

British prime minister: A victim of his “herd immunity” policy

Robert Stevens
8 April 2020

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson remains in an intensive care unit, fighting for his life after self-isolating for 10 days having contracted the coronavirus.

Johnson was rushed to London’s St Thomas’ hospital Sunday evening from Downing Street, after his condition worsened and he had problems breathing. On Monday evening he was sent to an intensive care ward.

On March 27, the prime minister announced on Twitter that he had been diagnosed with coronavirus. In upbeat tones he declared, “I’ve developed mild symptoms of the coronavirus, that’s to say, a temperature and a persistent cough. ... Be in no doubt that I can continue ... to communicate with all my top team to lead the national fightback against coronavirus.”

Despite attempts by Johnson, his government and the media to play down how ill he was, it was clear to everyone from the brief video messages he tweeted from Downing Street and when he emerged from the door of Number 10 last Thursday to join in the national “clap for the National Health Service” that he was in in a bad way.

Trying to downplay Johnson’s plight, a Downing Street spokesman issued a statement Tuesday that he was “receiving standard oxygen treatment and breathing without any other assistance and does not have pneumonia.” This prompted banner headlines declaring that Johnson was not being ventilated and was “stable.”

But while Johnson is not on a ventilator, he is one step away from requiring it. The University of Reading’s Dr. Simon Clarke said, “The NHS, particularly at this moment, doesn’t give up intensive care beds just for people to be looked over. It doesn’t work like that, even for prime ministers.”

Paul Hunter, professor of medicine at the University

of East Anglia, commented, “Sadly about half of cases (50.1 percent) that go into critical care [with Covid-19] still die. This is much higher than for other viral pneumonias (22.4 percent).”

Speaking at a press conference Monday, First Secretary of State and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said he would be carrying out duties on Johnson’s behalf. It was revealed that another cabinet minister, Michael Gove, is self-isolating, and Downing Street issued a statement that should Raab be unable to fulfill his duties, they would be assumed by Chancellor Rishi Sunak.

It has emerged that attempts to downplay Johnson’s predicament were only finally abandoned because the US administration asked directly how bad he was. The *Daily Mail* reported Tuesday, “It took an intervention from our oldest ally across the Atlantic for questions to be asked about just how serious Mr. Johnson’s illness was. When Donald Trump revealed that ‘all Americans are praying’ for the prime minister, it soon emerged this was not typical hyperbole from the President.”

Despite acres of coverage, little is being even hinted at regarding the most blindingly obvious fact: Johnson contracted COVID-19 and requires intensive care because he was a victim of his government’s own policy of tackling the virus by means of achieving “herd immunity”—the mass infection of the population. This policy, if carried out as planned, would have resulted in untold thousands dying.

On March 3, with the virus spreading rapidly and 100,000 cases recorded globally and with the World Health Organization warning of a potential pandemic, Johnson told a press conference, “I continue to shake hands.” He said he had just visited a hospital ward that included meeting COVID-19 patients and had shaken everyone’s hand.

Two days later, as the UK's first death from coronavirus was announced, and after shaking hands with the hosts of ITV's *This Morning* show, Johnson was asked why there was no cancellation of public events or closing of schools. He replied, "One of the theories is, that perhaps you could take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures." Later that day he declared, "Basically we're saying, 'Wash your hands and business as usual.'"

Days later, on March 12, Johnson, flanked by his chief medical and scientific officers, announced the herd immunity policy. One day earlier a health minister, Nadine Dorries, announced she had caught the virus. She had been in touch with hundreds of people, including Johnson.

As deaths mounted, Johnson was forced to announce social distancing measures and then a lockdown on March 23.

Johnson and the government clearly believed their own PR and disregarded scientifically grounded warnings from health experts as to how infectious and dangerous COVID-19 is. He continued attending Parliament until it went into recess March 25. The previous day he held a cabinet meeting in Downing Street with three other cabinet members present. Three of the four attending in person, Johnson, Health Secretary Matt Hancock, and Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty were laid low by the virus.

On March 27, Johnson finally announced he had contracted COVID-19 and had "mild symptoms."

The blasé attitude to the coronavirus impacted on Johnson's partner, Carrie Symonds, who is six months pregnant. She remained with Johnson at Downing Street until he announced he had been diagnosed. On April 3, Symonds announced she had spent the previous week ill in bed with coronavirus symptoms.

On March 30, Johnson's main adviser Dominic Cummings was seen *running* out of Downing Street, after developing symptoms over the previous days and has not been seen since.

It was left until the very last minute before Johnson received hospital treatment. He became seriously ill because he was trying to maintain a pretence, for political expediency, that he was fine. To do otherwise would have raised again how criminal his "herd

immunity" policy was. Moreover, going forward Johnson et al were keen to stress that the COVID-19 pandemic would soon spike and begin to level off, after which the UK economy would need to get back to normal—meaning workers must return promptly to their places of employment and begin generating profit for the corporations and banks once again.

Whatever Johnson's personal fate, the herd immunity policy that landed him seriously ill in hospital, in place for weeks before he was forced to abandon it, has contributed to many thousands of people nationwide becoming infected and thousands dying. As the WSWS reported on the day Johnson was admitted to St. Thomas' Hospital, nine National Health Service workers and 12 public transport workers were reported to have died. Their blood is on the government's hands.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact