

The politics of pandemic

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“I found a stock of masks that was available and Americans – I’m not talking about the American government – but Americans, outbid us, ... They offered three times the price and they proposed to pay upfront. I can’t do that. I’m spending taxpayers’ money and I can only pay on delivery having checked the quality... So we were caught out.”

Those were the words of Valérie Pécresse (the president of the Île-de-France region, which includes Paris) in an interview with BGMTV as she discussed the critical lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in hospitals last month. Shortly after, the French weekly L’Express reported that Paris, which has requisitioned all masks amid the shortage, seized stock from Swedish producer Molnlycke that was headed for Spain and Italy.

The reality is that the USA, like much of the world discovered too late that they were unprepared, as doctors and nurses were forced to work in bin bags, they had to do something radical to save face. The solution was to spit all other their own free market bullshit.

At the start of April the Trump administration ordered 3M, a Minnesota-based manufacturer, to stop exporting protective masks to Canada and Latin America on Thursday. Trump has invoked the Defence Production Act to stop exports of critical equipment which allows the state to dictate the manufacturing and distribution processes of private companies.

It didn’t stop there, true to form the belligerent behemoth took to piracy and economic force to cover up the failures of the Trump government. They began outbidding on PPE being shipped in from elsewhere. Shipments destined for Canada turn up light, Trudeau making it clear in a statement that the US has simply paid a higher price during transit and left their partners in the lurch. The German’s were similar done over when the USA seized 200,000 N95 masks mid transfer in Thailand. Commenting to RTL radio regarding how American officials had swooped on a Chinese airport to take away a planeload of masks that France had ordered. Dr Jean Rottner described the methods they are using;

“On the tarmac, the Americans arrive, take out cash and pay three or four times more for our orders”

The nature of the international mask trade right now is clear. We’re seeing spy agencies such as Israel’s Mossad enlisted to secure coronavirus testing kits (as reported by La Figaro) and wilf scenarios as the one described by Peter Pellegrini, prime minister of Slovakia until just a few days ago, who told a Slovakian TV channel “We were already preparing cash worth 1.2 million euros in a suitcase. We planned to use a special government flight and go get the masks ... However, a dealer from Germany came there first, paid more for the shipment, and bought it”.

We’re not special either, I’m told by government insider that “boxes of PPE landed in Heathrow, due for the DHSC to go to NHS stockpiles and were recalled. They never left Heathrow. Everyone on our side was fuming” The PPE was already paid for and tracked, none the less, they were recalled mid flight. So much for international solidarity eh?

Perhaps one could forgive a desperate state taking desperate measures, however we have to remember that they see the world through the lense of capitalism. In a press briefing last week the Trump administration confirmed that they were in fact giving these very stockpiles to private distributors who would then sell the PPE in, as the questioning reporter had described, “Ebay style auctions”. Their defence was simply that these corporations had more capacity to distribute across some 600 warehouses.

The reality is that hospitals and services that serve poor communities, have no chance of keeping adequate supplies. We're seeing "mask deserts" where entire regions are suffering critical lack of PPE while affluent and high prestige areas (as well as private enterprises) have no concern. Once more the class disparity and inherent racism in the state logistics of the USA become all too painfully clear.

This self serving attitude is especially problematic for small nations such as Barbados who had a shipment of ventilator seized despite having been paid for and places such as Cuba and Pakistan than still remain the victim of embargos. Foreign governments using the working classes as political collateral in their ongoing political pissing contests.

Back in blighty?

It's no better. The Department of Health outright rejected advice from Nervtag, in 2016/7 to renew stockpiles of PPE because it would be too expensive. Nervtag were established the review government policy and provide recommendations in case of a influenza pandemic, however in a meeting in June 2017 They were told by Jeremy Hunt to "reconsider" their formal recommendations due to as a health department official present stated "the very large incremental cost of adding in eye protection."

A minute from the meeting stated that *"a subsequent internal DOH economic assessment has revealed that following these recommendations would substantially increase the cost of the PPE component of the pandemic stockpile four-to six-fold, with a very low likelihood of cost-benefit based on standard thresholds."*

The cost-benefit there refers to the fact that providing adequate eye protection to NHS staffers was deemed a bit costly. The direct result of this three years later is the deaths of over a dozen NHS doctors and nurses, sacrificed to Tory cost cutting measures. Nervtag also advised that intensive care units (ICUs) should be designated "hot spots" carrying out aerosol generating procedures. Therefore, FFP3 respirators *"should be recommended for all staff at all times in these areas when a patient with pandemic influenza is present"*. Meanwhile we have dozens of reports of NHS staff having to buy their own, battling the ever inflating prices with one nurse in Yorkshire telling the Guardian she had to spend £100 to buy a FFP3 respirator online.

