

STATE OF EMERGENCY



COVID-19

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PARLIAMENT STREET

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A

Policy Paper

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PARLIAMENT STREET

partnership in policy

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus crisis is unlike anything the British body politic has had to face in a hundred years. The last time the world faced a public health crisis on this scale was the 1918-20 “Spanish flu” pandemic.

There is no one alive who held a senior government or administrative role then. There is no one for us to look to for counsel who has dealt with a comparable crisis to the one we now find ourselves in.

In that case, the government cannot simply tell the people that they know best and expect the people to follow them blindly.

Complete transparency is now required and the policy that this nation follows has to be one that each citizen has a stake in.

The people are far more likely to adhere a policy when they feel that their voice and concerns have been taken into consideration.

The aim of this paper is to propose an alternative approach to the one currently been pursued by Her Majesty’s Government.

To place this alternative approach into the national conversation and let it sink or swim on the strength of the ideas contained within.

My specialty is in the machinery of politics and not the practice of medicine. I freely admit this and in the writing of this paper have sought the advice of medical professionals every step of the way.

As they will be working to mitigate this crisis, they have asked not to be named but I would like to give them my deepest thanks for their time and also their patience with me as I bombarded them with questions.

Additionally, I make no apologies for saying that some of the suggestions contained within this paper have been appropriated from the measures taken by government officials in other countries. If an idea appeared sensible, I have appropriated it. It is up for the reader to make the decision if they too consider a measure to be sensible.

Due to the fast-paced nature of our current crisis it is impossible to imagine that in my haste to get this paper out into the public domain that I haven't forgotten an occasional reference. I will be going over this paper again later with a finer toothcomb, so I kindly request patience with me in relation to this.

When our government is taking a different approach to the overwhelming majority of other developed governments across the world, I am liable to want to at least have a look and see what they are doing and why they are doing it.

This paper is intended as constructive criticism of the government's policy.

I have my own personal politics and preferences for certain personalities over others, as well as we all do, but for all intents and purposes this paper has been produced as an attempt at a "Hail Mary" pass to get the government to pivot towards a more proactive policy.

The only thing that can control this pandemic is social distancing. However, the current policy being pursued by our government is waiting until the number of cases of COVID-19 make social distancing an absolute necessity. The trouble is that now we are seeing an exponential growth in cases of COVID-19.

The government must now end this softly, softly approach to this crisis. If the government knows that certain measures are going to be necessary, instead of waiting for things to get worse, they need to put those measures into immediate effect.

We must be much more aggressive in implementing a policy of social distancing now rather than waiting for the reported cases of coronavirus to grow.

It truly is the national interest that the government succeed in combatting the coronavirus crisis. We now all need to work together to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and slow down the transmission of this coronavirus.

The primary focus of our government now must be preserving the health of our National Health Service. We must ensure that those who desperately need medical attention, receive it.

The bold and proactive measures outlined in the policy paper will go a long way to helping the government with this goal.

PAUSE THE MARKET

If the fight against this coronavirus is the moral equivalent of war and it is going to require this country going onto a war footing it will be essential for the total focus and complete energy of the Administrative State be on the public health.

In order to achieve this end, it will be necessary to take extraordinary measures to place all other public policy concerns “on the shelf” until we have got over the current crisis.

The first of this measures that the government should implement is a 30-day Stock Market Pause. As things stand today, too many politicians and bureaucrats seem too concerned with policy impacts on the markets, as opposed to people. This has to stop.

The stock market needs to be taken off the table whilst we deal with this public health crisis. As long as the politicians are focused on the markets, the money men and not the medics will be in charge.

We cannot have politicians being more concerned with pound signs than the public health. Economies recover but loved ones will not come back from the dead.

A Stock Market Pause would have the effect of helping businesses weather the storm of this public health emergency. It would certainly be preferable to the Stock Market Panic that appears to be on the horizon if don't.

This coronavirus is essentially a biological crisis and not a financial crisis. What the markets need is a coronavirus vaccine more than it does any further interest rate cut.

President Donald Trump is likely to support and mirror such a bold policy decision. A plunging stock market is the last thing that an otherwise economically strong America needs.

If the City of London and Wall Street suspend business, then every other stock market will too. Markets cannot stand uncertainty, but the uncertainty won't be over until we have managed to get a handle on this coronavirus.

War has caused the Stock Market to pause before and what we are now facing is the moral equivalent of war.

PUBLIC HEALTH OVER PETTY POLITICS

We need to have a unified British response to this crisis. Some have said that need to be on a war footing. What a war footing has always meant in Britain is a time when we all put partisan differences aside and work together as one nation united. In times of national crisis, we need to have 100% of the people working in one direction. It is no time to have the 52% vs. the 48% or whatever divided calculation one might use.

