

# The Covid response suggests that Tory MPs now think tha...

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We have, according to Boris Johnson, a national emergency. For once, I will not disagree with him. Omicron is creating a crisis with regard to Covid on a greater scale than any that we have faced before. As a consequence, I dutifully watched his broadcast to the nation last night. Having overcome my initial reaction, which was that if we face a crisis he could at least comb his hair to emphasise the fact (a sentiment I expressed more colourfully on Twitter) three immediate thoughts came to mind.

The first was that if we faced a crisis, the reaction was remarkably tepid. All that has been done is to bring forward the deadline when everyone should be offered a booster vaccine in the UK. However, the assumptions underpinning this offer are clearly absurd. That is partly because the rate of vaccination has to be double that which has been achieved to date and I am really not sure that the army can make up that difference. There also seemed to be a failure to factor in Christmas. Worse, an appeal to staff in the NHS to work ever harder will not go down well after the revelations of the last week, for which there was not a word of remorse. As messaging went, this was dire. I can't see this promise being honoured.

Second, implicit in this single approach to tackling this crisis are a number of ongoing beliefs that the government still appears to hold. The most significant is the belief that immunity can be created if not by infection, then at least by injection. By now the fallacy of this argument should, I would have thought, have become apparent. In saying so I am not belittling vaccination, and I would urge everyone to be vaccinated. What I am saying is that this programme is clearly insufficient to tackle the crisis that we face by itself.

The paltry measures that were announced last week, and which will now be debated in Parliament tomorrow, are in the context of the scale of the problem that we face also utterly inconsequential, even if they could be enforced in their mediocrity. Requiring that a mask be worn in a theatre is so wrong when in reality theatres and all other places of mass entertainment should now be closed. With a virus as virulent as this one is we cannot afford anything that looks vaguely like a mass spreading event and yet they are being permitted all over the country, day in, day out. I just wish our Opposition

had the courage to say so. We need lockdown, and we need it now.

Nor was there any indication of lessons learned, let alone the announcement of a program to at last recognise the fact that Covid is an ongoing threat that must be managed within our society. So, there was nothing about additional NHS resources. Nor was there anything about NHS pay. There was not a hint that schools, universities, places of work, hospitality venues and other locations must be made safe before they can be reopened because we can now be certain that there will be further waves of Covid to come. This requires mass programmes of ventilation and filtration. Nor was there any hint that mistakes have been made, including the declaration of a 'freedom day', which was nothing of the sort.

However, the third issue was probably the most important, and that was that there was no suggestion that Rishi Sunak will be sent back to the Despatch Box any time soon. Even if, for reasons that are incomprehensible, no further lockdown takes place (and for the record, I think we will be in lockdown by next weekend) there are a wide range of issues that need to be addressed now, including a critical need for investment in everything from intensive care facilities (without it being claimed that these will represent new hospitals) to the ventilation systems on which it is very likely that our long-term ability to control Covid is dependent. In addition, in the short term there are bound to be costs of business disruption. So far none of these issues has been mentioned by any leading politician, and that dismays me because it is so obvious that these issues must be addressed and that state intervention is required to make sure that they are.

The simple fact is that so far it would seem as if no lessons from Covid have been learned. It is as if the assumption is still being made that, just like a common cold, we will get rid of this and life will return to normal pretty soon. After two years that assumption is so glaringly wrong that I would have thought it would have permeated even the most impenetrable of political brains, but that does not appear to be the case. Instead, we face the quite extraordinary prospect of up to 100 Tory MPs, all of whom are dedicated to removing our right to protest, voting against the government to maintain the right to not wear a mask and who are vehemently opposed to any other measures to tackle this crisis. It is as if they think that delivering death in the community is now what politics is about.

It is not and it really is time that we had politicians demanding the level of change that is really required to handle this crisis which to date others none of them have been willing to embrace.