

My speech during the debate on Covid-19, 28 September 2020

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Government rightly want to get the virus down and limit deaths, but they also need to promote livelihoods and economic recovery, and it is proving difficult to get that balance right. I do not accept the criticisms that say, "Well, the Government change their mind." Of course, the Government change their mind, because the virus waxes and wanes and the situation changes on the ground. They have to study the data and do the best they can.

What I would like to hear from Ministers is more in various directions where I think they could improve the position more quickly. The first is the issue of treatments. There has been some excellent work done in the United Kingdom, and it is great that a steroid has now been discovered that can make a decent improvement for various patients. That is great news and I welcome it, but what about the tests and trials we were promised when I raised this, many months ago now, of other antivirals, other steroids, antimalarials and clot-busting drugs? All those may have possible efficacy and they have their scientific and medical support around the world. We have great science here, so can we hear the results, please, Minister? Where have we got to? Are any of those going to work? The more and better treatments we can get and the more we can understand the different strands and features of this disease in different patients, the better it will be for keeping people safe.

We have learned that the Government now agree with me and others that they need to do a better job on isolation hospitals and on segregating patients who have this very contagious disease from all the other people who need to use our health service. I am pleased about that, but can we have some more details? Why cannot we simply use the Nightingale hospitals for covid-19—let us hope we do not need anything like that number of beds for this second wave—and keep all the other hospitals for non-covid? Or, if they are going to have shared facilities, certainly in urban areas where there is more than one hospital, can we have covid-19 hospitals and other hospitals that are open for other conditions? We do not want to see all the death rates for other things shooting up because people feel they cannot get access to their hospital or they are worried about going to their hospital because of covid-19.

We then have the issue of the damage this is doing to the economy. I understand the strategy, but it seems that the damage is going to fall unduly heavily on hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism, the areas where we need more social contact and where that is thought to encourage the transmission of the disease. As someone who does not normally recommend subsidies, I do think that when people are banned from going to work, running their business or doing their job, they deserve some public support. They are doing that in the public interest, because their Government have told them that their activity is particularly damaging to the public good. If that is true, surely we the taxpayers have to pay for that.

I assume that the Government think we will come out of this sometime, and we want to go back to a world where there are theatres, cinemas, entertainments, good restaurants and all the other things that make life worth while and give pleasure to families. We do not want to live in a world where they are gradually all closed because there is no support and they are not allowed to function at all. We need more intelligence to work alongside those sectors, to see how they can get ways of working and living alongside this virus all the time it is out there and causing us trouble.

There have already been hon. Members today requesting exit strategies, and I quite understand why it is very difficult for the Government to give us one, because they are all sorts of unknowns that I do not know any more than they or their advisers do. We understand that their preferred exit strategy is the discovery of a vaccine and the roll-out of massive quantities of that vaccine for sometime early next year, so that we can then come out of lockdown.

That would be great, but we cannot bank on that. There are ifs and buts in that and it may not happen, so there needs to be a strategy for a situation where we do not have a magic vaccine. That is why we need more work on safeguarding people who are most at risk and more work on how we can get other people back to work, to save those livelihoods and those businesses and to wean them gradually off subsidy, which they are going to need all the time they are banned from doing their job and keeping things ready for us when times improve.

Above all, the nation needs some hope. It needs a vision of a better future. It needs to believe that, in a few months' time, something good will happen. It certainly does not need the threat of cancellation of Christmas or the threat that thousands of students will be locked away in rather small accommodation in their universities because there is a fear that they might spread the virus more widely.

[My intervention during the debate on Covid-19, 28 September 2020](#)

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): May I have a progress report on something we have talked about before: infection control? This time round, will there be isolation hospitals so that we can control the infection in the hospital sector better, and will there be good controls to prevent the seepage of people with infection back to care homes?

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Mr Matt Hancock): The answer to both those questions is yes. We have learnt a huge amount about those and put in place improved procedures, but I am going to come on to the question of the impact of that on our strategy.

The virus has shown beyond all possible doubt that the health of one of us begets the health of us all. Without a doubt in my mind, the central question about the control of the virus, and one that I ask myself every day, is, "How do we best keep people safe from this virus while protecting liberty and livelihoods and the things that make life worth living?" I believe that in reality there is not a simple trade-off between those things, because the exponential growth of the virus means that there are in reality only two paths: either to control the virus or to let it rip.

