

UK Covid-19 Inquiry evidence reveals how “let it rip” policy determined the end of COVID lockdowns

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Public hearings in the second stage of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry began this week. The inquiry was announced by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson in May 2021 and has been moving at a snail’s pace, with proceedings expected to take until 2026 to complete. In the meantime, 229,000 people have died of COVID in Britain, according to official statistics, while millions suffer from Long COVID.

Lead counsel Hugo Keith KC read out the evidence on Tuesday, the first day of this stage of the inquiry focusing on political decision-making in Westminster between January 2020 and February 2022. It revealed new information on the criminal attitude that prevailed in government circles at the beginning of the pandemic, and their overarching concerns that the economy be protected, not the population.

Despite the World Health Organization declaring COVID a pandemic on February 24, 2020 and reports of thousands of infections and deaths coming in from around the world, most notably from Italy, Dominic Cummings, at the time a senior advisor to Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote in a text message on March 2: “The PM [prime minister] doesn’t think it’s a big deal; [he] doesn’t think anything can be done, and his focus is elsewhere; he thinks it will be like swine flu and thinks his main danger is taking the economy into a slump.”

At various times, claims have been made that the government was not aware of the seriousness of the pandemic or of the consequences of it running unchecked, to excuse the criminal actions taken. Evidence at the hearings debunks this completely. An unnamed “senior Cabinet official” is quoted as saying on March 13, 2020, “I think this country’s [headed] for a disaster, I think we’re going to kill thousands of people.” A text sent a day earlier on March 12, from Cummings reads: “We’ve got big problems coming. The [Cabinet Office] is terrifyingly shit. No plans. Totally behind the pace. [...] We’re looking at 100 to 500,000 deaths between optimistic and pessimistic scenarios.”

Concerned with ensuring the profits of corporations, the

Tory government delayed instituting any public health measures as long as possible. It only acted when it became clear that the National Health Service (NHS) was going to collapse, threatening the stability of the state and massive economic damage. The ruling class had to take into account growing public concern and anger in the working class that measures had not been put in place to protect the population.

The government had no plan in place to institute a lockdown and had to haphazardly come up with one. Despite the decision for a lockdown being taken on March 9, it wasn’t imposed until March 23, causing more people to needlessly die. This is graphically described by Cummings in a text to Johnson: “You’re going to have to lock down but there is no lockdown plan, it does not exist, SAGE [Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies] haven’t modelled it, the Department of Health and Social Care don’t have a plan”. Reportedly, Johnson replied by musing out loud whether the virus should just be allowed to “let rip”.

Johnson had already declared the homicidal “herd immunity” programme in public on the *This Morning* TV show on March 5, where he explained, “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.”

As these discussions were taking place, the murderous decision was made, on March 17, 2020, to release tens of thousands of mainly elderly patients from hospitals to care homes, without testing. Taken in opposition to all medical advice and against any public health considerations this resulted in thousands of needless deaths as COVID tore through care homes turning them into killing fields.

Evidence presented in the inquiry makes clear that the consequences of this action were fully understood. Sir Patrick Vallance, the government’s chief scientific adviser, had briefed the cabinet about asymptomatic transmission just a few days previously. As lawyers for the bereaved noted, “In light of what was known, the decision in both England

and Wales to discharge people from hospital into care homes without testing was indefensible.”

As infections were rising again in September and early October 2020, after an ebb throughout the summer due to the lockdown being in place—and after most lockdown restrictions were lifted at the beginning of July—discussions took place in the Cabinet Office on whether to reimpose the lockdown.

The contending sides outlined their arguments to Johnson. At a meeting on October 25, 2020, one comment made to Johnson was “let it rip”, and, in relation to elderly people, which would have been the most threatened by a new surge of COVID, “They have had a good innings”. Just five days later, on October 30, 2020, even as Johnson had to authorise a second national lockdown to begin six days later on November 5, he made his infamous statement in Downing Street, blurting out, “No more fucking lockdowns. Let the bodies pile high in their thousands”.

This policy of social murder led to well over 100,000 more deaths over the next year, with many among the elderly. It summed up the determination of the ruling elite to end all lockdowns—an aim carried out just a few months later from March 8 to July 2021—in what was described as a “roadmap out of lockdown” that would end all restrictions “irreversibly”. This agenda was fervently backed by Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour Party who worked with the government as a self-declared “constructive” opposition throughout the first years of the pandemic.

The cabinet first had discussions around Long COVID in October 2020. Anthony Metzger KC, speaking on behalf of Long Covid Kids, Long Covid SOS and Long Covid Support, told the inquiry that Johnson initially “denied the truth of the suffering” of Long COVID patients. “In October 2020, while the Department of Health and Social Care was publishing guidance on long Covid and called for recognition and support for people with long Covid, Boris Johnson scrawled in capitals that long Covid was ‘bollocks’”. Metzger added, “Mr Johnson has admitted in his witness statement that he didn’t believe long Covid truly existed, dismissing it as ‘Gulf War Syndrome stuff’. The inquiry will be concerned to probe how the former prime minister could possibly hold this view in October 2020.” Noting that Johnson now accepted that Long Covid was a “serious health condition”, Metzger said at the time, “The UK’s senior most decision-makers were dismissing, diminishing and disbelieving the very existence and risk of long Covid.”

During the second and third day of hearings, the inquiry heard evidence on how the government was prioritizing profit over the health and lives of the population. On Tuesday, it was revealed from the diary of government chief

scientific adviser Vallance that “Chancellor [Rishi Sunak] blocking all notion of paying to get people to isolate despite all the evidence that this will be needed.” On Wednesday, the British Medical Association (BMA) testified that the government “abandoned basic public health protection” when setting up a privatised Test and Trace system. Caroline Abrahams, charity director for Age UK, described an “underlying assumption that older people with care needs would be unlikely to survive”.

The evidence presented paints a devastating picture of ruling elite indifference to the suffering and loss of lives of workers and the elderly. Their only motive was protecting the interests of the banks and corporations. But what is known publicly only scratches the surface of their criminal conduct. This was highlighted by the refusal of current Prime Minister Sunak to release all his WhatsApp messages to the inquiry. Sunak’s statement to the inquiry says, “Having changed my phone a number of times over the last three years, I do not have access to the WhatsApp messages that I sent or received during the relevant time, and neither were the messages backed up.”

The body heard that key WhatsApp messages by Johnson from January 31 to June 7, 2020, are “unrecoverable”. The loss of Johnson’s messages were described by Peter Weatherby KC, for Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice, as a “remarkable and unfortunate coincidence”. Weatherby said, “We would urge the inquiry to commission experts to see why those messages can’t be retrieved and whether they may have been deleted.”

As the WSWS has noted, the role of the inquiry is not to hold anyone to account for the disastrous handling of the pandemic. No matter what evidence is uncovered or oral evidence presented, the Inquires Act prohibits ruling on or determining anyone’s civil or criminal liability. Like every other public inquiry held, from the Aberfan disaster in 1966, to the Grenfell Tower inferno, it will finish in a whitewash.



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