Division is a luxury that can only be afforded by safety and until we are rid of the scourge of this coronavirus, we are not safe. We are combatting a virus that cares nothing for whether someone votes for the red team or the blue team.

In the same way that concerns about the Stock Market need to be drawn out of the public policy process like venom out of a snake, so to must the party-political positioning and posturing which often clouds effective decision making in Westminster.

Furthermore, with all due respect to Boris Johnson he does not strike one as the sort of leader who would take naturally to administering the minutiae of responding to a pandemic.

The strength of a true leader is being able to appoint the best people to offset their own weaknesses. Some have criticised this British Prime Minister for not acting with the appropriate urgency. If Mr. Johnson is later deemed by the public at large to have downplayed the enormity of the challenge ahead of the country at this pivotal moment in time, then he will have lost all credibility with the public at large going forward.

It is suboptimal to have a Prime Minister lacking credibility at the best of times but when the country is facing a pandemic it would be downright deadly. The same applies in respect to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, The Rt. Hon. Matt Hancock MP.

The Prime Minister is forgiven for being “economical with the actualite” when it comes to his personal life because it is regarded as private. The Prime Minister must understand that the public considers untruths about matters which do not concern them to be a very different kettle of fish to misinformation about matters that affect them personally.

A politician might engage in “truthful hyperbole” about a thousand things that have no impact on most individuals daily lives and the public will by and large accept it as part of the showmanship aspect of modern politics. When the public will turn on a political leader

This Prime Minister is one of the most effective modern politicians in the use of public relations. The issue that his government is faced with is not one which allows for Mr. Johnson to communicate with his traditional flamboyance. I fear that he might, out of force of habit, deviate from the script with a wry one-liner. He should follow President Trump’s lead and have someone with more of an administrative demeanor as the bureaucratic face of combatting this crisis.

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Hanoock still maintain their credibility, but I fear that if the government remains engaged upon its current course then a serious “credibility gap” will emerge.

Mr. Johnson should be fully engaged with the process but as he has to ensure the rest of the government continues to function during this crisis, he will have to manage it whilst taking an aerial view and a broad-brush approach.

What is needed in all haste is the appointment of an official colloquially known as a “tsar” to coordinate the government’s response to this crisis and provide a defined line of command and accountability for that response.

We need someone in charge who might appear boring in times of little trouble but who in times of great uncertainty cuts a reassuring figure.

We also need someone who is adapt at getting the bureaucracy to bend to his will.

We need a united effort in which the country is able to move beyond Party and towards a common purpose. To do this we need Boris Johnson to prove that he can indeed be like Churchill and, as Churchill did with Attlee, reach across the political aisle and find in a former foe, an essential ally.

It is my contention that the present Conservative Prime Minister, Boris Johnson should extend an olive branch across the political divide and appoint former Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown as Coronavirus Tsar.

This will take the issue of the public health out of the political arena. This needs to be done to prevent the peripheral matter of partisan politics affecting public health policy at this time.

Additionally, Brown has the gravitas to be taken by the public and the reputation as a “big clunking fist” with the bureaucracy to cut through the red tape.

The appointment of Gordon Brown is also essential because it is the only way to combat the “Fake News Effect” at a time when we need the public to have faith in the government.

The present political climate has led to 63% of the British public viewing politicians as untrustworthy. Government Ministers fair little better with 57% of the British public thinking them untrustworthy.

What medical professionals need right now is someone in charge who can get things moving, effectively coordinating with all the relevant stakeholders in the response. Gordon Brown is almost uniquely qualified to do this.

I write this as a Donald Trump supporting Brexiteer. My politics are far greater aligned with Boris Johnson than with Gordon Brown but that is the point. I cannot stress strongly enough how much politics needs to be taken out of this process and I cannot think of a better way to do it.

Additionally, with his appointment a clear line of command and accountability will be established. Brown fulfils the two most important criteria for the official coordinating the government's response to this coronavirus:

- i) an ability to get the medical professionals the support and resources they need, cutting through the red tape and bureaucratic hurdles at a time when time is of the essence.
- ii) An ability to act as a reassuring spokesperson for the government, providing the public with honest information whilst at the same time not fermenting panic.

DEMOCRACY TO BECOME DIGITAL

The crisis caused by this coronavirus might have the government wanting to enact the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 for the first time.

The Act was passed by the Blair government in the wake of the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak in 2001, after deeming the existing legislation for dealing with national emergencies, the Civil Defence Act 1948, to be insufficient.

In 2013, the Cabinet Office produced a briefing note on “How the government prepares and plans for emergencies, working nationally, locally and cooperatively to ensure civil protection in the UK.”

I would recommend at this moment in time that every British citizen familiarize themselves with this document.