There is no middle option, because once the virus is growing, it accelerates. To the point made by my right hon. Friend the Right Hon Member for Wokingham (Mr Redwood), I am convinced that no matter how effectively we protect the vulnerable, and protect them we must, letting the virus rip would leave a death toll too big to bear. In reality, the only question is how to control the virus and when to put measures in place.

That comes directly to the question that we have been debating about both how to control the virus, and how we must act fast. The best thing we can do for schools, for our economy and for both lives and livelihoods is to act fast, together, to control the virus and to keep the rate of infections down. From that goal flows our strategy, which is to suppress the virus while protecting our economy and education until a vaccine arrives.

More lock downs?

Today if the government proposes more lock downs it needs to answer these questions:

1. Why have cases risen for so long in places already under local lock downs?
2. What is the exit strategy from lock down, and how do you avoid growth in the virus again if lock downs work?
3. Is there local buy in to the lock down, as it needs consent to work.

A green energy policy

I welcome moves to improve energy efficiency and to ensure our energy generation and use avoids pollution.

The UK along with other advanced nations has done a good job in using law and guidance to cut the output of particulates and dangerous gases substantially. Power station and factory chimneys have ways of cutting out dangerous

material. Petrol and diesel exhausts have been transformed by technology to remove harmful particles. Vehicles today cause much more of a problem from tyre wear and brake dust than from exhausts. Those smoke filled scenes of the Industrial revolution have gone, steam trains have been consigned to the museums, and London smog is only in the history books.

More needs to be done. It is best to tighten the requirements progressively at a pace technology and the market can absorb, as we have been doing. We need to look at how we can improve standards on domestic heating systems, start to cut tyre and brake wear residues, and be tough and vigilant on industrial plant. We need to encourage a much better approach to litter, where we see the results of worldwide bad behaviour in the state of our seas and what washes up on our beaches. We also see it in our countryside and by the edge of many of our roads and pathways, where a minority UK citizens have decided to burden the rest of us with their fast food containers and other detritus.

The win win is the promotion of fuel efficiency. I am keen on government initiatives to help people insulate their homes and improve the efficiency of their domestic installations. Business and government can work with people, offering them popular products because they are better. Why not use a scheme if it means you can be warmer at home and save money on the fuel bills?

The U.K. needs to pay more attention to reliable capacity and price. We have become too dependent on imports through the inter connectors, and need sufficient back up power given the amount of intermittent renewables now on the system. Rebuilding our industry and expanding our horticulture will require more cheaper power.

[A Conservative green policy](#)

As a particular view of what is a green policy rests at the core of the globalists position, let us begin our exploration of the policy agenda with green matters.

I am a green enthusiast. I wish to live in a country with plenty of beautiful countryside, with clean water and air, where we fish and farm in a sustainable manner and pass on our soils and seas in good order to our children. As a Conservative I take the longer view, see our individual lives as leases, and our own presence here as part of a continuum from ancestors to successors. Families and nations act to sustain memories of what has happened and to support the hopes of the young for the future. We all have a stake in a common past and plans for a better general future.

The immediate task of alleviating undue human pressures on the natural world must rest with less population growth. I have no wish for government to try to limit family size. Rising prosperity and improving chances of survival are

the main ways families and nations come to adopt self limitation on the numbers of children voluntarily. Here in the UK the birth rate is below the level of 2 children per woman to keep the population constant, which is a good outcome. Where in the world the birth rate is higher it usually accompanies poverty, disease and shorter life expectancy. We need to help low income nations rise from these tribulations , which we can do by promoting free trade, offering them help with fresh water supplies, medicines and emergency assistance, and ensuring the great technologies of the west are available for them to conquer the problems which hold them back.

Our UK green policy must start with proper control of net migration. We should aim for far fewer economic migrants than have come since Labour first changed our policies following their 1997 election win. The UK needs to train and retain our own skilled personnel, and to mechanise or pay more for the unskilled jobs where governments and business have too readily reached for cheap labour from abroad.

Once we have control of numbers, we can protect more of our countryside from development, and abate our growing appetite for various finite natural resources. Many of the troublesome issues which have arisen, from where to build thousands of extra homes to how to deal with overcrowding on our public transport systems fall away completely or are eased.