

It's a sad day when mainstream politicians have ...

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As the [FT is reporting](#) this morning, there is a growing demand from Tory MPs for the government to fix a date to end the current half-hearted lockdown that the country is facing. Their apparent logic is that if vaccines are delivered on schedule by mid-February then the vulnerable in the community will have been protected by early March, and so lockdown should end.

This logic is, of course, that of the Great Barrington Declaration. As I noted [last October](#):

The Great Barrington Declaration had nothing to do with epidemiology and a great deal to do with far right economics.

The declaration is even named after the headquarters of the market-fundamentalist US think tank where it was signed.

What it demanded was that the vulnerable in society - who were well over 10 million people in the UK - be locked down and that the rest of society be free to continue their lives.

There was, of course, no evidence as to how this might work.

Nor was there any consideration of the fact that there are those who are defined as vulnerable who co-habit with those who are not e.g. those parents over 60 who still have children at home - of whom there are very great many. It was just suggested that isolation 'should be arranged'.

As is usual for market enthusiasts, dogma and not reality was what mattered. And it still very obviously does to Tory MPs.

The dogma was obvious. It was that state intervention could be kept to the minimum scale possible and that markets should be left open and uninterrupted to the greatest possible degree. The price to be paid was locking up the elderly, they thought, until vaccination was possible.

It's easy to see how the current position of Tory MPs comes straight from this. But they ignore three things.

The first is that we do not as yet know how effective the vaccines really are.

The second is that no one knows if those who have been vaccinated can still transmit the disease.

The third is that there remains the problem that most in ICUs are now below the age where vaccination is a priority, even if it remains true that most deaths are in the more vulnerable groups. The NHS is not just being overwhelmed by the elderly. Its resources are being stretched to the limit by those who are younger, and it is not the elderly who are transmitting the virus to these younger people, because the elderly are, almost without exception, trying to stay out of harm's way.

In other words, vaccinating the elderly is not going to end the coronavirus crisis in the NHS, or in society. It is going to help, we hope. But whatever is achieved by mid-February is not going to end this. The chance of that seems exceptionally remote.

I noted Prof Devi Sridhar discussing the possibility of risks this coming autumn and next winter on Channel 4 News last night. I have little doubt she has good reason for her concern. And the biggest enemy of those, like her, who are seeking to challenge the government into taking appropriate action is the indifference to evidence of market fundamentalists whose only goals are the creation of profit opportunities and the minimisation of state intervention to protect people, with the simultaneous goal of minimising public spending.

Dogma is driving these Tory MPs. Care should be. It's a sad day when mainstream politicians have reached such depths of indifference to suffering.