers into the hands of a regime. Under Rowley, Trinidad bore witness to the birth of what Giorgio Agamben calls the Health Security State.

### The Health Security State in Trinidad

Ruled by [curfews, lockdowns, extreme and arbitrary restrictions, and a lengthy state of emergency](#), the Trinidadian regime’s mode of “public health” was primarily one based on *policing*, that is, the downwards projection of state power that was intended to drown out known and established means for individuals and their families to protect their own health. (This did not happen without substantial resistance, which we get to next).

One has to understand the long historical relationship between “public health” and colonialism in the periphery to appreciate what transpired in the Caribbean, and specifically in Trinidad. Suffice it to say that British colonial authorities were frequently possessed by alarm when it came to tropical diseases and the “backward” practices of local populations. Disease plus backwardness also coloured their caricatures of the Dark Continent—and thanks to the WHO and US regime media, that narrative is making [a strong comeback](#). The colonies, especially in the “steamy” tropical zones, populated by dark and musty “brutes,” were seen by the British as being in need of concerted **sanitation**. Having examined the nineteenth-century archives of the Colonial Office on Trinidad, I the opportunity to see numerous reports on a variety of local outbreaks, and ways of controlling them, enough to gain a picture of the paramount place of public health in British colonialism. One can surmise that the reason for this is that poor health conditions, and the unchecked spread of disease, harmed **labour productivity** in what was an export-oriented colony. Public health also served the colonial ideological discourse of “civilization”: across British colonies around the world, documents abound with statements by colonial officers and settlers “saving” primitive lice-ridden aboriginals from early deaths, believed to be the result of living in a



fictive Hobbesian “state of nature”.

Health discourse has also found its way into more contemporary acts of **imperial violence**. Violence is often cast as a **therapeutic** measure, one designed to “**save lives**,” as in bombing Libya in order to support “democracy”. Violence against Iraq in 2003 was also framed as therapy, in terms of “**prevention**” designed to “**protect**” Americans from the threat of things such Weapons of Mass Destruction. Violence as therapy and as a sanitation campaign is also encoded in the term, “ethnic cleansing”. Again, this is what I call **humanitarian abduction**.

Linked to “saving lives,” there is not a little bit of messianism that pervades the speech of leaders of health regimes. Rowley himself spoke of the experience of what he called Covid-19 leading to “[the birthing of a new order](#)” in Trinidad & Tobago. Who would speak in such terms about *a disease*, unless one was thinking of something other than the disease to begin with? In his recent media address on July 18, Rowley continued to speak in science fiction terms with reference to the creation of a new and better citizenry, one where youths would almost instinctively come to reject violence. The result is already promising to be the attempted materialization of a dystopian vision, one in which we can discern [the shape of things to come](#).

## Who Will Fix It?

A state that enables, facilitates, and causes conflict cannot be trusted to remedy the effects of its actions. There is, however, one advantage that Trinidadians have, that Canadians do not—the Health Security State in Trinidad lacks the material and financial resources of its counterpart in Canada. Unlike Canada, where the ruling party under Justin Trudeau [lavished hundreds of millions of dollars](#) on subsidizing all dominant media, Trinidad’s regime cannot yet afford any such luxury (without foreign funding). In Canada, the massive bailout of the media not only helped to buy their loyalty and silence any potential criticism, but it also prevented competition among news media while placing alternative media at a disadvantage: there was no more incentive to be the one, lone, different newspaper, radio station, or television channel where one could hear the news and views that were heard nowhere else—which might have instantly commanded a large market of interested listeners, viewers, and readers. “News” coverage in Canada presents a landscape of monotonous homogeneity, where one can get the exact same story, written in an almost identical manner, across a range of media sources.

In Trinidad instead, what is arguably the most prominent local television news—TV6 News, owned by the Caribbean Communications Network, a private company—more than once featured damning and brilliant criticisms and condemnations of the pandemicist regime, whether by the National Trades Union Centre (NATUC) which hosted a panel on “vaccine” injuries, or the pastors united in “TT Response” who condemned the “vaccines” as such. It was rare, but [it happened](#). In Canada, [this](#) never happened.

In addition, local churches of different kinds, including the Nation of Islam headed in Trinidad by David Muhammad, [stood up in defiance](#) against mandatory “vaccination” and produced supremely articulated critiques and incisive analyses. Prominent social media activists, such as the businessman/environmentalist Gary Aboud, gave impassioned speeches [against medical apartheid](#).

As long as lessons are *not* learned from the past three years, about what the Health Security State is, and what it does, the Public Health approach to “crime” will proceed unimpeded. It promises to be no less sweeping and intrusive. In Prime Minister Rowley’s own presentation, it aims to penetrate the youth, their minds, their schools, their homes, and their family life. It is intended as a total, final solution. It

represents a return to the essence of the Nazi state as the foundational health security state.

If left unchecked, this will be the closest Trinidadians have ever come to being marched back into slavery. And it will let those guilty of crimes against humanity walk away free after the monumental assaults of the past three years. To demanding for the state to “do more” or “come up with a plan” to address “crime,” should no longer be done innocently and with a belief in the beneficence of the state.

In an [essay](#), Claudio Grass wrote: “Given that the vast majority of the population happily and eagerly made that Faustian deal of trading freedom for the illusion of safety, there is no telling how far the state will go tomorrow, exploiting that very same weakness”. Thanks to the Trinidadian test case, we are beginning to arrive at a much clearer picture of what one possible future might look like.

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## PART 2

# “PUBLIC HEALTH” TOTALITARIANISM: THE EXPORT OF A US MODEL OF PERPETUAL DOMINANCE MANAGED BY TECHNOCRATS

**A**s long as human *bodies* are somehow involved in something, anything, one could unscrupulously argue that raises a “public health” issue. Unfortunately, we happen to live in a time of a global crisis in the supply chain of scruples, while myth-making experiences massive inflation, and democracy suffers from its worst recession since WWII. “Public health” is becoming, at least for some, the “feel good varnish” for an attempt to secure a new totalitarianism.

If the concept of “public health” was meant to be interpreted so broadly as above, then it would become a useless concept: public health is *everything*, so it is in fact *nothing*. Nothing sits outside the boundaries of public health, thus we cannot know what constitute the contents of public health. Was the concept, “public health,” originally intended to be used as an amoeba term? Now “public health” is becoming something more than just about health, thus “public health” has entered the terrain of metaphor, simile, analogy, and sophistry.

“**Listen to your doctor**”. In North America at least, generations of people have been raised with the expectation that their doctor is an expert, one on whom you can rely, a person you can trust. This is perhaps why a “public health approach” has been chosen to address all sorts of non-health issues. It is about command and control by an expert elite, a technocracy, while surmounting the trust and legitimacy crisis that has befallen all other major institutions. A “public health approach” can involve maximum political and economic intrusion into every aspect of everyday lives. It can be about diminishing if not outright erasing individual rights, or at the very least transforming what were once rights into what are now conditional, temporary privileges. At the more extreme end of the spectrum of possibilities, the invocation of “public health” can raise the pitch of public discourse to hysterical levels, when anything and everything can be said to “endanger others”. Those who defy the “rules,” are then condemned for ignoring the White Coat brigade that claims to have a monopoly on truth, virtue, and “safety”.

