

Two relatively recent outbreaks are classed as 'pandemics': swine flu in 2009, HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Neither is quite comparable with the present pandemic in terms of scale, or the latter due to the means of transmission. These and other recent outbreaks are better analysed by colleagues at the London School of Hygiene who are far more expert and experienced in this field than I.

The most closely comparable pandemic of the relatively recent past was Spanish flu in 1918-19, in terms of its international nature, its long continuation in 3 waves, numbers dead (estimated 40-50million worldwide), methods of transmission. But the context, national and international, at the end of a major war a century ago, was so different that I hesitate to draw conclusions from it likely to be helpful in the present crisis. A useful survey (which focuses on London but has wider relevance) is Andrea Tanner 'The Spanish Lady Comes to London: The Influenza Pandemic 1918-1919' *London Journal* 27, (2), 2002, pp51- 76. There are also more recent books on the pandemic by Laura Spinney and John Crosby but I have not read them.

I would focus rather on how this pandemic differs from those of the recent past especially in its context. It emerged in 2020 when poverty in the UK was already at exceptional levels due mainly to insecure employment and low pay in an under-regulated labour market. Too many employers evaded the minimum wage, employed workers on insecure contracts which did not guarantee specific hours or pay, or claimed that employees were self-employed enabling employers to evade obligations to pay sickness benefits, pension contributions and holiday pay. A high proportion of the people who were poor by the internationally recognized measure- incomes below 60% of the national median- in 2018/19 were in work of this kind, according to research by respected independent bodies, including the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Rowntree Foundation, the Resolution Foundation. They found that about 23% of the UK population, 33% of children, were poor by this measure, 60% of them in households with at least one worker too low-paid to support a family. Use of food banks rose steadily before 2020, though they were hardly heard of in Britain before 2010. Other causes of poverty were cuts to welfare benefits especially the introduction of Universal Credit, and the high cost of housing following the sale of council housing under Thatcher and abolition of rent controls. A report on poverty in the UK by the UN Rapporteur on

Extreme Poverty and Human Rights in November 2018 was an excoriating critique of the extent and causes of poverty, emphasizing the numbers and causes above. The government ignored it.

These severe policy challenges of poverty, low or no pay, starvation, homelessness, inadequate welfare support, have grown immensely due to the pandemic, along with unemployment, and are very public. Similarly the pandemic has exposed the long-standing crisis in the care of older and disabled people. Can these crises still be ignored? There is no sign of planning for their elimination by the government. There is a need for immediate short-term raising of benefits to levels adequate to eliminate starvation and support rents, enforcing payment of the 'living wage', much increased funding for residential and community care and paying carers adequately. In the longer run, regulation of the labour market and job creation. Also thought is needed about how to fund these policies. One option is the revaluation of properties for Council Tax for the first time since 1993 which would yield higher incomes for local authorities.

More positive findings due to the pandemic are i) the extent of voluntary, community action, e.g., in running and donating to food banks, has become publicly evident though it also is not new; ii) the extent of family care for those in need, also widely underestimated in normal times, as is the stress it can place on, mainly female, carers. A danger, though, that government may evade its responsibilities and rely on future action by volunteers including families.

I don't belong to a research group. I could draw on existing research and data to develop the thought above into a policy paper.