

Keeping things in proportion

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The closure of Heathrow Airport for about 24 hours this week has been treated as a national disaster.

To view the media, you would think that the world had always come to an end because a modest number of people could not make it into and out of the UK, even though all its other airports were open and fully functioning.

Without exception, every national media outlet appeared to think that this was a matter of enormous concern to us all.

The reality is that 50% of people in the UK never fly. In addition, the vast majority of flights into and out of the UK are undertaken by people in the top 10% of income earners in the world, which group broadly aligns with the top 10% of income earners in the UK. And, as a matter of fact, around 90% of flights are for leisure purposes and not for business.

In that case, and to interpret this data in an appropriate fashion (whilst bearing in mind that the proportion of business travel through Heathrow might be above average), what really happened over that 24-hour period was that a relatively small number of the people in the UK's top-earning elite were mildly inconvenienced, mostly with regard to their plans to go on holiday. The fact that this was so widely reported is simply an indication of how out of touch our media are with the lives of most people and is not an indication of the fact that a serious national event occurred.

There were serious national events that occurred over the same 24 hours.

People died in corridors in hospitals.

Large amounts of untreated human waste were poured into the UK rivers and onto its beaches.

Climate change advanced.

The stock of nuclear waste that we have no idea how to treat increased.

People in need were profoundly distressed by their inability to make ends meet and the fact that Labour plans to make their lives very much worse.

Vast numbers of young, unemployed people got rejection letters from the jobs that they had applied for or were simply ignored and never heard anything further again about the applications that they had made.

The UK's local authorities sunk deeper into debt without anyone having an answer as to how the services that they supply will be delivered in future.

Very little appears to have happened in resolving the issues that Comic Relief was set up to address.

All of these are crises. What happened at Heathrow was not. When will we talk about the things that matter?