## Exporting the Model

[In Part 1](#) we saw how in Trinidad & Tobago the step was taken by the government to declare a “public

health emergency”—and no biological disease was involved. The focus was “crime,” meaning the “crime” of a particular class of people, those lower down the social pyramid. We wondered about the origins of this approach. The prime minister made these announcements after spending weeks in the US, and meeting with US President Joe Biden’s advisers.

**We might now be getting a clearer picture as to the origins of Trinidad’s public health approach to crime.** The US is exporting its model of “public health” totalitarianism to dependent regimes overseas. In the past year, the Trinidadian government has furnished the country as what is effectively a dumping ground for the unwanted and expired “vaccines” of countries such as the US, Canada, and recently Spain. [Planned Parenthood](#) has set up shop in Trinidad, also in 2022—with the organization defending the notion that abortion is to be defined as “reproductive health,” while spreading other products of US identity politics.

[In 2021](#), CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky declared gun violence a “serious public health threat”. (However, we could clarify that there is no such thing as “gun violence,” only violence. Guns, if this needs to be recalled, have no agency.) Before Walensky, Joe Biden said the country was facing “[a gun violence public health epidemic](#)”—as if this alleged “gun violence” could “spread” and “infect” bodies. It was following that when Walensky declared: “I swore to the President and to this country that I would protect your health. This is clearly one of those moments, one of those issues that is harming America’s health”. In 1997, Congress ended funding for the CDC to research “gun violence”. It was resumed, however, in 2018, [by Donald Trump](#).

Following partisan doctors who went against their own confinement and distancing dictates and [supported mass congregations](#) for Black Lives Matter protesters in 2020, in 2021 [Walensky continued](#) to expand the domain of “public health” to include “racism” (guns and “race” being two of the most salient American obsessions). “What we know is this: Racism is a serious public health threat that directly affects the well-being of millions of Americans,” [Walensky said](#), “as a result, it affects the health of our entire nation”. Thus we see “public health” being opportunistically stretched to encompass all manner of public administration and social relation issues.

This model of command and control has now been exported to a Biden-friendly regime in the Caribbean. We will have to see where else it might travel, and how much more social, political, economic, and cultural territory it consumes. Thus far, however, the approach seems to have little to show for itself, and “the science” backing it up has already been vigorously shaken, to the point of disrepair.

## “The Science” is Partisan Rubbish

In the US, “gun violence” has been framed as a “public health issue” by none other than the head of the CDC itself, Rochelle Walensky, as we saw above. Keeping with the same pattern we have witnessed in bold relief for the past three years, the campaign is defended as one that *follows* “the science”. In the process of trying to provide “scientific” legitimation for the US gun control agenda, and American attempts to frame homicide as a public health issue (the well from which the government of Trinidad now drinks), “the science” itself has come under fire and the result is massive damage to its reputation and credibility. This should sound familiar, to more critical and alert readers.

[In this article](#) we read of Don Kates and two other gun policy scholars who noted in a 1997 *Reason* cover story, that the **studies funded by the CDC** “were controversial precisely because they seemed designed to **promote a political cause**”.



“Contrary to [the] picture of dispassionate scientists under assault by the Neanderthal NRA and its know-nothing allies in Congress, serious scholars have been criticizing the CDC’s ‘public health’ approach to gun research for years,” noted Kates and company. They described some of that criticism:

In a presentation at the American Society of Criminology’s 1994 meeting, for example, University of Illinois sociologist David Bordua and epidemiologist David Cowan called the public health literature on guns “**advocacy based on political beliefs rather than scientific fact.**” Bordua and Cowan noted that *The New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the main outlets for CDC-funded studies of firearms, are consistent supporters of strict gun control. They found that “**reports with findings not supporting the position of the journal are rarely cited,**” “little is cited from the criminological or sociological field,” and the articles that are cited “are almost always by medical or public health researchers.”

Further, Bordua and Cowan said, “**assumptions are presented as fact:** that there is a causal association between gun ownership and the risk of violence, that this association is consistent across all demographic categories, and that additional legislation will reduce the prevalence of firearms and consequently reduce the incidence of violence.” They concluded that “**incestuous and selective literature citations may be acceptable for political tracts, but they introduce an artificial bias into scientific publications. Stating as fact associations which may be demonstrably false is not just unscientific, it is unprincipled.**” In a 1994 presentation to the Western Economics Association, State University of New York at Buffalo criminologist Lawrence Southwick compared public health firearm studies to popular articles produced by the gun lobby: “Generally the level of analysis done on each side is of a **low quality**. The papers published in the medical literature (which are uniformly anti-gun) are particularly **poor science**”.

Where the Trinidadian regime would take its “public approach to crime” and what shapes it might take, were not clearly articulated. To date, the prime minister has made no further pronouncements on this strategy, which might suggest flagging interest on his part. But clearly, and almost explicitly in the prime minister’s own words, the US is investing in the project. That Planned Parenthood set up a *de facto* embassy in Trinidad at the very same time, is no mere coincidence. If “the family” has already been pinpointed as the origin of “crime” in Trinidad, then there are few organizations better qualified than the International Planned Parenthood Foundation for penetrating family life and disrupting the cycle of human reproduction. (Fortunately, the IPPF in Trinidad has met with the sustained opposition and well-informed resistance of Umar Abdullah’s *First Wave Movement*, among others, whose positions are in keeping with the cultural and moral histories of Caribbean people.)

To assist in learning the directions that can be taken by the Trinidadian state, it is important to first understand who is directing them, and from which sources the state receives its guidance. Here two documents may assist us by explaining the configuration of actors and interests vested in the “battle” against “crime” in the Caribbean. The [United Nations](#) and [USAID](#) stand out as two of the most prominent actors as one can [see](#) these [articles](#), which are also archived [here](#) and [here](#). The director of a Caribbean program funded by USAID titled, “Community, Family and Youth Resilience,” explained “the

four elements of the public health approach—defining the problem, identifying risk and protective factors, developing prevention strategies and assuring widespread adoption”. The program targets youths, preemptively, by discerning communities with youths “at risk”. If youths in specific areas are deemed to be “vulnerable” to criminal behaviour, then the “public health approach” involves creating (unspecified) “interventions” that complement police work. The fact that many youths refuse to be “targeted” is something even the director had to acknowledge. USAID collaborated with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in an initiative costing \$12.4 million over a five-year period, called CariSECURE. One of the main elements of the initiative appears to be the development of digital “crime information systems”.

## Global Ambitions: The US Effort to Export a Total Concept of Public Health

The US government, particularly under Joe Biden, has not limited its sights to its own country, and parts of the Caribbean: it has also sought to introduce amendments to the WHO’s International Health Regulations that push its more total concept of “public health,” one that would allow states of emergency to be declared for virtually any perceived “threat” of “harm”. For now, that effort has met with resistance, and does not appear to have been achieved.

