Funding the Future

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The FT has noted this morning:

The UK has suffered the highest rate of deaths from the coronavirus pandemic among countries that produce comparable data, according to excess mortality figures.

The UK has registered 59,537 more deaths than usual since the week ending March 20, indicating that the virus has directly or indirectly killed 891 people per million.

It added:

At this stage of the pandemic, that is a higher rate of death than in any country for which high-quality data exist. The absolute number of excess deaths in the UK is also the highest in Europe, and second only to the US in global terms, according to data collected by the Financial Times.

That is not something anyone would want to note. And yet it is the reality of what is happening in this country at present. After a decade of government that has refused, in effect, to govern, because it has believed that its job has been to hand over as much as possible of government activity to the private sector and to leave the rest to wither, we have seen the consequence. People have died. And of course it can be said that people have died everywhere, but the reality is that many more than necessary have died here.

This matters. It matters to every family and friend involved.

It matters because we are a long way from containing this disease here, despite what the government says, and a second wave is more likely as a result in this country than most as a consequence.

It matters as well because current moves - from reopening schools to shops and businesses - will exacerbate this excess death rate, with all scientific advisers appearing to be agreed that infection rates are set to rise, and potentially significantly, as a consequence.

It matters too because those responsible should be held to account.

It matters most especially as it is still apparent that they are failing. The supposed track and trace system that is to start today is very obviously utterly chaotic, and without any adequate systems or training in place for it to commence operations. Numerous tweets from those with responsibility for public health are confirming this.

And it matters because of the duality that persists between words and actions. This is why the Cummings fiasco matters. The words said by those with power and their actions are simply inconsistent, continually, and without any apparent concern on their part that there is anything wrong with this. Johnson did it again yesterday, telling the Liaison Committee that there was no effort to get people out of hospitals and into care homes as the crisis began, for example, when I can report with certainty that this is exactly what happened in the area where I live.

I believe in the power of government.

I believe that the power in question can be a force for good.

Indeed, I was very obviously brought up in a period when that power was appropriately used to advance the well-being of many, me included.

That said, my faith is not blind: I am aware of all the possibilities that power can corrupt. So I have every wish for proper checks and balances, and a powerful fourth estate to hold those in authority to account, because that is essential (and is why the BBC were so wrong to cave in on Emily Maitlis).

And I know I am not alone in thinking that what the state can do is of enormous social benefit. People have clapped for the NHS for a reason, and NHS staff are very far from alone in being utterly dedicated professionals within the state sector.

But, and this is a most massive but, a corrupt political and economic paradigm, deliberately constructed in the immediate post-war era by those who hated the power of the state and were petrified that they thought that it would lead to Soviet-style communism, which was brought to power by Thatcher and Reagan, has left a legacy in the form of politicians of the calibre of our current Cabinet, who are between them without either an original thought or the capacity to have one in their heads, leaving them open to the corrupting influence of advisers who see it as their goal to undermine parliament, the civil service and the checks and balances within society so that private capital may profit.

And people have died as a result.

I fear too many more will as yet.

And when people ask me why I want a different political and economic paradigm I can add the avoidance of these deaths to my list of reasons.

We did not need to have the worst Covid-19 deaths rate. It was choice that led to this happening.

It was the wrong choice.

It was a false choice.

It will happen again unless challenged.

That is what we have to do: the challenge remains ours to make.