

Lockdown Protests Flare Up Around the World

Analysis by Barbara Loe Fisher

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

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- > Since the beginning of 2021, demonstrations calling for an end to COVID lockdowns and voluntary vaccination have spanned the globe from Canada to the Netherlands and Lebanon
- > February and March 2021 saw anti-lockdown protests in Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Bulgaria, Serbia, Poland and other countries

At the end of 2020, there were large public demonstrations opposing severe restrictions on civil liberties, including in Germany^{1,2} and Great Britain.³ In Denmark, there was a public protest against proposed legislation that would mandate COVID-19 vaccination.⁴

There is increasing civil unrest in many countries after a year of experiencing the crippling side effects of government public health policies that have restricted autonomy and freedom of assembly^{5,6} and caused mass unemployment and destruction of small businesses,^{7,8,9} steep increases in substance abuse, depression and suicide,^{10,11,12,13} and inadequate treatment for other diseases like cancer.^{14,15}

Since the beginning of 2021,¹⁶ demonstrations calling for an end to COVID lockdowns and voluntary vaccination have spanned the globe from Canada¹⁷ to the Netherlands¹⁸ and Lebanon.¹⁹ February and March 2021 saw anti-lockdown protests in Denmark,

Sweden, Switzerland, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Bulgaria, Serbia, Poland²⁰ and other countries.

The Netherlands: ‘Love, Freedom, Stop Dictatorship’

In January 2021, the government of The Netherlands instituted strict lockdown rules that banned gatherings of more than two people, shut bars and restaurants and imposed a 9 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. curfew, the first since the Nazi’s issued orders to Dutch citizens to “stay at home” during World War II.

People who break the curfew face a 95 Euro (\$115) fine. Schools and “nonessential” shops have been closed since December 2020.²¹ On January 24, 2021, the police used water cannons and dogs to disperse hundreds of protesters opposed to curfews.

Tear gas was fired on a crowd of several hundred protesters in Eindhoven, where there were reports of looting and at least 30 arrests and a COVID testing center was burned in the city of Urk.²² In early March, a test center in another city near Amsterdam was the scene of a pipe bomb explosion.²³

On March 14, 2021, Dutch riot police broke up a crowd of several thousand anti-lockdown protesters gathered at The Hague. Water cannons, batons and dogs were used by police after protesters violated social distancing rules and disregarded warnings to disperse. Holding yellow umbrellas and chanting, “love, freedom, stop dictatorship,” about 20 people reportedly were detained by police and two demonstrators were injured.²⁴

Ireland: ‘Let Ireland Live’

On February 17, 2021, hundreds of people gathered in Dublin carrying signs like “End the Lockdown” and “Let Ireland Live” and clashed with police, resulting in 23 arrests.

The demonstration was held after the government extended the country’s third lockdown until April, which meant that all nonessential businesses, restaurants, pubs

and gyms would remain shut, with the government recommending people stay at home and placing a 3-mile travel limit on movements.²⁵

On St. Patrick's Day and on March 20, 2021, the Irish police (Gardai) arrested a number of demonstrators for violating pandemic public health restrictions on public gatherings.²⁶ The majority were not wearing face masks and some carried banners opposing mandatory COVID vaccinations.

Denmark: 1,200 Rally Against Lockdown Restrictions

On February 28, 2021, eight demonstrators were arrested in Copenhagen, Denmark, in front of the Town Hall during a mostly peaceful anti-lockdown rally attended by a crowd of about 1,200 people.

Organized by "Men in Black," it was the first protest since the government announced the extension of many COVID health restrictions to April 4, which includes the closure of bars, restaurants and most secondary schools and universities. Danish police said the eight demonstrators were arrested for rowdy behavior and using fireworks during the protest.²⁷

Sweden: First Protest Opposing New Public Health Rules

Unlike most other European countries, Sweden did not lockdown at the beginning of the COVID pandemic and there were few social distancing restrictions through most of 2020.²⁸ However, when COVID cases began to rise in later in the year, the government instituted stricter rules.

On March 6, 2021, Swedish police broke up a rally of hundreds of people who had assembled in Stockholm to demonstrate against COVID public health restrictions.²⁹ The rally, which was the first to protest the country's new public health laws restricting movement, was organized by Freedom Sweden, a citizen group that maintains the new laws violate human freedom.

Switzerland: Protest Against 'Dictatorial Powers'

On March 6, 2021, 4,000 Swiss citizens walked peacefully in the town of Chur, Switzerland, carrying banners in a protest against use of "dictatorial powers" by the government to implement restrictive COVID public health policies that include the continued closure of bars and restaurants.