In the [Report of the Review Committee regarding amendments to the International Health Regulations](#) (2005), under “Article 2 - Purpose and scope,” the Committee wrote on page 27 that it “considers that the proposed amendment to replace ‘public health risk’ with ‘all risks with a potential to impact public health’ may not increase the clarity of this Article. Public health risks are already defined in Article 1”. Article 1 of the WHO’s [International Health Regulations](#) of 2005, specifies on page 9 that, “‘public health risk’ means a likelihood of an event that may affect adversely the health of human populations, with an emphasis on one which may spread internationally or may present a serious and direct danger”. While Article 1 remains somewhat ambiguous, the Biden government’s attempt to definitively broaden the definition has been rejected.

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### PART 3

## LOCKDOWNS AND “PUBLIC HEALTH”: WEAPONS OF THE RICH AND POWERFUL

**B**eginning in July of 2022 a series of articles here and on *Disaster X* have been examining and questioning what it means to declare *crime* a “public health emergency”. The case is that of Trinidad & Tobago, which is being used as a lab [experiment by US agencies](#). This is relevant to important [new](#) research showing that in the US, [the military](#) and the [national security state](#) more [broadly](#), drove the so-called “[pandemic response](#)” with the so-called “[War on Covid](#)”. The line between [militarization and public health](#) has been blurred beyond recognition. Drawing from this framework, in Trinidad the practice of “lockdowns” and the concept of “public health” have been [weaponized](#) and enlisted in the service of “national security”. A “war” requires combat, sacrifice, the loss/surrender of [freedom](#) and [money](#), and [authoritarian leadership](#), as [General Stanley McChrystal](#) explained—regimentation and confiscation in the name of security, thus fit the paradigm perfectly. [Continuing the war](#) theme, to this date the CDC continues to use telling language: “Vaccines continue to be the most important [weapon in the fight](#) against COVID-19”. Given the actual practice of lockdowns, emergency

decrees, quarantines, firings, arrests, [psychological operations](#), and censorship—the CDC is not using merely figurative expressions. In other ways the war continues with the practice of locking down being expanded, as in the [US' current ban](#) on “unvaccinated” foreign travellers, which effectively amounts to a Black Travel Ban since those most affected constitute half or more of the Caribbean population and most of Africa.

The prime minister of Trinidad & Tobago promised to elaborate publicly on what he meant by his “public health approach” to crime—but as of February, 2023, he had yet to do so formally, even after several months. However, he has apparently put the idea into practice, and certainly the policy itself has already been written and is “out there”. That has left us with the task of describing the logic (the theory) by studying the actions taken. We now have a much more definite answer to the question, “**What is a public health approach to crime?**” which is rooted in actual actions taken by the Trinidadian government, added to what we read in Parts 1 and 2. Unlike the blandly generic statements made by Caribbean collaborators funded by USAID, whose obfuscation rarely allows them to get into the specifics of their proposed “interventions,” we instead bear witness to those actual interventions in practice.

We have a basic outline of an answer. A “public health approach to crime” involves:

- **Hierarchy:** white collar crimes are excluded; the focus is on crimes alleged to have been committed by members of the working class, particularly youths.
- **Emergency:** implementing extraordinary measures, which can venture into the extra-legal domain; also, this heightens executive power. Democratic debate is neither invited nor factored into any of the decision-making.
- **Totalitarianism:** crackdowns combined with surveillance, as an attempt to close down a social system. Police become the new instruments of “public health”.
- **Lockdowns:** [borrowing](#) from/[imitating](#) the [Chinese-originated](#) and [Chinese-promoted policy and practice implemented](#) to “fight Covid,” which Trinidad like so many other countries [imported](#), following the invention of an existential crisis that requires [radical containment](#) measures.
- **Indiscriminate Punishment:** collective punishment, on all members of a designated socioeconomic sector, without any evidence or formal charges laid, without any trials, and even without a logic that rationalized the action as fair or appropriate.
- **Economic intervention:** the state assumes the right to intervene in an industry, by force, and cancel the exercise of the right to private property.
- **Confiscation:** the state then places itself in charge of the occupied industry which was targeted by the lockdown.

The focus in Part 3 of this article, given recent events and announcements, is on the last four points above.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that when the government of Trinidad & Tobago talks about “targeting crime,” it is **only the crime of a particular class** that concerns the government. The much larger crimes of the rich and powerful are simply not included in the government’s “targeted” approach. This is true despite the fact of what is publicly well known. For example, in August of 2019, Trinidad’s *The Guardian* published this report: “[THE MILLION-DOLLAR BUSINESS OF CRIME...police intelligence report names ‘big fish’](#)”. In that article we read the following and it should



be kept in mind (emphases added):

“Close to **40 prominent businessmen**—from south, central and east Trinidad—who are linked to **major drug and human traffickers, gun runners, gang leaders and murderers** fuelling the **multi-million dollar criminal enterprise in this country**, have been named in a police intelligence report.

“These businessmen, who are being **protected by some members of the T&T Police Service on their payroll**, are among 100 people of interest identified in a confidential 2019 police intelligence report obtained by Guardian Media....

“These businessmen have formed symbiotic relationships with the underworld to rake in millions and are contributing to the rising homicides and increased lawlessness now pervading the country.

“The eye-opening report identifies people who have registered businesses which they are using as fronts to run lucrative human trafficking and prostitution rings.

“Guardian Media, in its special investigation on sex slavery done in May, had identified several **complicit law enforcement officials** who have aided and abetted these businessmen.

“The businessmen pay hitmen to execute people who interfere with their business and illicit operations, hire gang leaders in particular areas to provide security on various projects, or move contraband and assist with other activities....

**“The question, however, remains: Why hasn’t the police acted on some of these ‘big fish’ if they were aware of their activities for some time?”**

One rhetorical move that has become a standard part of the government’s narrative, is that of *deflection*. Rather than take responsibility for the police service itself not arresting known kingpins, and even collaborating with them, the prime minister accused the public of “[protecting criminals](#)”. The move is a familiar one: a downward transfer of blame to the mass of the society, and an upward extraction of capital.

Interestingly, and in a rare case where the truth is blurted out so clearly, Trinidad’s Minister of National Security, Fitzgerald Hinds, argued that his job is *not* to ensure the [safety and protection of citizens](#):

**“No, my duty is not to ensure that people feel safe and secure.** My duty is to ensure that those organisations and agencies that are responsible for the public’s safety, border security, that they are clear about what the people through the Government’s policy is, that they are provided with the resources that they need, and that I lend encouragement and general support to them, that’s my duty”.

Thus another question that arises is: if the state does not seek to protect the population, then who or what is the state actually protecting, if anything or anyone?

