

Some questions on the virus

We are waiting for the science to catch up with events. It is clearly not easy understanding and combatting a new virus in a hurry, when crucial information has to come from patients suffering from the disease willing to submit to various treatments to see what happens. We have, however, had all too many cases and deaths, so soon perhaps more knowledge will be forthcoming.

We need to know, for example, whether any of the proposed existing licenced medicines for other complaints can help alleviate symptoms, ease severity or reduce the time the illness lasts. The UK has now approved remdesivir, but there are other remedies taken on their own or with others that might help. We need an update.

There is the question of the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine. This is going into production before the results of clinical trials. We are told there may be results early autumn. There are also other vaccine hopes around the world.

The UK has now been testing random samples to represent the population as a whole to find out infection rates. This should enable a more accurate R or transmission rate to be calculated. When will we see proper graphs and charts of these numbers with a better evidence base for R? This could be helpful in making decisions about the pace of further easing, which is much needed for the sake of livelihoods.

What is the expert view on why the new case rate and death rate has stayed as high as it has during a strong lock down? Shouldn't they have subsided more. How was the virus being transmitted during this period? Can we now use track and test to head off further localised outbreaks?

Are we now in the position where too many deaths are being attributed to CV 19 when it is not even known whether some had the disease or not, or when they also had other serious conditions that might have been the true cause? How comparable are our figures with other countries, that follow different criteria for reporting deaths?

Much now rests on making a success of test and trace. That requires the willing collaboration of the public, taking tests if and when they develop covid like symptoms they do not normally suffer. It needs the rest to agree to self isolate if they have been in close contact with someone who has the disease.

We cannot keep the whole country in lockdown for more months, with just the NHS and a few basics up and running. It was possible to borrow and print the money for a couple of months, but it does not work if you try to do that as a new lifestyle with no limit on the cash .

Hong Kong

The Chinese authorities attempted to introduce a right of appeal of Hong Kong court cases to the mainland, seeking to put HK law more firmly under China's control. This deeply unpopular move sparked many protests in Hong Kong and led to running fights between the police and the protesters. A hapless Chief Executive tried to persuade a split legislature that this was a benign and sensible move, without success.

Grasping the opportunity of the Covid 19 preoccupations of the rest of the world, China has now moved to legislate her supremacy in Beijing, bypassing the Hong Kong legislature. The new law will allow either the Hong Kong police or Chinese officials to determine if someone's democratic protest amounts to treason or sedition. Wanting independence is banned.

Mr Trump has responded strongly to this development. Each year by law the President has to confirm that Hong Kong is still sufficiently independent of China to qualify for the continuing special trade deal it enjoys with the USA. He says he is not willing to do so, given the new incursions on Hong Kong independence. This will mean Hong Kong business will face the same tariffs, bans and penalties as trade from mainland China to the USA does.

The UK is the co signatory of the Treaty with China to establish Hong Kong as part of China under the one country two systems mantle. The two systems were meant to encompass the right of Hong Kong to settle many of its own matters and court cases in return for maintained access and privileges to western markets. What action should the UK take to seek to uphold this Treaty? Is it right to offer UK residence to Hong Kong citizens?

The famous clauses 18 and 19 which provide for Hong Kong judicial and law making independence do also contain a provision allowing the imposition of Chinese national laws when there is a break down in government in Hong Kong.

IAG need to understand the anger about BA job losses

Yesterday in the Commons some MPs were allowed to ask questions of a Transport Minister over the bad news of possible job losses and worse terms and conditions of employment for BA staff who keep a job. All felt the same, that IAG are treating BA employees badly after years of profiting from prime slots at Heathrow and from the successful UK based international travel

business.

The Minister pointed to the deferral of VAT payments, the Covid commercial finance facility and the Job retention or furlough scheme as government help to the industry. She expressed regret about the job losses at BA, Virgin and Easyjet. She told us the Job retention scheme money being used by BA was not “designed for taxpayers to fund the wages of employees only for those companies to put these same staff on notice of redundancy within the furlough period.” She said the government has “set up a restart, recovery and engagement unit to work with the aviation industry on the immediate issues affecting the restart of the sector and its longer term growth and recovery”.

She said she did not have legal powers to remove landing slots from BA nor did she set out any legal means of using leverage from the Job Retention grants. When challenged about the proposed worsening of terms of employment, she said she expected companies to “treat their employees with the social responsibility that one would expect.”

I am following up with a letter to the government asking them to show more urgency over the threats to BA jobs, and asking them to take a tougher stance over IAG’s actions. IAG have large cash reserves, will want to run airlines as we recover and has profited a lot in the past from its U.K. investment. So why is it picking on U.K. staff for redundancies?

