

# Former UK prime minister Boris Johnson said COVID virus was “just nature’s way of dealing with old people”

Robert Stevens  
1 November 2023

Boris Johnson and the Conservative government’s policy of mass death during the COVID pandemic has been the focus this week of the ongoing UK COVID-19 Inquiry. On Tuesday Dominic Cummings, Johnson’s chief adviser in the early months of the pandemic gave evidence, as did Lee Cain, who was Downing Street’s Director of Communications.

Although the Inquiry has been provided with only a partial collection of electronic communications such as WhatsApp messages—swathes of which have been deleted by their senders—and other records such as diary entries, from these it is already clear that a brutal policy of social murder was in operation from the off. This resulted in hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths, with the *Economist*’s excess death tracker recording 250,000 in Britain as of the end of October. On top of this, between one and two million people are suffering from the impact of Long COVID.

During Tuesday’s hearing with Cain, chief counsel for the Inquiry Hugo Keith KC questioned him on evidence made available in the notebooks of Sir Patrick Vallance, the UK government’s chief scientific adviser during the pandemic. In one entry, Vallance said that Johnson bluntly told senior advisers the COVID virus was “just nature’s way of dealing with old people”.

In December 2020, with Johnson opposing scientific advice to impose a further lockdown—which came into operation against his objections weeks later—Vallance wrote: “He [Johnson] says his [Conservative] party ‘thinks the whole thing is pathetic and Covid is just nature’s way of dealing with old people – and I am not entirely sure I disagree with them’.”

In another diary entry from five months earlier in August 2020, Vallance noted that Johnson

favoured “older people accepting their fate and letting the young get on with life”.

Vallance wrote of a Cabinet Meeting in Downing Street in December 2020, “Chief whip [Mark Spencer] says ‘I think we should let the old people get it and protect others’. PM [Prime Minister Johnson] says ‘a lot of my backbenchers think that and I must say I agree with them’.”

In a WhatsApp message to Cain on October 15, 2020, weeks before Johnson was forced to agree a second lockdown in England that he never wanted, the prime minister callously wrote: “I must say I have been slightly rocked by some of the data on Covid fatalities. The median age is 82-81 for men and 85 for women. That is above life expectancy. So get Covid and live longer.”

When asked by Cain the implications of this statement for policy, Johnson replied, “It shows we don’t go for nationwide lockdown.”

It was at the end of this month, October 2020, that Johnson blurted out his infamous statement, heard by several people in Downing Street: “No more f\*\*\*\*\*g lockdowns. Let the bodies pile high in their thousands!” A second national lockdown began six days later on November 5.

Johnson was fully aware of the terrible human cost of the let it rip policy, designed to keep the economy open and profits flowing. A March 2020 diary entry from Imran Shafi, a former private secretary, attributed to Johnson a statement: “We’re killing the patient to tackle the tumour. Large ppl [taken to mean large numbers of people] who will die, why are we destroying economy for people who will die anyway soon.” Shafi said he understood that Johnson made the

statement in a meeting with then-chancellor, and now prime minister, Rishi Sunak.

The Inquiry also heard that Johnson's special advisor Dominic Cummings wrote a message to Cain, just four days before the first lockdown began, revealing that Johnson was still opposed—despite scientific evidence known to Downing Street showing that a national lockdown should have been in place at least 10 days earlier—a measure that would have saved thousands of lives. On March 19, 2020, Cummings messaged Cain saying, Johnson was “back to Jaws mode”.

Asked by the Inquiry what this meant, Cain said it was a reference to the film *Jaws*. “The PM at a time would refer to the mayor in *Jaws* who wants to keep the beaches open,” so as to not harm the economy, despite multiple shark attacks and deaths. Cain added, “He [Johnson] sort of said, you know there's more harm coming. The mayor was right all along, to keep the beaches open, because it would have caused long term harm to the community.”

Cummings told the Inquiry that in the run-up to imposing a national lockdown there was essentially no plan in place to protect the most vulnerable people: “I would say that that entire question was almost entirely appallingly neglected by the entire planning system... The Cabinet Office was essentially trying to block us creating a shielding plan.”

Cummings, who was sacked by Johnson in December 2020, said he was not in favour of lockdowns either, and instead argued for stricter border controls and more testing as “much better” for saving lives and protecting the economy.

The revelations confirm every word written at the time on the *World Socialist Web Site* and by principled scientists and medical professionals about the crime being carried out against the population through the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In February 2021, in an event highlighted by the WSWS's perspective column but largely ignored by the media, the *British Medical Journal* correctly characterised the UK's response as “social murder”.

The eugenicist policies espoused by Johnson et al were based on the ruthless class logic that thousands of predominantly elderly, overwhelmingly working-class lives were a price well worth paying to keep businesses open and making money for their wealthy shareholders, and to put a stop as soon as possible to payments for

furloughed workers.

In fact, for every pensioner who died, savings would be made in state pension costs and other expenses required to keep people healthy into old age. Less than a year after the first lockdown was put in place—with the government well on the way to declaring the pandemic over—forecast figures published by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) fiscal watchdog showed that the amount the government would have to spend on state pensions was to fall by £1.5 billion by 2022.

The determination of the Tories to end lockdowns and protect the profits of the corporations—an aim wholly backed by the Labour Party opposition—inspired Chancellor Sunak's “eat out to help out” scheme that ran during the summer of 2020, which used discounted food and drink to encourage people into bars, restaurants, pubs and cafes. In a WhatsApp exchange seen by the Inquiry, this led government scientific adviser Professor Dame Angela McLean to refer to Sunak as “Dr Death the chancellor”.

Such ruthless indifference to mass death was shared by the ruling class internationally, whatever the nominal political coloration of the national government. When the UK economy was being thrown open after the first lockdown, the Inquiry heard, the government's most senior official Simon Case told colleagues Johnson was in “‘let it rip mode’ cos [because] the UK is pathetic, needs a cold shower”, with Case warning, “This is in danger of becoming Trump/Bolsonaro level mad and dangerous.”

Between them, the governments of Donald Trump and his successor Joe Biden, Jair Bolsonaro and his successor Lula, and Johnson and Sunak, have overseen the excess deaths of over 2.5 million people to date.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**