Now of course the government is scrambling for PPE, caught out by their lethargic response to a looming pandemic only too late did they realise the situation, now the government tenders site is full of emergency requests for respirators, eye protection, gowns and body bags.

Their deepest fear is being caught out in their lies and cost cutting. They fear the bad press caused by such horrific revelations as the three nurses stateside who were forced to wear bin bags for PPE and who are now all ill with Covid -19. Even as similar stories pour in here, even those that have ended in death, the government is in deep denial. Last Sunday Hancock said that 5.7% of hospital doctors were off sick or absent because of Covid-19, however the Royal College of Physicians held a survey of more than 2,500 medics found the rate was almost three times that – 14.6%.

Protect the NHS?

Of course now they've had a few weeks to get their act together, now they want to praise the NHS, tell us they care. The repeated lies and manufactured mythos of a Tory part on the side of the NHS, alongside sympathy for Boris, seemingly earning them the favour of the house bound votership. This is utterly laughable considering they have been such prominent agents in is destruction. Over the past thirty years we've seen successive Labour and Tory governments undermine the NHS, seeing the number of beds halved and countless jobs discarded. Most recently we've seen the ever growing threat of full privatisation begin slicing the NHS apart with huge chunks of it's operation sold to the highest bidder, farmed out for private tender so corporations can get fat on the labours of the national treasure. It's nothing but an utter disgrace.

The bastards laughed, clapped and cheered as they blocked a pay rise for nurses.

To help us in forgetting the past few years with Brexit exiling thousands of staff and disgusting racist policies sending home yet more, the government have doubled down on their ersatz solidarity. "Protect the NHS" indeed.

More like treat our doctors and nurses like sacrificial lambs to the slaughter, let them die a noble death protecting the community just as long as no one things to blame the government for their critical lack of support and essentially kneecapping the service. To aid this new narrative they've started portraying our doctors and nurses as soldiers, giving their lives in the "war against Covid 19". We've seen over a dozen NHS workers die during the pandemic and they've been held up as "front-line heroes", warriors who willfully gave their lives to save us all. It's a lie in the truth and political spin bullshit to displace the truth.

They are using the language of military stoicism to make their deaths lamentable self sacrifice instead of what they actually are which is entirely preventable results of systematic undermining by a state which has persistently chosen to restrict the funding of the NHS over actually providing them with the means to save lives. They want us to forget that our doctors and nurses are dying because they didn't care to support them... they want them to become simply numbers, an anonymous figure they can list of those who died fighting Covid 19.

Each death should be sending ripples of revolutionary rage across the country but instead with been corralled into the grim acceptance, "people die in war, thoughts and prayers, nothing can be done. Oh well".

This separation from reality and projection of war time self sacrifice is infectious mind and it's not just the cabal at the top of the Tories, were seeing the same in reports from the BBC and in the tabloids, heck even Queenie references Vera Lynne in her speech and across the pond Trump stands at a podium and makes the same pantomime;

"You watch them and they are putting their outfits on , putting their masks on and it's incredible. It's like no different than you watch the war movies, the old clips of war – running up hills, to me it's the same thing."

It's a powerful narrative that parasites can call upon to stir up some sense of duty in the proles they were quite happy to sacrifice to herd immunity. Early on in the crisis the shortage of workers was concerning farmers, hoisted on their own petard, they found themselves without a wealth of foreigners to abuse all day for shit pay. They began a campaign to recruit volunteers for the now jobless British population, when that didn't work they petitioned for more flights to bring

eastern European workers over, now as they empty milk into drains and letting veg rot they are calling the campaign to hire housebound Brits “the land army”.

Remember that this is the government that was quite seriously considering doing very little to stymie the spread and once again weighting up protecting people vs damage to the economy. Until early March Cummings and co we’re looking to sacrifice a projected 250,000 people, in a policy which would, as Boris would describe to Philip Schofield as “...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...”. Ofcourse this was before Hancock actually listened to some specialists and managed to get the crew to instigate social distancing and lock down policies, bringing the projected deaths down to 20,000. It was only at the end of March they began robust testing after much pressure and the numbers tested remain depressingly low.

Even this was presented in a politically wet manner, the threat Covid-19 presented undermined, that if we got ill we’d only have to spend 7 days in isolation (the W.H.O. advise being 14 days at the time). Don’t get worried at all, we don’t want to hurt the economy too much eh? The subsequently national holiday saw Snowden break records, nothing to worry about tho eh, it’s not all that bad, they’ve not even said wear a mask! ... the job don. We went into lock down.

It’s time to blame the working class!

By week two this came with a sickening implication that it’s the public who go outside during lock down who are killing the doctors and nurses. Why aren’t you supporting the troops they bleet, while Hancock gets caught out on TV having not even bothered to caught how many nurses had died. Don’t blame the consistent undermining of the state, it’s Steve whose popped to the shop for a none essential item whose to blame. The Met. police have been inundated with snitches dobbling in people walking down the road or stopping for a breather.

