

Brits Unite Against Coronavirus; but How Long Will the Solidarity Last?

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Last Thursday night at 8pm, people across Britain took to their doorsteps and clapped to demonstrate their solidarity with health workers, currently on the front line desperately trying to save victims of Covid-19. It was a show which evoked something of the spirit of resilience and national unity which this pandemic has unleashed in Britain of late. For not since World War Two have we experienced this 'Blitz spirit'.

One cannot help but notice the extra smiles of reassurance exchanged by passers by as we all take our daily walk; the one form of exercise allowed per day. People are sending signals to each other, as if to say 'it's alright, we're in this together, we'll get through it'. There is no doubt an element of fear in those smiles as well, however. In a way, the smile covers up a multitude of doubts about what the future will hold: today we are out for a walk, tomorrow we may be fighting over a loaf of bread in the supermarket.

For when we look to our neighbors on the continent, the picture looks pretty bleak. The Italians have moved on from serenading on their balconies to sending video messages to the government begging for food. The nation is on the brink of social unrest, after over 2 weeks of lockdown. A video has emerged in which a father pleads with the government for help: "Like my daughter, other children in a few days won't be able to eat this bit of bread. Rest assured, you will regret this because we're going to have a revolution." Police descended on a supermarket in Palermo, Sicily, after people began stealing food. Criminal gangs are beginning to exploit the chaos and incite violence.

At the moment, Britain is more united than it has been in decades. Brexit is old news. Scottish independence – shelved. Boris Johnson – formerly a divisive figure in UK politics – is now more revered than hated as he has transformed into a war-time Prime Minister of Churchillian proportions. Heroically, he has even succumbed to the virus himself – the ultimate sacrifice. #PrayForBoris is doing the rounds on Twitter. His approval ratings have shot through the roof.

Yet this is just the beginning. Britain, like many other nations right now, is on the precipice of an economic crisis like no other. The 2008 economic crash is dwarfed in comparison. The government is having to significantly intervene in the economy, and has moved to nationalize the railways, with talk of bus services and airlines being next. The state has to grow in such a crisis – in a pandemic, everyone's a socialist. And historically speaking, crises have generally been followed by a stronger, more powerful state with the taxes to pay for it. After all, the welfare state and nationalization were responses to conflict and turmoil.

But there is still a risk of this pandemic creating more inequality in an already unequal

Britain. As one [analyst](#) has put it: “the virus doesn’t discriminate between people but the accompanying economic shock certainly does”. The measures announced by the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, last week were ‘unprecedented’ but won’t necessarily target all who may desperately need help. Various firms have already made staff redundant in the first week of the lockdown, and there will likely be more to follow. With 20% of British people already living in poverty, the fallout from the economic crisis could be far worse than the pandemic itself. Farmers are already warning that there may not be enough food to feed everyone, and say they need 70,000 workers to harvest crops over the coming months.

‘Months’ not ‘weeks’ is the key word, according to another face we are growing used to seeing – Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Jenny Harries. In the government’s Sunday briefing she emphasized that we are in this for the long haul: six months if we’re lucky, but it could be much longer before we return to ‘normality’.

What that ‘normality’ will consist of is another question. Arguably we will never be quite the same again...

127,737 people have been tested for coronavirus in Britain so far, of whom 19,522 have tested positive, with 1,228 deaths.

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