

## **View from Westminster – March 2020**

There's nothing quite like a global pandemic causing unimaginable suffering and unprecedented political turmoil to undermine a satirical Westminster columnist. How can one even begin to gently mock a political class fighting incomprehensible battles with the weight of the world on its shoulders. No historical precedent, no prior insight, no previous experience...nothing...can prepare those who lead us for the battles both done and to come. One can only wish them well.

Yet, for all that, humour is in our DNA. It is a fundamental part of what makes our country so great. It's therefore why, even in the bleakest moments, the sound of laughter can and must ring out.

Let's face it, lockdown, self-isolation and social distancing have ushered in occasionally amusing moments. The nation collectively celebrates the success of Jo Wicks before collapsing in a heap about 5 minutes in. We then recover just in time to try and master Zoom and remember where the mute button is before insulting the boss's home furnishing choices. Of course, on every call, there's at least one participant taking part in the study full of books they've never read, but makes them look intelligent if the camera captures the right spines. And who hasn't then ended a call, gone on a walk, and found themselves comically sidestepping into a bush as somebody approaches from the opposite direction. It's these moments that raise a smile, even in the trickiest times.

For these times are unbelievably tricky. Emergency legislation empowering the state to wartime levels of centralisation and beyond has been passed with barely a flicker of dissent. The population has been asked to stay largely indoors for a period of time without a defined end. I will personally be quoting Peppa Pig in my sleep by time this is over....20,000 deaths meanwhile is being mooted as a good result. I long for the days when that phrase meant nothing about mortality and instead referred to West Ham picking up a point at Leicester.

The Government is doing what it can and is rightly being supported. The speed at which convention centres have become hospitals is a sight we might not wish to see, yet is nonetheless objectively remarkable. Serious questions around preparedness will need asking and they will be asked when this is done. They are rightly parked for now.

For local government, capacity is stretched and more will be asked as we move forward. On the other side, the multibillion rescue package will need to be paid for and the coming times will make the austerity years look like a picnic. All that however is for another time.

For now, it's all hands on deck. Godspeed as we go. If you believe in a deity, ask for assistance for all on the frontline. And then hope that the next column you read from me is packed with its usual mix of substandard jokes and satirical commentary. That will mean normality has returned. I'll never complain about it again!