



The Truth Is Out There: COVID-19 Was About Politics, Not Science

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When The New York Times allows its star columnist to write an oped revealing that mask mandates did nothing to stop the spread, it's obvious something is changing the narrative about the pandemic.

The truth, as the saying goes, is a time-release pill. Three years on from the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, we're getting closer to identifying the origin of the virus, we're discovering government decisions were guided by politics as much as "the science", and the consequences of the lockdowns – that will be felt for generations – can now be honestly talked about.

When *The New York Times* last month allowed its star columnist [Bret Stephens](#) to write an oped titled "The mask mandates did nothing. Will any lessons be learned?" , it was obvious something is changing.



The publication a week ago in the British media of the contents of more than 100,000 private WhatsApp messages exchanged during the crisis between Matt Hancock, the health minister at the time, and UK government officials reveals the scale to which the British public were misled by their political leaders. Others have used stronger words than “misled” to describe what occurred.

While it’s unlikely Hancock will be arrested for wilful misconduct in public office, as some have suggested, the comparisons being made between Watergate and the British government’s actions during COVID-19 are not entirely out of place. One difference is that no one died because of Watergate.

The WhatsApp messages show, for example, how Hancock rejected advice to reduce the time required for COVID-19 isolation because to do so “would simply we’ve been wrong”, and that he planned to “frighten the pants off everyone”, and that school students in England were forced to wear face masks because officials declared it was a measure “not worth an argument”.

A demonstration of the sheer bloody-mindedness that characterised so much of what Hancock did is provided in an exchange between him and a political aide about how to manage a Conservative MP they suspected would vote against harsher lockdown restrictions. The aide wrote to Hancock, “James [Daly] wants his learning Disability Hub in Bury – whips call him up and say Health team want to work with him to deliver this but that’ll be off the table he rebels.” Hancock replied: “Yes 100%”.

So far nearly all of the Australian media has carefully avoided any mention of the Hancock WhatsApp story.

It’s true that this is what happens in politics, and it happens all the time. But policymaking during COVID-19 was supposed to be different.

The contents of the WhatsApp messages would be breathtaking if it wasn’t for the fact that those who dared question the government’s COVID-19 policies are not at all surprised by the behaviour of Hancock and his ilk.

Not just a story about British politics

Hancock’s WhatsApp messages isn’t just a parochial story about British politics. During COVID-19, governments around the world copied each other, and here in Australia those in the media who barracked hardest for lockdowns and mask mandates regularly referred to what was occurring in the UK, the United States and China.

There’s every reason to think that the process of policymaking in Australia during the crisis was not much different from how Hancock operated in Britain. As yet, there’s no evidence Scott



Morrison got his idea for secret ministerial portfolios from the UK health minister.

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No media outlet in this country was more enthusiastic about lockdowns and masks than the ABC. Which perhaps explains why the government-owned news agency has all but ignored Hancock and his messages. There are twice as many news stories on the ABC website about [Hancock appearing](#) on *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here* (two) than there are about his WhatsApp messages (one).

That single story was a nine-minute interview on ABC Radio National earlier this week with the Isabel Oakeshott, the British journalist who revealed Hancock's messages. The first six minutes of the interview were taken up with questions about the ethics of releasing private communications, and then for the next three minutes the ABC host Patricia Karvelas attempted to argue there was little that was newsworthy in the messages.

This country's media spent two years telling Australians to unquestioningly obey the government. It would disturb the narrative for journalists to admit to the public or to themselves that so much of what we were told to do during the COVID-19 crisis by politicians was the product of the selfishness and self-interest of those politicians.

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