## Targeted Lockdowns: Expanding State Power, Deepening Dependency

Just like international sanctions that are intended to shut down a target nation's ability to import and export, and just as indiscriminate, a new form of collective punishment has been added by the Trinidadian state to the arsenal of state repression: **targeted lockdowns**. The pretext of "fighting Covid-19" provided the rationale and the necessary social and political conditioning that enabled use of this indiscriminate tool. Instead of "two weeks to flatten the curve," in this particular case what we encounter is "six months to stop the crime". However, not only does the tactic fail to address the actual source of the crime, or even target the criminals themselves, or address the most serious crimes, it will not stop the specific problem from reappearing if or when the targeted lockdown is ended. **Thus, just like Covid lockdowns, industrial lockdowns fail to address the alleged problem, while threatening to make the problem much worse.** To make matters even more twisted, the *crime lockdown* is utilized to address the harms and losses caused by the *Covid lockdowns*—even if the state officially pretends that no such harms happened and instead boasts that "we spent money to save your lives".

The central message in this story is that **the state can and will interfere with and even kill a local, independent industry** that allows people excluded from the formal economy to find a means of subsistence. In place of earnings from their own hard work, gained from their own two hands, they are offered not even state handouts but rather the *opportunity* to apply for state grants. Independent self-reliance is forcefully transformed into a hope for dependency.

## Rule by Emergency

This act of treating crime officially as a "public health emergency" is a supposedly novel, experimental strategy developed for Trinidad by foreign agencies, particularly USAID and the broader US federal state which itself operates in a [permanent state of emergency](#). However, it needs to be noted, the combination of "health" and "security" is also to be found in China's notion of [fangkong](#), applied to combating "extremism".

Trinidad's approach—if one can call it Trinidad's—bears a clear American imprimatur where rule by emergency is designed to [stigmatize and then persecute](#) local alternatives to the dominant regime, with the aim of destroying them. "Covid" and authoritarian politics thus form a closed loop. The implantation of "the pandemic" was never itself primarily a biomedical operation, rather epidemiology was used as a mask. The "pandemic" was first and foremost political, from the outset to the present. If the dominant medicine looked too much like "Bad Medicine," it is because the politics driving bad medicine were even worse.

## The Story of Scrap Iron in Trinidad

Some background for this story is needed, and here we need to go into some of the particulars of this Trinidadian case which revolves around an economic activity in the informal sector: the collection of scrap metal of any kind ("scrap iron") and its export. Trinidadians are very familiar with trucks calling out from their mounted loudspeakers as they patrol every inch of the large island: "*Buying scrap iron, old battery buying!*" Collectors will pay residents in any neighbourhood for any metal items which they wish to dispose, whether old appliances or leftover building materials, or discarded sheets of metal roofing, and so on.

Long-standing [accusations](#) are that some scrap metal collectors go the extra mile: taking down power lines to extract the copper is a legendary example. [Pious letters of indignation](#) sent to the editors of local newspapers further entrench outlandish stories of theft committed in broad daylight, thus adding to the folklore. The result is neighbourhoods left without electricity, or utility hubs unable to pump water, deliver electricity, or maintain telephone service. Even [church bells](#) have gone missing. Still, there is no actual evidence that members of the local Scrap Iron Dealers Association are actually responsible. *Anybody* can steal metal and then deliver it to a scrap yard for money. Does it therefore follow that the industry itself is to be indicted? The government's answer to this question is in the affirmative.

Tensions between the industry, represented by the Scrap Iron Dealers Association (SIDA), and some members of the public, and between the industry and government, have been developing for years. Alleged theft, and attempts by the state to displace the industry, have been at the centre of public debates. For its part, scrap iron dealers have been [publicly acknowledged](#) by the government itself for having taken various steps on their own to “regularize” the industry by formally registering and identifying metal collectors.

## The Political Economy of “Scrap Iron”

“**Buying scrap iron, old battery buying!**” is a recorded line sung repeatedly from the loudspeakers of a truck, and one hears it in literally every neighbourhood in Trinidad. I personally heard it in 2019 and 2020. You can hear and view one such truck [here](#). The ad is so famous in the country that it has been memorialized in at least [two songs](#).

The industry in Trinidad, rooted in the self-directed and independent efforts of low income, working class individuals who would likely be unemployed otherwise, has witnessed strong increases in profitability. This is true not just locally, but globally.

Locally, the scrap metal industry not only generates income for collectors and processors, but also generates crucial foreign exchange at a time of limited foreign exchange reserves held by the Central Bank. There are also downstream industries supported by scrap iron workers, that supply everything that they need to live everyday, from food markets to local parlours. Even in terms of foreign trade, shipping companies would suffer painful losses in the event of the industry being locked down: the [majority of shipping containers](#) holding exports from Trinidad, are filled with scrap metal, according to SIDA.

Globally, “with [China's increasingly voracious appetite](#) for metal to feed its growth spurt,” scrap metal is prized. According to one [source](#),

“recycling...generates more jobs than mining. Some of the most commonly recycled metals in the world and what their exports are valued at are: iron (\$22.9B), copper (\$12.4B), aluminum (\$8.81B), stainless steel (\$4.53B), nickel (\$446M), lead (\$444M), zinc (\$412M), and tin (\$90.2M)”.

Another [source](#) estimates that the global scrap metal industry is worth \$500 billion. According to the Bureau of International Recycling, **45% of worldwide annual production of steel, more than 40% of copper production, and almost 35% of aluminum** is produced from recycled material. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the scrap metal industry, though commonly overlooked (and looked down upon), is a crucial part of the world economy. A different [source](#) estimates that the global scrap metal

market will reach \$368.7 billion by 2030, but also notes that it has been growing annually by 9.7%. Another analyst expects the market to grow by \$340.73 million during 2023-2027, accelerating at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8%. Similarly, one more [source](#) estimates that the global scrap metal market size was valued at US \$326.6 billion in 2021, and is expected to expand at a CAGR of 9.62%, reaching US \$566.8 billion by 2027.

The Trinidadian [state's interest in this industry](#) has grown in step with the industry's proven profitability, globally and locally. In 2020, we learned that: "the Ministry of Trade, since 2013, has been trying to regulate this industry, which has been **growing globally**, as reflected domestically. Statistics provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) show scrap metal exports escalated from [TT] \$69 million in 2009 (another [source](#) states it was \$82 million) to \$96 million in 2010, **an increase of 39 per cent in a year**". [Profits continued to grow](#) to \$216 million in 2018, and have increased further since then, reaching a zenith of [TT] [\\$285 million in 2021](#). Trinidad is the [75<sup>th</sup> largest exporter](#) of scrap metal in the world, which may seem like a rather humble place, until one remembers that it is an island, with a population of 1.4 million. Furthermore, in 2022 the industry brought in [US \\$43 million](#), at a time when foreign exchange was in short supply.

The state added a twist, however: growing profitability was tied, it alleged, to a growth in domestic theft—an argument that would create **the opportunity for a state takeover under the guise of "fighting crime"**. The intention was already on its way to making policy in 2021. By late 2021, unnamed advocates in the media lobbied for transforming the industry in a manner that would pave the way for an eventual [state takeover](#): "the industry can go much further with the help of revamped government policies as well as a more serious approach from the State....it's precisely because of the concerns about the troubling aspects of the sector that the State should involve itself and regulate more through beefed-up laws and rules". Ordinary, self-employed people had apparently become so successful, that other interests began to lust after their [success](#): "the service performed by scrap dealers may well be regarded as policy gold....scrap dealers might more than carry their economic weight". It was more than one newspaper article that described the industry as a "[goldmine](#)".