The papers are full of sub bathers being shamed while flights continue to come in, their passengers heading unchecked down onto public transport on their journey home. As we stand 2 meters apart to head into the shops were working with cling film screens between us and workers on job sites up and down the land having the concerns about PPE and no social distancing dismissed by the bosses are “wet” and “fear mongering” meanwhile Transport for London alone has lost atleast ten members of staff. Call centres act as a breeding ground for contamination, and the construction sites are still open. The working class ever expendable exposed to risk to keep their money flowing while the upper management work from home scratching their arse on zoom, slightly more valuable to capitalists as they are.

Overwhelming it’s women on the front lines too, occupying the majority of healthcare and service industry roles as the residue social reality of centuries of enforced social division continue to sow discord, or that early figures suggest that black and minority ethnic members of our community are over represented in the figures of infected and dead. No, we don’t have to talk about that because Steve’s nipped out to Daves for a none essential bag of grass and some coppa has been breathed on, the latter incident resulting in a summary sentence of 3 months banged up as examples need to be made.

The cops new found powers to stop and hassle anyone they fancy has been taken to, shall we say, over zealously with countless reports of harassment for perceived offences. The threat of imprisonment and huge fine used to control people with fear. Sure we should be maintaining

isolation and sure people have ignored the threat, but to use the threat of violence to impose the states will? No, that isn't OK.

What adds to this disturbing series of events is just how much they are being applauded. The hostility and rage spewing out from social media on anyone who steps out of line is sickening and all too quickly we have people celebrating the police using drone to track people and CCTV vans driving through parks. Justice has been summary and the punishments utterly disproportionate to the offense. This new wave of draconian authority has entirely embraced the digital age too with Google utilising its tracking features to monitor people's movements and provide data on where people congregate to officials and policy makers.

In South Korea several websites have sprang up so you can check how close you've been to someone with Covid-19. These sites use information from the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) and pin point visited locations and travel routes of people diagnosed with coronavirus using a color for each patient.

This is by no means a solitary example of how the desire to collecting data under the guise of "security" is inflicting very real threat to basic liberty. On March 17th, Israel's Netanyahu approved a very broad set of surveillance measures which he described himself as "invasive". In Iran, people were instructed to download an APP called AC19. It pretended to be a diagnosis tool but was in fact malware beaming their real time location to the state. Given that Iran is currently in a state of near civil war it's easy to see how this data could be weaponised. In Taiwan it's mobile tracking they've labelled an "electronic fence", Poland? Send in a selfie to prove you are in quarantine. In Austria they are mass monitoring people's movements via telecom networks as are Italy, Belgium and Germany. The UK government is deep in talks with the likes of Google, O2 and EE to mass collect tracking data and the NHSX, the digital arm of the NHS, are developing a contact tracing app, It'll be opt-in but that's moot when everyone is playing snitch and the social obligation to download and play along with is overwhelming.

Meanwhile pundits on the TV are now asking how long we're going to keep hurting the economy by protecting vulnerable members of our communities and when it's not about the economy we have the emotional blackmail such as this charmer from Graham Medley;

'We will have done three weeks of this lock down so there's a big decision coming up on 13 April. In broad terms are we going to continue to harm children to protect vulnerable people, or not?'

That's right, why aren't you thinking of the kids at a time when we're heading into the projected height of the death toll. This unsettling narrative pushing us all to "get on with it" is going to lead to a second wave if we rush back into protecting the economy from its own lack of redundancy.

Pretty soon the same parasites who laid off thousands will be blowing their own trumpet and talking about how they're offering jobs and helping the economy. #ClapforBoris for getting us through it eh? Now, download the app and get back to work, aren't you happy to get out of the house? We got through it together didn't we? The stoking of nationalism fever already well in effect and at the end of the day only serving to keep the capitalism thriving. We've already seen independent and small businesses shut up shop (especially pubs and cafes) as the market leaders continue on strong, ever increasing their market dominance and reducing competition into a handful of corporations who control pretty much everything, much as we saw in the food industry over the last 25 years. Remember that the DOW had its best day since 1933 closing 2,112.98 points higher — or more than 11% — at 20,704.91. Meanwhile, Somerset Capital Man-

agement, which Rees-Mogg has a 15% stake in, said that the crisis was a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity to profit from stocks in emerging markets such as Brazil and South Africa. Someone sure is suffering here and it ain’t the toffs.

The questions now are whether or not we’ll let them get away with this murder and the theft of liberty?

Will we forget the austerity policies of parasites and how they used fear to enforce a police state?

Will we act as the memory of a working class who are tired of being chewed up and spat out, neither forgiving nor forgetting?

That choice is yours.

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