[I wish the USA well in restoring peace and good policing](#)

I have had a number of emails from people understandably concerned about the death of George Floyd and the riots in the various US cities.

Before replying I decided to read what the President and what Mr Biden said to have some greater understanding. These are matters for the USA to resolve. As their friend and ally we wish them well in doing so.

The words of the President capture the problem. He said:

“All Americans were rightly sickened and revolted by the brutal death of George Floyd. My administration is fully committed that, for George and his family, justice will be served. He will not have died in vain. But we cannot allow the righteous cries and peaceful protesters to be drowned out by an angry mob. The biggest victims of the rioting are peace-loving citizens in our poorest communities, and as their President, I will fight to keep them safe. I will fight to protect you. I am your President of law and order, and an ally of all peaceful protesters.

“But in recent days, our nation has been gripped by professional anarchists,

violent mobs, arsonists, looters, criminals, rioters, Antifa, and others. A number of state and local governments have failed to take necessary action to safeguard their residents. Innocent people have been savagely beaten, like the young man in Dallas, Texas, who was left dying on the street, or the woman in Upstate New York viciously attacked by dangerous thugs.

"Small-business owners have seen their dreams utterly destroyed. New York's Finest have been hit in the face with bricks. Brave nurses, who have battled the virus, are afraid to leave their homes. A police precinct station has been overrun. Here in the nation's capital, the Lincoln Memorial and the World War Two Memorial have been vandalized. One of our most historic churches was set ablaze. A federal officer in California, an African American enforcement hero, was shot and killed.

"These are not acts of peaceful protest. These are acts of domestic terror. The destruction of innocent life and the spilling of innocent blood is an offense to humanity and a crime against God.

"America needs creation, not destruction; cooperation, not contempt; security, not anarchy; healing, not hatred; justice, not chaos. This is our mission, and we will succeed. One hundred percent, we will succeed. Our country always wins."

He went on to offer National Guard help to State Governors, urging them to enforce the law and protect people and businesses from violence.

Mr Biden said:

"These last few days have laid bare that we are a nation furious at injustice. Every person of conscience can understand the rawness of the trauma people of color experience in this country, from the daily indignities to the extreme violence, like the horrific killing of George Floyd.

"Protesting such brutality is right and necessary. It's an utterly American response. But burning down communities and needless destruction is not. Violence that endangers lives is not. Violence that guts and shutter businesses that serve the community is not.

"The act of protesting should never be allowed to overshadow the reason we protest. It should not drive people away from the just cause that protest is meant to advance.

"I know that there are people all across this country who are suffering tonight. Suffering the loss of a loved one to intolerable circumstances, like the Floyd family, or to the virus that is still gripping our nation. Suffering economic hardships, whether due to COVID-19 or entrenched inequalities in our system. And I know that a grief that dark and deep may at times feel too heavy to bear.

"I know.

"And I also know that the only way to bear it is to turn all that anguish to purpose. So tonight, I ask all of America to join me – not in denying our

pain or covering it over – but using it to compel our nation across this turbulent threshold into the next phase of progress, inclusion, and opportunity for our great democracy.”

This was a more dignified statement than Mr Biden’s comment “you ain’t black” if you vote for Trump.

Bring back the fish counters

Sainsbury’s and Tesco cut back their fresh fish counters to tackle the hoarding demand for other groceries at the start of the lock down. It is time to bring them back. Indeed, it is time to open more and reverse the trends of recent years. where some retailers were closing fresh fish and meat counters anyway.

The UK fishing industry had become very dependent on the catering trades and on export for its fish sales. Retailers are busily importing packaged fish. The Covid 19 policy assault on the hospitality industry, and the end of the Common Fisheries Policy, provides an ideal time for a re think.

The aims of getting control of our fishery back is twofold. We both wish to catch less to allow stocks to rebuild from the damage of the CFP, and greatly increase the proportion of the catch to be landed in the UK so we can eat more of our own fish. This is not difficult given the huge amount of fish taken by other countries every year under the CFP.

So now is a great time for the supermarkets to work with the fishermen and women to offer contracts for more UK fish to be sold direct to customers in shops. It is ridiculous that this island nation set in a sea of fish has major supermarkets that do not allow us to buy fresh fish from the UK. I trust the government rejects any idea of giving much of our fish away in some new deal after we have properly left the EU in December. This provides commercial opportunities for the fishing industry and for retailers. Decent contracts from major retailers would allow the UK fishing industry to borrow to invest, to expand its capacity to serve the local market.