On July 8, 2022, Prime Minister Rowley publicly announced that he would seek the advice of the Attorney General on banning the marketing of scrap metal. It was in that same month that Rowley announced that crime was a "public health emergency".

## **Controlled Opposition: A Collaborator in their Midst**

It could be said that Allan Ferguson, the president of the Scrap Iron Dealers Association (SIDA), does not appear to be the astute, pragmatic, or even charismatic leader that his members deserve. Recently, when a church bell was stolen, he issued a [public apology](#)—thereby implicating his membership in the theft, even though no such thing had been proven. If the missing bell had been brought to one of the yards, then he ought to have known about it, and the police would have found it. Had the bell been delivered, then the guilty party would have also been known—somebody at a yard had to pay the culprits for the bell. Ferguson has not asked police to provide evidence that anyone in his association is guilty of theft. Accusations are made against scrap iron dealers for thefts from the telephone and electricity companies, without casting a suspicious eye on the employees of those companies themselves—even when government officials themselves hinted at the possibility of attacks on public utilities being an [inside job](#). In other words, everything has been done to focus all blame on one single entity: scrap iron dealers.



There is no shortage of evidence that the police have in fact been able to tackle the vast majority of alleged scrap metal crimes, with an unusually high success rate. Police data revealed that, “in 2020 there were 58 reports of scrap-iron theft and they arrested 30 people. In 2021, police responded to 87 reports and 52 people were brought before the court. Between January and August this year [2022], a total of 162 reports were made and police arrested 136 people”. In other words, police arrested people in 84% of all reported cases of theft. This does not sound like there is a crisis in policing the industry, requiring special, additional measures. Indeed, local politicians have made the point that the police should simply be [left to continue doing their job](#).

As if to underscore his role as the state’s intermediary, it was Ferguson who made himself complicit in demanding strong action by the state, *against his own industry*. In a [report](#) on July 4, 2022, Ferguson pleaded for the government to take action to stop copper theft: “trust me, the longer you take to stop the theft and crime from taking place, the stronger you will make the criminals”. Indeed, as president of the scrap iron association, Ferguson had himself urged the government to [halt the export of copper](#). He did all this even as “he expressed suspicion that a case is being made out against scrap iron dealers as the perpetrators, to justify the **handing over of the industry to a foreign conglomerate**”. He then complained, “**Anything poor people have, they [the wealthy] take it**”. Why Ferguson would then facilitate the state, given the feared outcome, is something he would need to explain to his members.

Dependency on the state, and specifically the ruling party, would seem to run counter to the independent ethos of scrap iron collectors. However, Ferguson established precedents that exposed his association to the danger of dependency. In the recent past, [he cried out](#) to the prime minister to assist his association in obtaining the scrap metal from a shuttered refinery, and the language is unmistakably that of an almost child-like supplicant: “Mr Prime Minister, you are a man that I watch, and I don’t lie: I admire you as a prime minister. Please, I know you are busy, but please hear our cries. I am not fighting for me, I am fighting for my organisation”. This a pattern that repeats all too often in Trinidad: members of the public identify a problem; they cry out for the government to “do something”; then the government takes action that is either a blunder which makes the problem worse, or is brutally heavy-handed; and, then the complaint is about what the government has done. Especially after the past three years, the last thing any Trinidadian should want is *more* government intervention in their affairs.

Further eroding the industry’s independent position as part of the unregulated informal economy, Ferguson [called out](#) to the government to “**regularize**” the scrap iron industry, and make it part of the established, institutional, regulated economy. He demanded “**recognition**” of the industry as a “viable employer” and “foreign-exchange earner”. Why his members would need such “recognition” was not explained. Also, surely the *self-employed* scrap iron collectors/vendors already know that they are viable employers—the actual association itself is not their employer. Having the state regulate their earnings also suggests the likelihood of losing income to pay taxes. One has to wonder for which side Ferguson is batting. Members of his own organization [openly denounced him](#) to the press. Scrap iron workers [faulted the association’s executive](#) for not coming to their aid once the lockdown was imposed:

“Another worker Keevon Perry said the association was not helping them. ‘They have not reached [come] here. So who is helping out us, the people?’ Perry said he was the breadwinner in his house. ‘Without this job, there is nothing for us. No one is hiring us’. He claimed the association was only seeing about itself and not its workers”.

Under Ferguson, measures were introduced to [self-regulate](#) against metal theft, just as the state

indicated its growing interest in the industry. The state's growing interest exactly matched the growing profitability of the scrap metal industry.

Ferguson, as president of the TT Scrap Iron Dealers Association (TTSIDA, or just SIDA), is on record for [explicitly supporting state intervention](#) in the industry whose independence he was charged with protecting. The language he used was that of abject dependency: “**The only way we can improve ourselves is by working with the government to do what we have to do**”. Government, according to Ferguson, exists to “improve” people. He then blamed the scrap iron dealers: “We, as dealers, cause most of our problems”. It really is astounding to witness such a collaborationist turncoat installed at the very top of such an organization. As a collaborator, and one who has turned against the majority of SIDA's members, one wonders how Ferguson has kept his position, or whether the position retains any significance. The apparent betrayal may remind us of the leaders of Canadian faculty unions demanding policies of mandatory vaccination, knowing full well it would lead to some of their own members getting fired.

Support from independent media and social media activists fell far short of anything resembling solidarity—though the media published some expressions of [sympathy](#) from members of the public for the scrap iron workers. Instead stances of even anti-government activists was, by and large, patronizing and distant. The concern expressed was that scrap iron collectors, locked out of their jobs, might engage in disruptive protests that could inconvenience commuters. “You don't want to turn the population against you,” cautioned Stephan Reis (host of “Breaking Dawn” and member of the Progressive Empowerment Party). Yet, the population on the whole has never been perceptibly *for* the scrap iron collectors, and has generally done nothing to support them since they have been locked out.

The policy announced by the Trinidadian government in 2021 involved sweeping regulation that would pry the scrap metal industry away from the informal economy. This was the very same “recognition” for which Ferguson, the president of the scrap iron dealers, had been praying. In particular, the government announced that,

“the policy seeks to provide the framework that will ensure **compliance with health and environmental requirements**, an improved **licensing** and **monitoring** system for the industry, reduction in the incidence of scrap metal **theft**, an increased **accountability** and **transparency** for tax administration”.

Ferguson [endorsed](#) this, even as the country's leading industrial relations expert voiced [strong concerns](#). This, according to former Senator Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, was [a reprise of old colonial legislation](#) designed to **stamp out small entrepreneurs**. The government's policy would impose hefty new fines for failing to provide proof of written receipts for metal purchased from citizens, demanding a degree of literacy that would sometimes be problematic, and licensing requirements discriminated against ex-prisoners. Ferguson has been on board with the government, and Mahabir-Wyatt did not fail to suggest that.

