

# THE SPECTATOR AUSTRALIA

## Stop this pig-headed pandemic management

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If this latest case of over-the-top moonbatteries from Danandrewstan does not alarm you, I am not sure what will:

A 17-year-old learner driver was left “shocked” after being fined \$1600 for driving with her mum during the COVID-19 lockdown. Sharee Reynolds was supervising her daughter, Hunter, as she drove from their Hampton home to Frankston at the weekend when the pair were pulled over by police and fined for non-essential travel.

“We didn’t think for one minute that we would be doing anything wrong. We weren’t in contact with any person, we weren’t stopping anywhere,” Sharee told 3AW’s Neil Mitchell. “She [the police officer] said we were too far from home and we would cop a fine, and that Hunter would be the person to receive that fine.”

When the mother and daughter questioned the fine, Sharee said the police officer told her police were “smashing it on the roads today”. Hunter said she was surprised by the incident. “I was just shocked, because I obviously hadn’t done anything wrong, or so I thought. I was just really stressing,” the teenager said.

Wow. I and others have said repeatedly now that we have two crises here: the health crisis, and a political/economic crisis. But will the latter end up being more costly than the former? As I said in a recent piece:

One can rightly ask, does it make sense for police to arrest solitary figures on the beach? Does it make sense to ban individuals from going fishing? Does it make sense to threaten ordinary people with six months in jail and \$10,000 fines for violating social distancing guidelines? Does it make sense for the state to have drones flying overhead to keep an eye on its own citizens? Does it make sense to attach ankle monitors on some people as part of government surveillance measures?

It was the Austrian-English libertarian philosopher and economist F. A. Hayek who rightly noted last century: “‘Emergencies’ have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have been eroded.” We are seeing this happening throughout the West.

Let me offer just a few more worrying developments:

Vodafone has provided the mobile phone location data of several million Australians in an anonymised and aggregated form to the federal and NSW governments to monitor whether people are following social distancing restrictions amid the coronavirus pandemic. To date, governments, medical experts and the media have used location data from transport apps such as CityMapper, which shows how people move throughout cities like Sydney and Melbourne using public transport, in an attempt to determine whether people's movement has reduced.

Such developments have many folks concerned:

Technologies used to enforce social distancing and to monitor and curb the spread of the coronavirus need a sunset clause, or they could linger as an intrusive tool of the state, civil libertarians and privacy experts say. During a natural disaster or war, emergency measures taken by the government usually include a reasonably clear end date when the powers are no longer needed, Julian Sanchez, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, told the Washington Examiner. Coronavirus, much like terrorism, has the potential to spread and resurface, he said. A point of danger is when the persistent threat of resurgence justifies emergency measures as a prophylactic "just in case" measure. "You don't have quite as bright a line with something like coronavirus, which has the potential to become a cyclical problem."

And as I have so often warned, loss of life due to economic collapse is just as serious as actual corona-related deaths: "Knox County, Tennessee saw nine deaths by suicide within 48 hours this week as doomsday predictions over the novel Wuhan coronavirus panics an already anxious public and leaves millions unemployed and isolated."

And Americans are also being busted by the police for simply driving safely in their own cars:

Pennsylvania State Police cited 19-year-old Anita Lynn Shaffer for violating a stay-at-home for York County after police say she went a leisurely drive on March 29. Shaffer is the only person in the Commonwealth to be cited under the state's disease control and prevention act of 1955, spokesman Ryan Tarkowski said on Friday. Troopers have issued two warnings in other areas of the state... The citation will cost Shaffer more than \$200.

Fortunately, there is at least one American law enforcement officer who seems to get it:

Maine's Franklin County Sheriff Scott Nichols has a strong message for the Governor of Maine, Janet Mills, who issued "stay-at-home" orders with threats of police punishment if not followed. Sheriff Nichols issued a statement on the Franklin County Facebook page saying in no uncertain terms he will not follow the unconstitutional order.

"We will not be setting up a Police State. PERIOD," he wrote. "The Sheriff's Office will not purposefully go out and stop vehicles because they are on the road or stop and ask why people are out and about. To do so puts our officers at risk. This is not Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia where you are asked for your papers!" The sheriff's announcement comes as a welcome sign to Americans who have been arrested for inane things like praying outside, surfing, or trying to drive to work.

When this crisis passes, Australia may – at current rates – have had well under 10,000 cases of the virus, and perhaps 100 deaths. Time will tell. But if this is more or less how things will pan out, there will be at least two views on this.

The government will say, “See, we told you these draconian lockdown and shutdown measures were needed – it worked!”

Others will say, “See, it was nowhere near as bad, so all these draconian lockdown and shutdown measures really were not needed.”

The truth may never be fully known, but might lie somewhere between the two. However, as we seek to be wise about proper health and safety measures, we also need to be wise – very wise – about statism and Big Brother in action.