

Funding the Future

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George Monbiot wrote this yesterday [wrote this yesterday](#), in The Guardian:

We are trapped in a long, dark tunnel, all of whose known exits are blocked. There is no plausible route out of the UK's coronavirus crisis that does not involve mass suffering and death. If, as some newspapers and Conservative MPs insist, the government eases the lockdown while the pandemic is still raging, the eventual death toll could be several times greater than today's. If it doesn't, and we spend all the warm months of the year in confinement, the impact on our mental and physical health, jobs and relationships could be catastrophic.

It's not only well written; it's also uncomfortable because it says what is almost certainly true.

When this virus was spreading exponentially in March I thought it likely that there would be hundreds of thousands of deaths from it in the UK.

I well recall a friend and colleague asking with some incredulity how I could believe that 20,000 people might die as a result of it. I don't think I need to explain now.

I also recall another colleague saying he thought the government had wisely delayed lockdown to allow time for business to prepare for it. I admit I was astonished: virus management doesn't work like that and, as has been proven to be the case, to a large degree delaying lockdown negated the reason for doing it: the genie was out of the bottle by the time we did it.

I also known an epidemiologist who still insists it's all over: he says that all pandemics create a pattern of deaths, including the current decline, that we have now witnessed, and that this one is not a very serious pandemic and the crisis is over. I confess, I do not believe him, whilst hoping he is right: the Spanish flu did not work like that, and his claim that more than 50% of people in London had already had the virus made more than two weeks ago still seems to be unlikely, albeit that I accept that the capital has the lowest infection rate right now.

I offer the contrasts to suggest that I know there is a range of opinion on this issue. No

one knows for sure, and the only thing that is certain is that the epidemiologists are at war with each other in ways that I now know only academics can be.

So I make a judgement, and I agree with George Monbiot.

I see no evidence that this pandemic is over.

I do see evidence that the government's model has failed.

As has the Swedish one.

I can see evidence that schools can reopen in Denmark when there was one coronavirus death there one day in the last week. And I can see that we are still suffering one death about every two minutes, and it is apparent that the rate of reinfection has already risen since VE Day. And as a result I seriously wonder how we think it wise to do what they can.

What seems certain to me is that any end to lockdown is going to increase deaths in the UK, considerably. We are simply not going to get through this without a great deal more human suffering as yet. We might want to copy Europe on this, but can't because we have not managed reinfection in the UK in the way that they did: it's as simple as that.

And the suffering to come will not just be from more coronavirus deaths. The knock on physical ill health consequences (from cancer, to reports I am told of about physicians seeing really serious heart complications from untreated heart attacks) and mental ill health consequences, as well as the economic devastation that a largely failed lockdown has brought, have yet to really be counted. But they are real, and will be ongoing.

The time will come when ministers will have to be held to account for what they did. Johnson, most especially, will be accountable.

But right now we have to face an ongoing crisis that I cannot see ending for many months as yet, and with many more dying over that period as a direct or indirect consequence of the failure of our government to tackle this issue on a timely basis.

The talk of ending lockdown to get business 'back to normal' is just more failure to recognise reality in this context. 'Normal' has for this country gone for some time to come. This is not a 'moment' we're living through, where 'moment' refers to a brief period in time. This is an enduring period of stress. And they always create major change at personal and societal level.

I can hope for best outcomes.

But I know that unless the government is now as enlightened on continuing economic

management as it was not when it came to managing the move to lockdown then matters will be very much worse than they need be.

And in that context they have to accept that whatever was can no longer be. Which means, amongst other things, that they accept that the role of government has changed, for good, in favour of government intervention, and that payment for the restoration of capital to those who previously owned it - which **is what the demand for increased tax to pay for the crisis represents** - is a call that has to be ignored.

We have many issues to face now. Restoring what was already broken is not one of them. We have to move on and face what is to come. Seeking to maintain what got us into this mess is the last thing we need on our agenda now. Those who think otherwise have to be told, very politely, that their day is done.