



SALVATION: Predictions of a vaccine by the end of this year are now looking very optimistic

The next six months will be a lot tougher than the last

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THE executive (like Boris Johnson) may not be describing the latest batch of regulations and restrictions as a lockdown but it's pretty close to being one. But it will be an entirely different kind of lockdown this time.

The novelty of the original one has worn off. Rather than six months of unseasonably warm weather (when people rediscovered the joys of walking and began projects in the house and garden) we'll have the colder, wetter, darker days (and longer nights) of autumn/winter.

Something else will be different. During the first lockdown millions of people didn't know anyone who had contracted the virus, let alone anyone who had died from it. Indeed, that lack of intimacy with coronavirus encouraged an increasingly widespread belief that governments were overreacting to a supposed pandemic. It seems likely, though, that more of us will know people with the virus. We'll be aware of increasing numbers of people having to self-isolate. We will probably know someone who has died from it. We will have members of our own family ill at home; or others self-isolating with us because they have been in close

contact with someone who has it.

This intimacy with the virus will shake the complacency out of a lot of people and that will be no bad thing. In March and April the predictions were dire, almost as if the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse were expected to gallop through our lounges, scything all before them. When that didn't happen the fear vanished and resentment set in. But along with that resentment came a new strain of concern, a sense that governments were more intent on depriving us of personal freedom than encouraging a stand-up-and-fight strategy.

That argument never made sense to me. Why would governments around the world take the massive economic hits associated with lockdown – not to mention the huge sums pumped into furlough schemes and bailouts – just to lessen the personal freedoms of their citizens? And why would millions of people who wear seat belts, permit their children to be given a series of injections from birth, fit fire alarms, take out various forms of insurance, don't rage against CCTV everywhere, and allow their phones to keep track of them and their children assume that their government is only now removing individual freedoms?

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The latest restrictions are intended to bring down the rise in the R number – which began to rise again when restrictions were eased a few weeks ago. But if the number does come down won't there be a tendency for the complacency to return (particularly as the Christmas season kicks in)? And if it doesn't go down isn't it likely that a new sense of fatalism will set in and people will begin to think that, since they're probably going to get it anyway, they may as well enjoy themselves for as long as they can?

The only thing that will change the mood is hard evidence of a vaccine that works. In March we were told it was probably only six months away. Now we are told it could be well into next year. The present restrictions are intended, according to Boris Johnson, to last for six months. That's an extraordinarily long time to expect most people to obey the mask rules, the home visiting restrictions (especially when cold nights will limit the use of the garden) and a raft of other regulations. So I expect them to be breached, early and regularly.

The mental toll will also be enormous, particularly for those still classified as 'vulnerable', as well as the few million who live alone. It will also be hard on others living with their families and maybe even able to work from home. As I noted in a previous column – when I recounted my encounters with Mr D – depression can hit anyone at any time and it can be relentless in its determination to beat you into submission.

Six months of restrictions and curfews, with limited opportunities to enjoy parks and gardens, will be enormously tough for people who were already experiencing difficulty; not to mention people who may have managed reasonably well first time around. I see no evidence that Johnson or the devolved administrations have built that factor into their strategy.

One thing seems clear, though: it is going to be much tougher than it has been. More than ever we are going to have to work together and look after each other.

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 25 1970

Haughey Sought Clearance for 'Arms for North'

A TELEPHONE call about a cargo due at Dublin Airport was of paramount importance in the case, Mr Justice O'Keefe was told at the opening of the arms trial in the Four Courts, Dublin yesterday. It would undoubtedly be established conclusively that the cargo consisted of 500 pistols and about 180,000 rounds of ammunition, prosecuting counsel said. The call, he said, was made on April 18 last by the then Minister for Finance, Mr Charles Haughey, to Mr Peter Berry, secretary to the Department of Justice.

The telephone call was almost the final act in a conspiracy involving Haughey and the other accused men in the case under which they jointly and unlawfully agreed to import arms and ammunition into the country. Haughey asked Mr Berry if he was aware of a certain cargo that was due to arrive at the airport on the following Sunday. Mr Berry replied that he was. Haughey then asked him if the cargo would be let through if a guarantee was given that it could go directly to the North.

"Mr Berry said 'No', Mr Haughey then said, 'I think that is a bad decision.' When told that the cargo would be 'grabbed' Mr Haughey allegedly said, 'I had better call it off.'

With Haughey, the other three accused are Albert Luyckx, a Belgian businessman; James Kelly, a former Irish Army intelligence officer, and John Kelly, a native of Belfast. Counsel said that Captain Kelly went on holiday to Northern Ireland in August 1969. It seemed Kelly told Colonel Heffernan [his superior] that he was greatly moved by the events there and he felt a certain sympathy for a section of the population that was under attack. Kelly told Colonel Heffernan that as early as mid-January [1970] a number of defence committees in the North had asked him for help in the purchase of arms for their defence. At hearing.

Bradford Seeking New Jobs

NI MINISTER of Commerce, Mr Roy Bradford leaves this weekend on an industrial promotion tour of Europe in a major bid to solve the unemployment problem here. During the next two weeks he will be meeting with industrialists, businessmen and financiers in Sweden, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Germany already have eight factories in NI. As revelations from the Dublin Arms Trial rocked Leinster House, the former Irish Army intelligence officer, Captain Kelly maintained that he had been acting under orders. In Belfast, the British Army ordered vigilantes off the streets while the suave Unionist minister Roy Bradford mounted a jobs promotion tour of Europe.

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