

UK COVID Inquiry publishes first findings, as whitewash of ruling class criminality gets underway

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The UK COVID-19 Inquiry has published its first findings more than three years after it was instigated by former Conservative government Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The inquiry is chaired by former High Court judge, Baroness Heather Hallett, who in 2009 acted as coroner in the inquest of the 52 people killed in London's 7/7 terrorist bombings.

Hallett released a 240-page report covering its Module 1 which examined "The resilience and preparedness of the United Kingdom". It "examines the state of the UK's central structures and procedures for pandemic emergency preparedness, resilience and response." The Module 1 hearings were held in London in June and July 2023, with the Inquiry hearing "from current and former politicians as well as key scientists, experts, civil servants and bereaved family members."

Reports on a further at least eight modules will be published over the course of the next two years with the Inquiry not due to complete until summer 2026.

Over 235,000 people have been killed by COVID in the UK, with the population suffering one of the worst death rates in the world due to the homicidal policy of the Johnson government, summed up in his infamous outburst at the height of the pandemic, "Let the bodies pile high in their thousands!"

So widespread was the infection of the population that over a million people are estimated to be suffering from the debilitating impact of Long COVID.

In the first section of the report, Hallett cites testimony from two witnesses, Professor Jimmy Whitworth and Dr. Charlotte Hammer, who told the inquiry, "The COVID-19 epidemic was unprecedented in recent times, and it would not be reasonable to expect the UK to be fully prepared for a hypothetical epidemic of this size of a previously unknown pathogen."

In response, point 1.17. of the report reads: "The Inquiry agrees ... The potential disruption to social and economic life,

and the cost (in real financial terms and opportunity) as the result of a false alarm, may be disproportionate to the burden of an actual epidemic or pandemic. There are proper limits to preparedness and resilience (as there are for security), but improvements, even radical ones, can still be made. It is critical for any government, with the public's approval, to steer a course between complacency and overreaction."

The callousness of the suggestion that governments should not spook the markets by overpreparing for the real threat of an epidemic/pandemic is staggering and frames the entire report.

The report acknowledges that by the time the COVID pandemic hit, Britain had over a decade of pandemic planning in place but concludes that the main problem was that "The UK prepared for the wrong pandemic. The significant risk of an influenza pandemic had long been considered, written about and planned for. However, that preparedness was inadequate for a global pandemic of the kind that struck."

Moreover, it claims, the government, individual ministers and their scientific advisers were all victims of "groupthink". In fact, "many witnesses who gave evidence to the Inquiry blamed 'groupthink'. This is a phenomenon by which people in a group tend to think about the same things in the same way."

Among those availing themselves of this convenient get-out clause were David Cameron (Prime Minister from May 2010-2016), George Osborne (Chancellor of the Exchequer from 2010-2016) Jeremy Hunt (Health Secretary from 2012-2016), leading Tory Sir Oliver Letwin, and Sir Chris Whitty (the government's Chief Medical Officer during the pandemic).

Among others, who, "while not explicitly attributing blame to 'groupthink', nonetheless agreed that it was a risk that needed to be mitigated," were Sir Patrick Vallance (Chief Scientific Advisor to the government during the pandemic—who now advises the Starmer Labour government

and sits in the House of Lords) and another leading Tory, Michael Gove.

The guilty are clinging to the only alibi in sight. Johnson's advisor during the early months of the pandemic Dominic Cummings pioneered the strategy in evidence given to the House of Commons' own investigation in 2021, where he used the term "groupthink" no less than 15 times. In the *Guardian's* reporting, "It was applied to the government in general, to the Department of Health and to Sage [Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies]. It was used to explain the delay in understanding the threat posed by the virus, in locking down, in closing borders, in building a testing system, in developing vaccines".

Describing the UK parliament's pandemic report as "The first draft of a political whitewash", the WSWS explained at the time: "The authors' central claim is that the disaster in the UK was the result of 'groupthink' between government ministers and scientific advisers, who were all thinking in terms of a flu pandemic rather than SARS-CoV-2."

The WSWS noted that far from previous exercises for a flu pandemic being any cause for complacency, "the 2011 UK Influenza Preparedness Strategy warned of anything from 210,000 to multiple millions of deaths."

The WSWS rejected "the claim that a different type of viral pandemic was unforeseen" noting how "the report omits any reference to Exercise Alice, carried out in 2016, which envisaged a response to an outbreak of Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV)." That "23-page report warned of the rapid development of a 'large scale outbreak' and recommended increased stockpiles of PPE, an extensive contact tracing system and the screening of travellers from abroad."

Hallett's introduction also glosses over why, when the pandemic hit, no contingency measures were put in place, and the necessary lockdown—only finally enacted on March 23, 2020—delayed for weeks.

Dealing with the state of the health and public health service prior to the spread of COVID-19, she notes, though in very mild terms, that "Going into the pandemic, there had been a slowdown in health improvement, and health inequalities had widened. High pre-existing levels of heart disease, diabetes, respiratory illness and obesity, and general levels of ill-health and health inequalities, meant that the UK was more vulnerable. Public services, particularly health and social care, were running close to, if not beyond, capacity in normal times."

But all this—the result of savage austerity imposed on public services by Labour and Tory governments in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crash and bailout of the banks—is excused with the lines: "The Inquiry recognises that decisions as to the allocation of resources to prepare for

a whole-system civil emergency fall exclusively to elected politicians. They must grapple with competing demands for public money and limited resources. It may be tempting for them to focus on the immediate problem before them rather than dwell on what may or may not happen."

The impact of such unprecedented cuts to the health service, and skyrocketing poverty, are clouded with thousands of words and pages of graphs detailing the "labyrinthine ... complexity" of "the institutions and structures responsible for emergency planning." This is corporate management speak designed to confuse rather than clarify. According to the report, it was "Processes, planning and policy . . . within the UK government and devolved administrations and civil services" that "failed their citizens," not the choices of political criminals.

The slightest of admonitions is delivered with a sentence: "Proper preparation for a pandemic costs money."

Not only was the government cutting funding, it was actively championing an anti-health and safety culture, with Cameron boasting in 2012, "I will kill off safety culture." His 2010-15 coalition government with the Liberal Democrats was "waging war against the excessive health and safety culture that has become an albatross around the neck of British businesses."

From the beginning the Johnson government was aided in enacting its policies of social murder by the Labour Party, first under Jeremy Corbyn, who pledged to work "constructively" with the Tories, then Sir Keir Starmer. Now prime minister, Starmer continued his services, moving quickly to endorse Hallett's first chapter of the whitewash. The report, he said, had confirmed "what many have always believed—that the UK was under-prepared for COVID-19, and that process, planning and policy across all four nations failed UK citizens".

No one, of course, would be held responsible. People should be satisfied that "this government is committed to learning the lessons from the inquiry."

Starmer knows that no-one in ruling circles will be brought to any sort of justice by the Inquiry. Initiated by Boris Johnson, of all people, and held under the Inquiries Act 2005, it is specifically prohibited from ruling on or determining anyone's civil or criminal liability. Hallett's first report shows she has no intention of even coming close.



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