One immediate consequence of the licensing system—endorsed by Ferguson himself—was the immediate [halt or prolonged delay](#) by the state in issuing licenses. Ferguson complained: “we are constantly denied licences to work”. But that was the apparent intention. Speaking out of the other side of his mouth, Ferguson returned to criticizing: Trinidad's scrap iron, he said, has a huge export market which generates handsome revenue for dealers and “this is why I believe those in authority are targeting

this industry,” he said. At first, the state wanted its “cut”; but now it wants the whole pie.

## Locking Down an Industry

On [August 12, 2022](#), the government of Trinidad & Tobago decreed that all exports of scrap metal would be halted for a period of six months, thereby locking down the industry in the country. Anyone caught violating the ban, “will be liable to a \$15,000 fine under the 1904 Metal and Marine Stores Act or a \$1000 fine and/or imprisonment of 12 months under the Trade Ordinance”. By November, the government was to introduce new legislation governing the industry, and by February 23, 2023, the lockdown was set to end, unless government decided to renew it for a further three months. By January of 2023, the \$15,000 fine was raised to a [\\$100,000 fine](#).

Minister of National Security, Fitzgerald Hinds, even invoked the spectre of “[terrorism](#)”. Calling crime a “public health emergency” was not enough for this government. Hinds “saw the attacks [on public utilities] as a ‘larger plot’ which may need the Anti-Terrorism Act to prosecute and alluded to ‘political purposes’ at play”. This was a thinly veiled reference to the opposition United National Congress. The government in fact declared the issue of scrap metal theft, a “[national security issue](#)”. Thus *9/11 met Covid met January 6: national security, public health, and criminalization of opposition*.

The ban effectively shut down the entire industry, since it is export-oriented. The ban directly impacted at least [20,000 workers](#) in the scrap metal industry (others put the number at 25,000). Workers immediately organized and protested by shutting down some roads. Prime Minister Keith Rowley, never a light touch when addressing opposition, [referred](#) to all the protesting workers as, “**marauding gangs of metal thieves**”.

However, this is not the first time that a Trinidadian government has locked down the scrap iron industry. In [2011](#), under a **state of emergency** that was declared to fight crime, the government closed down the industry. In 2011 there was no declaration of a “pandemic,” and the opportunity to cast crime as a “public health” issue had not yet ripened.

On July 7, 2022, the prime minister, Dr Keith Rowley [declared](#): “As a matter of **national security**, I have asked the Attorney General whether we should prevent, for a restricted time, the marketing of used metals in Trinidad and Tobago....Manhole covers, they selling that. They cut the cable. Now they cutting the water lines”. Suddenly, it was now a matter of *national security*, and as is the norm when things are cast in that manner, draconian actions thus become thinkable.

Out of work scrap metal collectors were told by the Trinidadian government that they could apply for [food grants](#) to support them during the lockdown—just as the government did with its Covid lockdowns. The response of the Minister for Social Development and Family Services, Donna Cox, was cold, distant, and bureaucratic. There was no sense of urgency in her public statements that suggested an awareness of a need to rush to the aid of families that the government itself had thrown into even [deeper poverty](#). Opposition MPs [condemned the government](#) on that very basis:

“...it was clear that this rushed decision by the government, without any proper consultation of the industry, would have brutal consequences on citizens who will now struggle to put meals on the table, send children to school, and even repay loans.

“Having listened to the executive of the (association), it is clear that the government has acted

totally recklessly by ignoring the fact that not only will tens of thousands be thrown onto the breadline, with this ban but it was done at a time when many of these workers were depending on this income to send their children back to school”.

Scrap iron workers who temporarily blocked roads in protest [declared](#), “If we can’t eat, none of all you can eat”. However, by the end of August (2022), those protests had ceased. Some of the workers did note that [crime](#)—the very thing that the government purported to be targeting—would necessarily result: **“The devil finds work for idle hands....Hungry people is angry people”**.

SIDA’s president, Allan Ferguson, pleaded with the government numerous times to schedule a meeting with his association, in the days leading to the announcement of the ban. He was ignored. Ferguson even proposed [limiting the ban to copper](#) alone, since that was the metal at the centre of all the thefts from public utilities plants, rather than shut down the whole industry. He even [threatened to sue](#) the government if it imposed a six-month ban. When the government did just that, no lawsuit ensued. At the very least, it cannot be said that SIDA remained totally passive in the face of government threats: at every step it has proposed meetings, held press conferences, and offered reasonable [alternatives](#) as [solutions](#). It was all for naught. Ferguson even tried appealing to the [World Trade Organization](#), in what appeared to be a futile effort.

**Trinidad is not alone** in imposing a six-month ban. At almost the exact same time, [South Africa](#) also imposed a [six-month ban](#), using the same pretext of “crime”. The Trinidad Plan seems to be international in scope, and it thus appears to be a planned menu that is being followed by others. [The UK](#), though not engaged in locking down its industry, nonetheless passed the Scrap Metals Dealers Act in 2013 which “stipulates that all dealers must be licensed and prohibits cash trade, presumably to create a paper trail for transactions”. Sellers of scrap metal are identified in the UK. Interestingly, also in 2013, Trinidad adopted a similar law (apparently not enforced), which once again suggests international coordination.

**“The shutdown of the industry for six months feels like a scorched-earth response,”** [wrote](#) Paolo Kernahan, a prominent Trinidadian journalist. He also argued that it reflected a “brainless” and “rudderless” policy on the part of the government. However, I argue that it is instead “rudderful,” and here Kernahan seems to have overlooked the bigger plan. Too often citizens assume that any harm done by government must be unintentional, accidental, and simply the product of stupidity. This gives all of the benefit of the doubt to the state, signing a blank cheque of assumedly benign intentions. Such an assumption does not square with the history of the modern state, rooted in organized violence, extraction, and racketeering. For some local opposition politicians, the lockdown was seen as [deliberate overkill](#), a form of collective punishment carried out because of a handful of thieves (who may or may not have even been regular scrap iron workers).

**“Something big is coming. We have to get organised,”** said SIDA President Ferguson, after the lockdown had been announced. This reflects an awareness that the lockdown itself was only Phase 1 of the government’s bigger plan, which went well beyond the pretext of fighting crime. Ferguson personally distanced himself from the street protests by members of his own body.

The effects of the lockdown were felt regionally. We learned that traders from other parts of the Caribbean had been [travelling to Trinidad](#) to sell scrap metal. The closure of the industry would thus impact the incomes of economically marginalized persons beyond Trinidad’s shores.

Some in Trinidad saw [a pattern](#), but did not quite explain it. One attorney wrote to the media



reminding them that the same government had also shut down Petrotrin (the national oil refinery), Caroni Ltd. (all sugar production), and the Seafood Industry Development Company. The case of scrap iron differs, however: the industry is not being closed down for good, but rather as temporary move to facilitate much bigger moves.

Having realized the profitability of this homegrown industry, the Trinidadian government immediately set out to do a feasibility study to examine the sector's "[value chain](#)". "We want to see what the industry holds in terms of the entire value chain," said the Minister of Trade and Industry in October of 2022.