Legislation needs to be passed forthwith establishing a “Virtual Parliament” for the duration of this crisis to ensure that the government and Whitehall do not use the Civil Contingencies Act as a de facto Enabling Act.

Parliamentary debates can be conducted by video technology like Skype and votes can be cast remotely. Just because Parliament cannot physically sit does not mean that in the second decade of the twenty-first century that it should not sit. Much of what happens in Parliament can be done anywhere, including online.

COMING TOGETHER BY STAYING APART

As Dr. Norman Swan has said, the only thing that can contain this pandemic is social distancing. Here are some measures the government should put in place with near immediate effect:

- i) All Restaurants and Bars should be made to close to the public from midnight tonight. They should be encouraged to open, however. This is in order for them provide carry out delivery service and drive-thru options.
- ii) The government should also ask all non-essential businesses to close for a period of two weeks after which it should be subject to review.
- iii) All schools should be closed with immediate effect. It is nearly the Easter, so children should be told that their Easter holidays have been extended.
- iv) All examinations that take place during the Spring such as GCSE's and A-levels be suspended for the year. Our teachers and student do not need to have the additional anxiety of not knowing what is happening regarding academic testing.
- v) All companies providing utilities should be required not to suspend or disconnect any essential services for non-payment for the duration of this crisis.
- vi) All public gathering of more than 50 people should be banned for the duration of this crisis.

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

The BBC should be used to ensure effective national communications.

BBC One must be used as a tool for the government to communicate with the public. It should be providing consistent, transparent and accurate information to ensure that all citizens are properly kept in the loop. An informed citizenry is less likely to fall victim to mass hysteria.

BBC TWO should be turned into a virtual school, during the daytime hours, providing educational programming during the day. As Channel's 4 and 5 also exist through public charter, they should be used for this purpose as well.

One channel can have educational programming for children aged 5-8, another for ages 9-12 and the final one for ages 12-16.

Additional religious, spiritual and comedy programming should also be produced to keep the public mood in as a good a spirit as possible.

UTILISING ONE NATION

Within the NHS specialist staff should be moved to dealing with the coronavirus response. In addition to this the NHS must be enabled to utilise medical students and give them the powers they need to be utilised to maximum effect. The proposed fast tracking of final year The Royal Army Medical Corps should also be seconded to assist with coronavirus care.

As recently suggested by Shaun Bailey AM, retired police officers should be allowed back into the force whilst we are dealing with this crisis. This should help to mitigate the negative impact COVID-19 will have on the police's ability to provide the highest standard of law enforcement.

All non-essential public sector staff should be seconded to COVID-19 CIVILIAN CARE FORCE which would: -

- i) Ensure emergency food and medical deliveries which maintaining minimal human contact.
- ii) Operate a "phone a friend" unit with a focus on those living alone. This could be done from individual's homes. We cannot have vast amounts of the population living in solitude, without any contact from other human beings. If this becomes the case, then we will soon find that the mental health crisis caused by COVID-19 will have caused greater harm than the physical. It is essential therefore that the government puts a system into effect that ensures citizens can still remain connected at this time of self-isolation.

A PLACE TO STAY

The government must start mandatorily taking over certain hotels for the duration of this crisis. They must start doing this now and not wait for what looks like it will be an inevitable bed shortage. The government must pre-empt that shortage.

Hotels should not be used for emergency care but instead used to house the less seriously ill in order to free up critical care beds.

Temporary nationalisation of hotels now is necessary to prevent our hospitals being overwhelmed later. I know that the government is already considering doing this. They should do it now and not delay.

ENABLING ESCAPE FROM REALITY

All care homes need to be isolated from non-essential people coming in and out because the most at-risk people are those over 80-years of age.

Virtual Reality headsets should be provided to care homes for the provision of immersive care for those elderly unable to go out. New technologies can inexpensively transport them to special places without their having to leave a safe environment.

It goes without saying that the headsets should be properly cleaned after each individual use.

FURTHER SOURCES

ABC NEWS (AUSTRALIA)

[Dr. Norman Swan recommends proactive national lockdown](#)

NEWS 19 WLTX (COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA)

[RAW VIDEO: Governor closes S.C. public schools amid coronavirus concerns](#)

WPXI-TV NEWS PITTSBURGH

[Gov. Tom Wolf orders bars, restaurants to close across Pennsylvania for 2 weeks](#)

ABC 15 ARIZONA

[Arizona schools debate closing or opening](#)

NBC NEWS

[Dow Drops More Than 2,300 Points Amid Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

TODAY SHOW

[Dow Plunges More Than 2000 Points On Coronavirus Fears](#)

CNBC TELEVISION

[Historic week on Wall Street ends...finally \(February 28th 2020\)](#)



