

This Amounts to Social Murder. The British Government’s “Deadly Handling” of the Pandemic

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The left has said it for a year and last week Cummings confirmed it: the government’s handling of the pandemic has consistently prioritised private profit over public health. Now we must hold them to account for their crimes against us, writes CLAUDIA WEBBE MP

Last week’s explosive testimony by Dominic Cummings, former chief adviser to the Prime Minister, revealed, if true, the extent of the government’s deadly handling of the pandemic.

The most shocking admission was that, due to government negligence, unpreparedness and sheer arrogance, many thousands of people died unnecessarily because of decisions made in Number 10.

Cummings was frank in his assessment: “Tens of thousands of people died who didn’t need to die.” If we trust a word of it, there is no need to wait for an independent inquiry, the Prime Minister must urgently apologise for this deadly dereliction of duty to everyone who lost a loved one due to his government’s carelessness. Then he must resign.

It was also unearthed that, contrary to government mistruths at the time, there were significant PPE shortages with British stocks continually being sent abroad even as the pandemic accelerated.

Cummings said that Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock “should’ve been fired for at least 15-20 things, including lying to everybody on multiple occasions.”

Perhaps the most severe and deadly of these “lies” was that, despite persistent government promises, there was no protective ring around care homes in the early stages of the pandemic.

As Cummings put it, “infected people went back to care homes and then infected people and it spread like wildfire inside the care homes. Also the care homes didn’t have the PPE to deal with it and they didn’t have the testing for the staff, so you had this cascading series of crises — like a domino effect, rippling through the system.”

It would be easy to write Cummings off as a self-confessed liar giving evidence to Parliament about a Prime Minister whom he branded a liar and further whom Cummings indicates was surrounded by liars in Parliament. Or perhaps the Conservatives in power have run out of opposition or people to fight with so they are eating themselves.

However, we know the government's lack of preparedness meant that NHS staff were fatally exposed. Tragically, more than 500 NHS and care workers have died after exposure to Covid-19, amid a shameful failure to provide them with suitable PPE.

This underlines the selflessness of those who dedicate their lives and even put themselves at risk to help others.

Any reasonable government would ensure that those who have contributed most to our national effort receive a fair compensation for their heroic efforts, including a 15 per cent pay rise. Yet sadly, we do not have a reasonable government.

The details of Boris Johnson's negligence and sheer carelessness are sickening.

Cummings confirmed that herd immunity was the initial policy of the government, which they knew would have cost at least 220,000 lives. Yet, the government denied that this was ever the policy, despite being on record saying exactly that, and got away with it due to our compliant media class.

Indeed, it should not have taken a disgruntled government employee to expose this government's deadly handling of the coronavirus. This was a damning indictment of our media ecosystem and reveals the cosy relationship between government and client journalists, which Cummings himself exposed.

Johnson's personal culpability and ineptitude was laid bare in the testimony. Johnson was said to regard Covid as "the new swine flu" at the start of 2020 and held a complete disregard for widespread loss of life — keen as he was to prioritise the economy over public health.

In a clear bid to grab our attention and headlines, Cummings described how officials had talked of getting the chief medical officer for England, Chris Whitty, to inject Johnson live on TV with the coronavirus "so everyone realises it's nothing to be frightened of."

This graphic description is only a few steps removed from Donald Trump's encouraging people to inject bleach to combat the virus and reveals how utterly unfit for office our Prime Minister is.

What this tells us is that the government's mishandling throughout the Covid pandemic amounts to what Friedrich Engels termed "social murder."

Engels used this to describe conditions in Manchester in 1845, in which the ruling class places masses of workers "in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and unnatural death."

There is no other way to describe the government's handling of the pandemic. It follows that everyone at the top of government associated with this utter calamity must resign.

Every community has been hit by this crisis, but it has especially impacted the poor, vulnerable and the oppressed including those in lower-paid work and who cannot work from home. African, Asian and minority ethnic communities, the disabled and those in poorer housing are among those hit hardest by this crisis.

My own community of Leicester East has been under lockdown or enhanced restrictions longer than virtually any other area. As one of the most diverse areas of Britain, Leicester is more deeply affected by the disproportionate impact of the virus.

A leaked government report found that “existing socioeconomic inequality” had left African, Asian and minority ethnic communities at greater exposure to Covid-19 as they were more likely to live in cramped and multigenerational housing in deprived areas and hold public-facing jobs.

Workers were denied proper sick pay and were forced to work, even whilst ill, in conditions which were not Covid-secure otherwise, they would suffer a loss of pay. Such were the conditions of wage exploitation in Leicester’s garment industry.

The disproportionate suffering of areas like Leicester is a damning indictment of the government’s failure to prioritise public health and implement a Zero-Covid strategy to suppress the virus. Yet the government continues to make the same mistakes over and over again.

It should have been made simple: if you get contacted by test and trace, you must be provided with the material means to isolate. It was estimated that, at the peak of the virus, at least 20,000 people a day were not complying fully with isolation orders, allowing the virus to spread.

This is not due to moral failures on behalf of the public — but because it is impossible for people living on poverty wages to comply with guidance on self-isolation and social distancing.

Yet the government failed to ensure this for working-class people in Leicester and across Britain. They were happy to squander billions to enrich private companies but flinched at ensuring that people were not faced with a choice between destitution or infection.

A Zero-Covid approach was necessary, to suppress the virus and prioritise public health over private profit. This would have avoided a cycle of confusing and ineffective local lockdowns. Even today with the concerning rise of the B.1.617 variant, it would protect both lives and livelihoods by driving down the virus so that the economy can properly restart when it is safe to do so.

The government’s handling of the pandemic has been defined by a belief that there is a trade-off between health and the economy. It is clear which side they are on, as they have consistently prioritised private profit over public health.

Yet this is a false dichotomy. Partly due to the government’s many attempts to prioritise the economy, from the initial herd immunity strategy, the Eat out to Help Out scheme and the rush to allow people into high-streets to do their Christmas shopping, we have the highest number of excess deaths in Europe, one of the worst death rates in the world and are also facing our worst recession for over 300 years.

Across the world, countries that have pursued a zero-Covid strategy are returning to normality, with all the economic benefits that brings. The government must follow the best examples set by countries across the world, especially across East Asia and the Pacific and adopt a zero-Covid strategy. This is the only way to prioritise the protection of everyone in Britain and especially those whom the virus has disproportionately affected.

This episode must be a wake-up call. We have a government responsible for “social murder,” yet they are still running high in the polls — it us up to us on the left to tell the truth in our neighbourhoods, communities and workplaces and continue to fight for a society which is built around people’s needs, health and wellbeing.

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