## Capturing an Industry: Locking Out Citizens

When it comes to culture, very *little* is invented out of whole cloth, and thus a great deal is repeated with only some variation. Here we find the "**terra nullius**" principle coming back to life. Whether the speakers are government officials, opposition politicians, or the local mass media, all of them have spoken at one point or another of the scrap metal industry as an [opportunity](#) to be **maximized**, as wealth to be **realized**, as an industry to be **explored**. They all seem to forget that 25,000 people have already been doing that, and that the business has existed in Trinidad for over a century (in fact British colonial authorities imposed an Act to govern the industry in 1904). Instead, the authorities pretend as if the industry were a clean slate—which speaks volumes about their intentions: **tabula rasa**. Lockdown was Phase 1. Phase 2 is expropriation.

Prime Minister Rowley announced plans to "[regularize](#)" the scrap metal industry. This meant imposing state regulations, state surveillance, and control over the entire industry. The industry would thus cease to operate as an independent one, part of the informal economy. While National Security Minister Hinds, "[dismissed](#) the notion that the plan is a roundabout way of taking the industry away from the average citizen and putting it in the hands of his party's financiers," this turned out very quickly to be mere gainsaying. The industry has indeed been taken away from the hands of average citizens.

On December 16, 2022, the Senate passed a [Scrap Metal Bill](#) ("An Act to create measures to regulate the business of dealing in scrap metals and for other related matters"), that would submerge the industry under [state regulation](#) and continued surveillance. Scrap iron workers would now be **forced to waive any rights that defended them against search and seizure**, with police being allowed entry to their premises at any time. Note that for roughly 90% of scrap iron workers, [their homes are their work premises](#). Public Utilities Minister Marvin Gonzales actually expressed [bewilderment](#) that any scrap metal worker would oppose police intrusions into their homes, unannounced and without a warrant: "I cannot understand why someone who is interested in operating in a legal, regulated manner...would have a problem with a law enforcement officer coming into their premises". Anyone who felt their rights had been violated, he said, had recourse to the courts (and presumably an endless supply of cash to pay for lawyers' fees).

Thus, with the stroke of a pen, scrap metal workers have lost effective, real possession of their own homes. The state has not just nationalized their personal living space, it directly threatens to eliminate their workspace: those who are squatters, and have no formalized and documented "town and country approval," cannot receive a license to continue their work. Thus scrap metal workers either lose actual possession of their homes, or they lose the ability to work. This is an open assault; it is an act of aggression; and, it clearly will result in diminishing the life chances of those who are being targeted. This is itself commission of a crime, done in the name of combating crime.

The violation of citizens' homes has now been normalized, in large part thanks to the ground being laid under the pretext of an alleged "Covid pandemic". The [expansion of bureaucracy](#) into the business of everyday life is another key feature. One needs to remember that scrap iron workers in particular, are in many cases working in the informal sector because the state itself laid them off from industries shut down by the state—the same state that now wants to control them where they were forced to flee.

In addition, the registration of dealers threatened to collect all sorts of [personal data](#), including characteristics usually described as "racial". Even persons selling metal to scrap iron collectors would be required to furnish personal information, such as copies of their passport or national ID: "I can't see people wanting to hand over that information to a man driving around saying, 'Buying old iron, Old battery buying'," [said](#) opposition Senator Jayanti Lutchmedial.

Almost immediately after the passage of the new Act, scrap iron dealers found that they were required to pay \$200 for a [registration sticker](#). Many could no longer afford to pay that amount. Without the sticker on their vehicles, they would be barred entry into collectors' yards. Much worse is that the money they receive for the metal they deliver has been abruptly and inexplicably cut: "dealers are now paying them \$500 per tonne rather than \$1,000".

Not failing in his role as double-talking collaborator, SIDA's Ferguson [called on the state](#) to ensure that it would enforce the new Act. He echoed the government's threats. SIDA would now be self-policing, alongside the state's policing: "the association will have its own team of people who will inspect and monitor the industry to weed out any wrongdoers". Ferguson even vowed to directly participate in enforcement: "If you send containers to operators without licenses, I will send the police to your house personally". By February, 2023, Ferguson repeatedly called on the President of the Republic to sign the bill into law, so that it could be immediately enforced. He appeared to [dismiss](#) the concerns of the majority of SIDA's members who store scrap metal in their household yards, simply reminding them that under the new law that will be an offence thus they should hurry to get rid of it (i.e., go out of business). Ferguson even called on the national population to rally in [support](#) of the proclamation of this law.

The Attorney General, in introducing the new bill, essentially [criminalized](#) the existing industry by engaging in hyperbole: "Significant also, in the **scourge of illegality** associated with this industry, is the proliferation of **illegal** scrapyards, **money laundering** and concealment of **illegal firearms**". He made the average scrap iron worker sound like a gangster. [Copper](#) was to be banned for much longer than the lockdown: copper exports from Trinidad were also criminalized, under the bill which bans its export for at least a full year, and that is just to begin with. What is important to note is that, to date, [not a single person has been prosecuted](#) for metal theft, despite the numerous reported arrests.

Along with criminalizing scrap iron workers, the Attorney General could barely disguise the lust of interested parties that back him: "In 2020, the global trade of scrap metal was valued at approximately [US\\$128 billion](#)".

President of SIDA, Allan Ferguson, "[thanked the government](#)" for the new Bill. He then noted the destruction it would bring to people's lives. First, "people who worked in the landfill collecting scrap iron would no longer be able to do so". Second,

"many dealers in the industry have houses behind their scrapyards, and some of them are squatting. So when the government is telling them they have to get Town and Country and EMA planning approval, it means they have to close their yards. The association was lobbying

government to get lands for them, but they didn't find it fit to grant them the lands, so 90 per cent of the dealers will not be able to operate, as the government doesn't want anyone to have their house in a scrapyard".

Third, anyone with a criminal conviction would not be allowed to acquire a license, thus further marginalizing many workers and driving them to the abyss of extreme poverty (and no doubt, increasing the crime rate).

The intention seems to be not only to control the industry from the top of political power, but to also vacate the industry of much of its current labour force. **For whose benefit?** Referring to the new bill, Opposition Senator Wade Mark [accused](#) the government of snatching the industry from "the small man" in order to hand it over to privileged friends:

"We have been advised that a high public official, a **high government official**, through family connections, has made an application for a major recycling plant whose basis for existence and operation will be scrap metal. We want to know if the Government is aware of this individual. I know the name of the individual. I know the parties involved in it. I want to challenge the Government to tell us if this bill is designed to **promote the interest of a financier** who will eventually take control of the scrap-metal industry".

## Conclusion: Covidian Fetishes and the Grab for Power

The outgoing figurehead President of Trinidad & Tobago, Paula-Mae Weekes, recently described citizens as becoming "[a savage people](#)". For years she had been openly mocked and criticized by many Trinidadians, especially online, given her snooty manners, her silence on traumatic events besieging the nation, her absenteeism, and her ridiculous [Covidian affectation](#) (banning any member from her security detail who was not "vaccinated"). She acted as an absentee president, hidden away in her palace. Weekes was also accused of illegally covering up for the prime minister, in a scandal involving the selection of a new commissioner of police. Widely suspected of being a lesbian, this did not play in her favour in a religious society that is predominantly unwelcoming to "LGBTQ" ideology. Her final speech was her parting shot at the country which rejected her, and that apparently repulsed her. Weekes ended her speech with a revealing line: "**The more things change, the more things stay the same**".

What is instructive about Weekes lambasting fellow citizens as "savages," is that it openly reveals the attitudes of the elites in the country: **contempt** and **conquest**. After all, for the past three years Trinidadians have been berated almost daily by the authoritarian Rowley, who spoke down to them as if he were a colonial master of the Big House. Rowley was the Pandemicist commandant who mocked the people for wanting to see the safety data for the mRNA "vaccines," but not asking for such data when it came to Horny Goat Weed, a name he uttered with a derisive tone. (Never mind that this is a widely used natural, herbal product, with a long history—perhaps *that* was the real problem Rowley had with it.) Revamped colonialism—the more things change, the more things stay the same, indeed.

Other members of the elite class pray for a return of "the pandemic". They rejoiced in all the restrictions, because where there are many difficulties one finds many "graces". So said Roman Catholic Archbishop Charles Jason Gordon in his New Year [sermon](#) for 2023. God himself had given Trinidad & Tobago a gift in 2022—with the relentless lockdowns, the curfews, the state of emergency, mandatory

“vaccination,” “vaccine” passports to enter bars and restaurants, people banned from going to beaches, and families fined for not wearing masks while in their own cars. These were all graces, and the passing of the lockdown pains Archbishop Gordon: “**It was a year of incredible grace if you had eyes to see it.** Times of difficulty are where God is **growing us up**, although **we may not like the medicine**. We need to look at what is around us, **what happened to us**, and see what was **God’s grace** in our lives”.

Prime Minister Rowley also had a [New Year’s speech](#), in which he renewed his emphasis on “the **public health consideration of criminal conduct** in our society”. In the same speech, Rowley also reactivated his “vaccine” campaign, under the rubric of patriotism and civic duty. The [new campaign](#) would again target “the unvaccinated”. Also in a replay of 2020, Carnival was again set up as a likely source of mass infection.

From the supposed high points of Trinidadian society, it is not surprising to hear articulations of contempt and desires for conquest. The people are cast as unruly savages, as criminals. Crime is inevitably over played. However, one aspect that I have been forced to amend concerns perceptions of a growing crime rate in Trinidad & Tobago. While I would still maintain that it is sensationalized, fear having been promoted by politicians and activists, and sold by the media, still [data exist](#) to support the claim that the country has broken all of its records in terms of its annual murder rate in 2022. This still does not address the selective, self-serving manner in which the “crime” label is deployed, nor does it tell us anything about causes.

The government of Trinidad & Tobago is clearly not done with implementing its “public health” approach to crime. Recently, the Social Development and Family Services Minister, Donna Cox, spoke of a “[parenting crisis](#)” as being a driver of crime—clearly laying the blame for crime entirely at the feet of ordinary, struggling citizens. Many of those citizens, along with scrap iron collectors, have faced greater economic adversity thanks entirely to the actions taken by the government, which has shown little regard for their welfare.

Just like international sanctions imposed by imperial powers, lockdowns are an equally indiscriminate enactment of collective punishment. Like sanctions, lockdowns never succeed in achieving their purported objectives. Locking down an industry, under the pretext of fighting crime, will neither stop the problem from reappearing, nor will it prevent it from getting even worse. Government officials will defend their actions using the language common to political leaders today: the measures were “targeted” and “temporary”. The effects of the measures, as we see, are by no means temporary. As for targeting, given the absence of prosecutions, and with no information about the identities of alleged perpetrators of metal theft, we cannot even know that the government is targeting the right people. Treating theft like Covid, the state cannot shut down either. In both cases, the state is hammering the wrong source of the alleged problem.

What is particularly instructive about this case study is how Covidian pandemicism (the intersection of catastrophism and authoritarianism) has served to lay the foundations for “new” instruments of governance. By “new” I mean recently acquired or implemented—otherwise, rule by a permanent state of emergency is now well established, particularly since 9/11. “Disease” (at the root of any concept of a “public health emergency”) has been instrumentalized and weaponized, and the meaning of disease will inevitably be expanded into an amorphous term whose only utility is that it serves to signal a state’s intention to intervene further in people’s lives.

While we still do not know the identities of the persons who can stand to benefit from their



relationships with the ruling party, and who allegedly will profit from taking over the scrap metal industry in Trinidad & Tobago, this still calls into question the meaning of “the state” and the real nature of “regulation”. **Too many who self-identify as “progressives” seem to take for granted that a heightened role for the state, and increased regulation, are by default “good things” that preclude harm.** At best, this is a naïve position, and it is not warranted by either historical or anthropological evidence or analysis. British anthropologist A.R Radcliffe-Brown several decades ago advised in his preface to [African Political Systems](#) (1940) that we should remember that “the state” is an abstraction: it consists of nested ties between living actors, i.e., real people. The state in Trinidad, like anywhere else, is a product of groups of interested actors who have captured its tools. The state’s enforcers are not called a “gang,” they are an “army”—an army is a gang that is commanded by a state. To rule is to “regulate”. More “regulation” means more rule by the gang that proclaims the rules. And while the state may rule to protect capital, or to defend the interests of particular capitalist factions, it can also rule for itself when it has been folded in with interests that exist outside of the strict legal confines of state agencies.

When dealing with a government that is a façade for the shadow government behind it, often the inverse of what appears on the surface is what is true. The largest criminal organization is the state itself, which presumes to usurp people’s homes and abolish their livelihoods—no other criminal organization in the country has either sought or has been able to achieve that. As a criminal organization, the state is guilty of racketeering and extortion, of inventing the problem that requires “protection,” and to support the costs of protection, the people must pay. This also describes a neo-feudal regime, and it is interesting to see how quickly and easily Trinidad & Tobago can fold itself into current international trends. We have thus not seen the end to lockdowns, not while a “public health” approach is allowed to expand without opposition.

As for the so-called “savages,” some seem to have taken to mocking the elites by turning this label into a badge of honour, relishing and revelling in it. As Carnival 2023 approached, a Soca tune titled “[Outside Like Garbage](#)” hit the airwaves and social media. Playing on the same “garbage” theme that is implied by the term “scrap iron,” the singer (Raw Nitro) exclaims: “I outside like **garbage!** I causin’ real **damage!** I gettin’ on **savage!**”. It was [Lord Palmerston](#) who in 1852 said that “dirt” is “nothing but a thing in a wrong place”; anthropologists have become familiar with the idea of dirt being “matter out of place” since Mary Douglas published *Purity and Danger* in 1966. Scrap-iron workers are thus treated exactly like garbage, as being out of place, savages, guilty of criminality. The state has thus locked them down (contained as if in a garbage can), and locked them out—outside like garbage. In the New Trinidad & Tobago, there is no place for the independent and the self-reliant, unless and until they fight to reclaim their own territory.

