

# Guardian refuses to publish former children's laureate Michael Rosen's letter denouncing UK government's "herd immunity" policy

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13 February 2021

The *Guardian* recently rejected the publication of a letter by Michael Rosen denouncing the Johnson government's policy of "herd immunity".

The decision not to publish can only be interpreted as an act of censorship, given Rosen's high-profile.

Rosen has written many successful children's books and was children's laureate from 2007 to 2009. Educationalist Morag Styles has described Rosen as "one of the most significant figures in contemporary children's poetry" and one of the first poets "to draw closely on his own childhood experiences and to 'tell it as it was' in the ordinary language children actually use."

Although best known for children's picture books, such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (1989) and books of poems like *You Wait Till I'm Older Than You!* (1997), Rosen, who is known for his left-wing views, has also written more serious works aimed at children such as *What Is Politics? Why Should we Care? And Other Big Questions* (2019), co-authored with Annemarie Young.

In addition, Rosen almost died from contracting COVID-19 himself last year and has spoken about the potentially permanent damage it has done to him.

He developed suspected symptoms in March, but his wife was told not to take him to hospital as part of the official advice to decrease pressure on the National Health Service. Rosen was only admitted to hospital after a doctor friend discovered his blood oxygen level was dangerously low. After being rushed to Accident and Emergency, he was moved into intensive care on March 29 and then back to a ward before being moved back into intensive care in early April, during which time he suffered multiple organ failure, developed a secondary pneumonia infection and was "hours from death." He left intensive care on May 22, after 47 days.

Given all of this, a letter from Rosen would normally have been considered something of a coup for the *Guardian* and

of significant interest to its readers. For almost two decades now, it has been standard procedure for the paper to publish his opinions on a variety of generally educational and literary themes. In the very week that the editorial offices were rejecting his letter denouncing the "herd-immunity" policy, the *Guardian* published the latest open letter from Rosen to the education secretary, Gavin Williamson, on how education policy is unnecessarily increasing an already heavy burden on parents and children engaged in home-schooling during the current partial closure of schools.

But it has become clear that whereas the increasingly illiberal *Guardian* can accommodate various criticisms of aspects of government policy, they are not so keen to publish a scathing denunciation of the policy of reopening the economy and schools pursued jointly by the Conservative government, the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

Rosen's letter was eventually posted on the Labour left supporting *Skwawkbbox* website. He wrote:

Dear sir/madam

Jonathan Freedland's comment 'Lies about Covid, insisting that it was a hoax cooked up by the deep state, led millions of people to drop their guard and get infected' ('Trump may be gone but his big lie will linger' *Guardian*, Jan 15) misses the point. If we look closely at what was being said in official circles in March 2020, we can see quite clearly there was a plan to create 'herd immunity' without vaccination.

Robert Peston had his usual inside story on March 12 in 'The Spectator' with a headline "Herd immunity' will be vital to stopping Coronavirus" and wrote of this desirable outcome without mentioning the inevitable huge loss of life involved

nor the high chance of it being unachievable.

A day later, 3 government scientists sang the same tune: Graham Medley told BBC Newsnight, 'We're going to have to generate herd immunity...the only way of developing that in the absence of a vaccine is for the majority of the population to become infected...'

Sir Patrick Vallance said that morning on the Today programme, 'Our aim is to try and reduce the peak, broaden the peak, not suppress it completely; also because the vast majority of people get a mild illness, to build up some kind of herd immunity.' Same day, John Edmunds said, 'The only way to stop this epidemic is indeed to achieve herd immunity'.

These people were talking of engineering mass death. It's not as if science is unaware of the Black Death, Myxomatosis, or Dutch Elm Disease. At the time, Boris Johnson was appearing on TV telling us that he was shaking hands with Covid patients.

The extraordinary fact is that this idea of 'herd immunity' without vaccination is lousy biology. No one knew then how long or short nor how strong or weak the body's immune response would be to this virus. No one knew how often it would mutate nor how different the would be from the original virus. These scientists were gambling with 'known unknowns' some of which would result in no 'herd immunity'.

What's more, the limited 'herd immunity' without vaccination that occurs naturally usually involves the evolutionary process of 'breeding out' (through death, before they reproduce) of those individuals who are susceptible to the virus and the 'breeding in' of those who are resistant, assuming the resistance is inheritable. This takes generations to effect – if ever. The problem for this scenario is that the section of the population most affected by the virus is above 'breeding' age! This negates the process by which evolution favours resistant individuals.

It seems to me horrific that top scientists were able to put forward their proposals to enact mass killing without being challenged, either on ethical or biological grounds. If you want to find out why or how this government has been lax, chaotic, incompetent and cruel in its approach to Covid-19, it starts here. The consequence is that there have been tens of thousands of deaths, and there are tens of thousands of us with long term or lifetime debilitating consequences.

They must never be let off the hook.

Yours faithfully

Michael Rosen

Over 110,000 people have now died from the virus in the UK thanks to the "herd immunity" policy denounced by Rosen.

By not publishing his letter, the *Guardian* is not only defending the Tories, their official scientific advisors and media figures such as Peston. They are forwarding an agenda they wholly agree with.

At every major juncture in the pandemic, the *Guardian* has advanced an oh-so-reasonable argument for reopening both schools and the wider economy.

On August 24, just as the government geared up to fully reopen schools after the first national lockdown, it published an editorial, "The Guardian view on schools reopening: a question of trust". Having first admitted that "The potential for a school to play a role in community spread of the virus is clear, given the number of households it draws together," the editorial insisted only that "At such a complex, fragile moment... Mr Johnson is right to say that there is a moral duty to get children safely back to school. But accomplishing that successfully will require engaging with and listening to teachers and parents, and giving them clear guidance."

The policy of fully reopening schools subsequently led to a huge rise in transmission of COVID-19, resulting in children becoming the most infected demographic, the UK attaining the highest daily per capita death toll from the virus in the world, and the National Health Service being brought to the brink of collapse.

On February 8 this year, with the most vocal right-wing political elements again clamouring for the reopening of schools and the economy, the *Guardian* published another editorial in which it argued, "Society will need to adapt... Schools will restart and offices may open, but there will have to be thought given on how better to ventilate them."

This, the *Guardian*'s support for ending any measures for containing the virus that cut across the accumulation of profit by the major corporations, is why Rosen's letter was not published.



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