



CONCERN:
From left,
Health
Minister
Robin
Swann,
Chief
Scientific
Advisor
Professor
Ian Young
and Chief
Medical
Officer
Michael
McBride
during the
daily media
broadcast at
Parliament
Buildings,
Stormont on
Wednesday

PICTURE:
Kelvin
Boyes/
Press Eye/
PA

Governments facing brutal conundrum as 'scamdemic' fears grow

IT'S not in the nature of governments, particularly democratic ones, to impose huge restrictions on the movements of their citizens.

And nor is it in their nature to close down the country and build up enormous debts which will have to be paid off by increasing existing taxes (and creating new taxes) for those same citizens. Yet that's precisely what most governments have been doing since the beginning of the year.

CV-19 has terrified governments; pushing them to lengths and measures that weren't even considered during the two world wars. For a while CV-19 also terrified the vast majority of people everywhere, which is why it was comparatively easy for governments to persuade them to stay indoors, keep their distance from others and, for the time being, adjust to something described as 'the new normal.'

Today, though, most people, particularly those below 50, aren't terrified. That's because they have reached two conclusions: death tolls are very modest in the great scheme of things; and the vast majority contracting the virus recover within weeks. So a gung-ho, 'let-us-out-and-be-free-to-take-our-own risks' mentality has taken hold: to which most governments responded by easing restrictions and 'opening up the economy' again.

But, as was always going to happen, restriction-easing has been accompanied by increasing numbers contracting the virus. Indeed, so high has the rate of infection risen that governments have introduced local lockdowns and are now reintroducing some of the restrictions that were eased just three weeks ago. Again, that seemed inevitable. Curfew (which is what it was) was always going to keep infection rates down, for the very simple reason that it enforced people to stay away from each other.

Governments are now faced with a brutal conundrum. The economy suffers when you force businesses

Alex
KANE



to close and keep workers at home. But the economy also suffers when huge numbers of workers contract the virus and are forced to remain at home until they recover (which, in some cases can take weeks). And because there are no certainties about still being a carrier when you recover, or even maybe even contracting it again, businesses could be faced with month after month of severely reduced production rates, available staff and foot-fall customer numbers. All of which could have a fairly similar impact to being closed altogether.

In the absence of a vaccine – and again, there are no certainties about availability – it is going to be extraordinarily difficult to resolve the conundrum. Which, in turn, means that the economy could remain in severe downturn/recession territory for another year – maybe even longer. At that point redundancy will increase substantially (no government could afford to continue

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with furlough schemes), businesses will close permanently and all sorts of other aspects of everyday life will face massive disruption.

So, what do we do? Some people argue that the government should just open everything and let the 'herd immunity' approach kick in. But the problem with that approach is that hundreds of thousands of people could still be off work for weeks on end; the virus could mutate into a stronger form (which happens fairly regularly with viruses); the NHS could be hit with a surge it cannot contain (leading to a knock-on impact on treating non-virus cases); there could be a significant uptick in the numbers being left with long-term health problems after contracting the virus; and while the death toll tally might still be modest in overall terms, it might still be high enough to unsettle public opinion and rattle governments.

We're heading into the cold/cough/sniffles/flu/seasonal disorder territory associated with the shorter, darker, colder, wetter days of autumn and winter; when we keep windows closed and reduce the ventilation so necessary to fight a virus. I can't see the government pushing herd immunity at this point. But nor can it continue with the present policy of opening then closing again; or easing then re-imposing restrictions, because all that does is create widespread confusion and encourage people to do their own thing.

What it all boils down to is that there really are no certainties with something like CV-19. But the fact that so many governments seem so reluctant to adopt a laissez-faire approach suggests that they remain fearful, very fearful, about what could happen. Until there is a vaccine that is demonstrably successful I remain supportive of the cautious approach.

But I'd also like to hear more clarity from the government and its advisers; and a greater willingness to deconstruct the arguments of those (growing in number) who say that what's happening is 'scamdemic' rather than real.

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 11 1920

Terror in South

THERE was a reign of terror at Tullow, Co Carlow on Thursday night when on the previous night two constables were killed and wounded. Two of the principal business places were burned to the ground and the Irish Bar broken into and looted.

The disorder began about eleven o'clock when a shot was fired, apparently as a signal, and then a volley was fired, followed by a bomb explosion and the outbreak of a fire in the establishment of Messrs Murphy, spirit grocers. At this point the people, filled with terror, ran into the streets from their houses, in some cases carrying pieces of furniture under the fear that the destruction of the whole town had been planned.

Raiders in the Glens

EARLY on Thursday morning there were raids for arms by a number of masked and armed men at Cushendun and Cushendall districts, Co Antrim. A number of arms were seized in several farmhouses in these districts. The police made a raid in one house in Ballycastle but nothing was found. On a search for arms a party made a raid on the gatekeeper's lodge at Captain Crommelin's estate at Cushendun. The raiders fired two shots at the house but the gatekeeper quickly replied from inside. The raiders decamped. Investigations yesterday showed that one of the visitors at least was wounded, a trail of blood being observed leading to the roadside. Meanwhile, masked men raided a number of Unionist houses in Carrigans district near Derry (in East Donegal). In one house they seized a shotgun and an old dagger. They seized a gun and 25 cartridges in the house of Mr White, land steward, whom they threatened to shoot unless he told them all about the Ulster Volunteers. White refused to tell anything.

Tyrone Partition Proposal Lost

AT THE meeting of Tyrone County Council, Sir H de Fellenberg Montgomery, DL moved that Mr T J S Harbison (Nationalist MP) should be appointed to the Council of Ulster County Councils.

Mr Harbison replied – 'We all know why this association was formed. It was part of a scheme to sever this county from the rest of Ireland and I will not be part of an association whose aim is to divide Ireland.' The motion was defeated.

(By the autumn of 1920 the increase in IRA attacks was matched by British reprisals, such as the 'Carlow terror' – often involving the newly-arrived Black and Tans, ill-disciplined ex-soldiers from Britain drafted in to reinforce the RIC. In the North Unionists and Nationalists clashed over the dawning reality of partition and the imminent creation of a Unionist state.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com