In Zurich, police reportedly dispersed several public gatherings that violated the 15-person gathering limit outside (five people limit inside buildings).³⁰

Greece: Lockdown Fatigue Fuels Protests

During the month of March, dozens of demonstrations took place in Athens and other cities in Greece against strict COVID lockdown measures that have included nightly curfews and police patrols on university campuses. There also have been riots protesting police brutality related to enforcement of social distancing rules.

One politician in Greece alleged the government is "taking advantage of the pandemic as a pretext to impose harsh measures, restrict democratic rights and freedoms, and advance an agenda that is damaging the public interest."³¹

Australia: This All Ends When We Say NO!

On February 13, 2021, health officials in Victoria, Australia put into effect a hard "circuit breaker" five-day lockdown and told citizens "you cannot leave your home unless you are doing it for one of four reasons: shopping for necessary goods and services; care and caregiving; exercise; and essential work."³²

Protests across Melbourne against the new restrictions resulted in several arrests. The protesters urged Australians to "make your voices heard" because, they said, the people cannot endure another lockdown. One demonstrator held a sign that said, "This All Ends When We Say NO!"³³

Canada: March of the Rebellious and Walk for Freedom

On March 13, 2021, in Quebec, Canada, thousands of people chanting “liberte” held a “March of the Rebellious” in opposition to Canada’s COVID strict curfews and other lockdown measures.³⁴ The demonstrators asked the Quebec government to support the need for all its COVID-19 health regulations with published scientific reports and “allow people to make informed decisions about vaccines.”

Several people were arrested and tickets issued for failure to wear masks or to social distance. Hundreds of Canadians in the province of Alberta participated in a “Walk for Freedom” demonstration in Calgary on March 20, 2021. Like the protest in Quebec, their goal was to communicate opposition to ongoing pandemic public health restrictions.³⁵ No tickets were issued or arrests made.

Several hundred residents of North Bay in Ontario, Canada, gathered at the North Bay waterfront holding banners that said “No More Lockdowns” and “No Vaccines” and called for an end to pandemic lockdowns and restoration of people’s freedoms.³⁶

Germany: ‘We Are the People’

On March 20, 2021, more than 20,000 German citizens rallied in protest against pandemic lockdown restrictions in the city of Kassel, clashing with police in riot gear. Many of the protesters were chanting “Wir sind das Volk” – “We are the people” – a slogan that was used by protesters calling for and to the Berlin Wall and communist East Germany.³⁷

According to Deutsche Welle(DW), some protesters tried to break through a police barrier, and police used mace and batons in scuffles with protesters and then used water cannons to disperse some demonstrators outside the area authorized for the rally. Police had warned that the demonstration would be broken up if protesters did not wear masks or social distance.³⁸

Britain: ‘Stop Destroying Our Kids’ Lives’

On March 20, 2021, 10,000 British citizens holding banners with slogans like “Stop Destroying our Kids Lives” and “Fake Pandemic” marched in London against COVID pandemic rules that prohibit groups to gather together and engage in public protests for any reason.³⁹ A number of demonstrators were arrested for violating pandemic restrictions on public protests.

According to AP/AFP, the march took place after “more than 60 lawmakers signed a letter demanding that the government change the law and allow protests to take place even when pandemic restrictions bar other types of gatherings.” The letter was coordinated by Liberty and Big Brother Watch, two civil rights groups.⁴⁰ There also were demonstrations in Newcastle and Manchester.

According to Britain’s Daily Mail, hundreds of protesters in Manchester marched to police headquarters, characterizing the COVID lockdown as a “crime against humanity,” while one of the groups marching through the center of London, Jam For Freedom, emphasized the need to avoid violence, reportedly instructing its members to: ‘Stay tight, stay aware, stay peaceful and polite.’⁴¹

France: Thousands Ignore New Lockdown Rules

On the weekend of March 20, 2021, thousands of protesters gathered in Marseille and Paris to oppose new COVID lockdown orders announced by the government. Many Parisians ignored the order and gathered outdoors in parks and promenades to enjoy the warm spring weekend, while more than 6,500 gathered in Marseille to attend a rule-breaking street carnival.⁴²

Under the new restrictions in France, people are not required to spend most of the day confined at home, but “non-essential” shops are closed and people’s movements are confined to a six-mile radius from their home residence.

Finland: ‘Let the People Speak!’

On March 20, about 400 people without masks marched through city streets to the parliament building in Helsinki, Finland carrying signs like “Let the people speak!” and “Facts and numbers don’t add up.” Police said the marchers protesting the government’s COVID restrictions violated social distancing requirements and crowd limits on public gatherings but was peaceful.⁴³

Romania: Parents, Protect Your Children!

Romania’s capital of Bucharest saw more than a thousand protesters opposing mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations. According to an AP/AFP report, “the largely maskless crowd honked horns, waved national flags and chanted messages such as ‘Block vaccination’ and ‘Freedom.’ One placard read: “Parents, protect your children! Stop the fear!”⁴⁴

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