

## **Mrs Sue Rule – Written Evidence (LBC0029)**

### **Life Beyond Covid – the View from Rosehaugh**

My name is Sue Rule. I am 65 years old. I lived for 62 years in south-east England, where I raised a family and ran a business, and ignored politics. I retired with my husband to the Cowal Peninsula in Scotland in 2017. It has been a revelation to be represented by an MP who is not a Conservative.

The view outside my window is magnificent. I look out over Loch Long and the Clyde estuary. At times during lockdown it has been so peaceful and serene, and the light on the water so beautiful. It was good to feel that humanity was giving nature a bit of breathing space.

I feel so privileged to live here, in a beautiful house with half a Scottish hillside for a garden. Friends and neighbours in our little community have risen to the challenge, as have local businesses – apart from a few minor inconveniences at the beginning of lockdown, we have wanted for nothing.

Except social contact. Music. Concerts. Festivals. Fetes and celebrations. Parties and pubs and family visits.

I have two daughters in their 30s, one living in Scotland and one in England, and one granddaughter. We celebrated my granddaughter's first birthday and marked the passing of an elderly cousin online.

My daughter in England contracted COVID-19 back in March – she was already self-isolating when lockdown began. After what initially seemed to be a fairly mild dose of the virus, she is nevertheless still suffering from symptoms. At times she has struggled to look after herself - she lives alone. And I am 500 miles away, unable to travel. We have both been on a journey of renewed grief (my daughters lost their father in 2011) over the past few months. Phone and internet connection has, I think quite literally, been a lifeline, but it has been a very difficult time for my daughter, and has carried a financial cost she can ill afford. She has made it this far thanks to the NHS, and the help and support of friends and neighbours, but she is not over the virus yet and I fear for her future.

In 2016, living in Kent, I was glad that Scotland voted to remain a part of the UK. Now, I dearly wish they had voted "Yes".

I contrast attitudes towards the pandemic in England with those prevalent in Scotland, and nothing more clearly demonstrates what a difference good leadership and humane political principles at the heart of government make.

The tragic farce being acted out in Westminster in the name of government continually breaks my heart for a country I used to love. I truly thought Britain was better than this.

*Are there any positives you would take from this pandemic?*

When lockdown started, I felt hopeful. As far as I was concerned, the greatest disaster the UK was faced with was the election of Boris Johnson in December

2019, sentencing us to five more years of going backwards when the need to progress to a just and sustainable economic model was ever more urgent.

I thought the crisis COVID-19 presented would be a wake up call for the people of the UK. I thought it would focus hearts and minds on what really matters to us. I thought people would rediscover how important connection is, individually, socially and globally. I thought we would start to learn how to work together.

As the UK government's dismal mishandling of the pandemic developed, I thought surely people would see what kind of charlatans we had put in Westminster. Surely people would realise that life is not a spat between "Left" and "Right", that pandemics and environmental sustainability transcend political boundaries and require us to work together using best available knowledge and expertise to develop innovative, value-driven responses.

It was an exciting prospect, worth a few months of hardship. I engaged with a number of groups and on-line conversations about 'Building Back Better'. It felt as if a powerful movement was growing, a movement based on consensus around what we wanted, where previous political movements (including Brexit) had focussed on protesting against what we didn't want. We would, I felt, create a valuable and lasting memorial to the lives the virus claimed.

*What are the things that you are most worried about?*

I'm most worried about the fact that it's not happening. I have no faith whatsoever in the competence of the UK government to do anything other than take a wrecking ball to British society. The public money needed to take us through the storm will not be available for those who need it. Money is going into the pockets of wealthy individuals and corporations, not into the community. It is clear that Government has abdicated responsibility for the wellbeing of UK citizens, and individuals will be left to pay the price of the pandemic alone.

Personally, I am most worried about the lack of support for my daughter, suffering the "long-tail" effect of COVID-19. She has suffered huge financial hardship as a result of lockdown, and will continue to suffer as the illness lingers and prevents her returning to work – even if her work remains there for her to return to. I am fortunate in being able to support her through this, as she does not qualify for anything else. But I fear for those who have no such safety net.

Britain has already been condemned by the UN for the levels of child poverty in this country. "Generation rent" was already struggling with mountains of debt. Our public services had already been eviscerated by a political economic thinking based on asset-stripping. I dread to think how much worse it is going to get.

*What do you most hope changes for the better?*

I have very little hope that things will change for the better in the foreseeable future. We are stuck with the government we have, fit for office or not. Just as we are stuck with the current electoral system, fit for purpose or not. We have a politically illiterate electorate who have elected a politically illiterate government. I don't see how that can end well.

We are facing a 14% decline in the economy, and we have yet to deal with the fallout from a no-deal Brexit. Our isolation from the rest of the world will

increase, as will the suffering, poverty and environmental damage being inflicted on the country by our own government.

I cannot see any alternative. Those in government have their own agenda, and they are pursuing it relentlessly. They have signalled clearly that they are not going to listen to science, sense, justice or compassion. All those voices crying out for social and environmental justice will continue to be sidelined and suppressed, if not actually criminalised. Even in writing this, I hesitate to send it, in case I place myself on some blacklist of people who don't support this travesty of a government.

If Britain continues its cruel, relentless political love affair with corrupt business practice in general and the fossil fuel industry in particular, money and power will remain in the same soiled hands. The creative thinkers and innovators will be ignored because they are not focussing on making money for the rich. More and more people will be discarded by the system to fend for themselves. Maybe that's where the only hope lies. In the ability of ordinary people to survive and re-build.

*13 July 2020*