

## Rebekah Treganna response to PMQs

**1. May I start by thanking the England team, who represent the best of Britain. However, I have been appalled by the racist abuse that players have faced on social media in recent days. I am sure that the Prime Minister will agree that education is one of the best ways to prevent racism continuing in future generations, however currently his government maintains that it is illegal for schools to teach about white privilege and engage in frank conversations about race and racism. I therefore ask the Prime Minister what steps his government will take to ensure that schools are able to tackle interpersonal racism in the PSHE curriculum?**

LOTO's focus on racism today demonstrates Labour's concern over it. However, focusing on policy rather than words may have been more likely to result in a tangible impact, especially since previous refusals to apologise for the comments concerned suggest Johnson would not apologise today so the question would be unproductive. Focusing on education rather than the Online Harms Bill, which already had an Urgent Question scheduled about it for later today, would have maximised the number of policies scrutinised.

**2. The ending of mask requirements from July 19th will render spaces such as public transport unsafe for those who are clinically vulnerable, excluding them from participating in daily life once again. Why has the Prime Minister chosen to value convenience for some over the mental and physical health of some of the UK's most vulnerable citizens?**

Scrutinising the life changing relaxing of restrictions is vital in the last PMQs before they are implemented, and in line with Labour's commitment to social justice this question focuses on how they will impact a marginalised group.

**3. In the early hours of this morning, two holidaymakers were sent home from the airport after being prevented from boarding a plane as they had received doses of the vaccine manufactured in India, and thus did not qualify for the EU's vaccine passport scheme. Will the Prime Minister confirm what steps he is taking to talk to EU leaders and ensure that this issue will be resolved so that British tourists will be able to enjoy the holidays they have booked for this summer?**

This question exposes the flaw in one of Johnson's proudest achievements, the vaccine rollout, preventing him gaining excessive praise for it, and drawing attention to an urgent issue that will potentially affect many voters this summer, thus balancing the importance of electability and accountability.

### Martha Gazzard

*Professor Whitty has stated that "instead of actually averting hospitalisations and deaths, you move over to just delaying them" when speaking on the easing of lockdown in a press briefing on the 5<sup>th</sup>. With Professor Karl Frisson estimating a million extra COVID infections due to the woefully lax precautions put on both the semi-final and final of the Euros, how can the government be seen as caring for the public - and working towards its implied goal*

*of averting hospitalisations - while letting the coronavirus run rampant especially when the effects of long COVID are not properly understood?*

*On the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Minister of State for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety said that "CAMHS is well-resourced and robust". However, leading GPs and people with experience with CAMHS have utterly refuted this statement on Twitter and in the press, with Dr Shaba Nabi saying "It is so difficult to meet the criteria, a child often needs to be demonstrably suicidal." Dr Shan Hussein has not had a CAMHS referral accepted since 2014. With mental health referrals on the rise, what is the government's plan to safeguard vulnerable children and ensure they are not put on unreasonably long waiting lists or turned away, as has happened and continues to happen today?*

*Mr Speaker, I wonder if the Prime Minister could tell us exactly what sanctions will be put in place for those spouting horrific racist rhetoric online, not just the apps themselves. Furthermore, if those encouraging racist abuse are to be banned from football matches, can the Prime Minister confirm he and the Home Secretary will not attend any England matches in light of their comments on gesture politics and taking a knee which has been seen by many as stoking the fire of racism?*

PMQs has two ways of effectively scrutinising the government – directly and indirectly. I want to ask questions that one can reasonably expect to be answered, but also encourage the public and media to look into Johnson's answers and scrutinise those. Therefore, I ask a fairly standard question on the naivety of the government to allow COVID to spread without fully understanding it, highlighting the slightly pandering and jumbled nature of their roadmap, a question on the effectiveness of CAMHS, which has been the centre of a social media frenzy over the last week, encouraging the PM to give an answer that is robust and planned, and holding him to that answer in the future, and a slightly incendiary question aimed to draw further attention to his behaviour surrounding the football at the time and ethnic minorities in the past.

Ruby Holywell-Walker

The first thing which stood out to me about the Prime Minister's responses to the questions today was how evasive they seemed to be. Not once did Johnson allow himself to be held accountable for the racist remarks in his book full of bigotry, claiming that they were "taken out of context." I fail to see how any context could justify such unacceptable comments. Not once did he apologise for or acknowledge his failures during the pandemic which cost over 120,000 deaths in the country he has handled so neglectfully. Instead, we were given a series of deflections and vague, avoidant waffling which altogether swerved the very pressing questions that we are so eager to have answered. How can we find reassurance in a time like this when our own leader, the one who is supposed to guide us to a stronger,

safer future as a country, so clearly doesn't have a clue what he's doing. It's this shoddiness which leads me to question whether the Prime Minister is simply incompetent to lead a country during a time of crisis, or if he's well aware of how poorly the situation is handled, but knows that in the chaos lies a large sum of money for him and his cronies.

Interestingly I also noted his surprise after being questioned by a female MP, "she knows exactly what she's talking about." I can't help but wonder why this comment was required. Perhaps it's simply a part of his sickly, charismatic performance, or perhaps it's just that the closest the man can get to a sincere compliment is to be patronising. Surely someone in such a position would be an expert on the issues they cover every day in their constituency, and I get the impression that Mr. Johnson would not have stated something so obvious if the MP had been a man.

Finally, given the opportunity to ask the Prime Minister some questions myself, I would be interested to know how he plans to improve the funding in rural areas for services such as mental health support and education, and how he means to combat the gross financial inequality and racial abuse that persists, despite his empty promises to tackle such issues.

#### Eleanor Neilson

Question 1: As there is a focus on football at the moment, I wanted to highlight the shocking stats about domestic abuse, almost exclusively against women, rising whenever there is an England game (26% when they win, 38% when they lose). Given the government's past failures to make significant and effective changes that improve women's safety in the wake of Sarah Everard's murder, I think it would be worth asking how and if the government plans to better protect women from male violence, both in the streets and in their homes.

Question 2: Continuing on the subject of football, during PMQs the Prime minister claimed that in the future, those found making racist statements would be permanently banned from games. If I were LOTO I would point out the fact that the PM himself has been found to have made multiple racist statements which he has yet to sufficiently apologise for, does this mean he would also be banned from future games? However, I also recognise that this might be a better point for a backbench MP to bring up as the LOTO would be unable to quote the Prime Minister's offensive remarks back at him.

Question 3: Although this was already debated the day before, I still think it would be worth bringing up the issue of the planned £4 billion cut to the foreign aid budget. Not only because this is an important issue morally and practically, especially considering this Conservative government is strongly against illegal immigration and foreign aid is one of the most effective ways to reduce this by increasing geo-political stability, but also because by bringing it up at PMQs you ensure the argument reaches a larger audience. Furthermore, the number of Tory rebels, including Theresa May herself who has claimed this is her first time going against the party whip, is a vulnerability that should be highlighted and exploited.

Jacob Levey

To start, I found this exercise rather difficult as I saw this PMQs as one of Starmer's best performances: using forensic structure with the first five questions pressing Johnson on his racism and then concluding with a curveball which cleverly neutralised the prime minister's prepared rhetoric and final flourish that ends up in the tabloid headlines. That said, Johnson still managed to come back with a pretty withering attack on Starmer's political prowess.

And so, perhaps what would be best for Keir is to work on seemingly spontaneous responses to the prime minister's easily forceable provocations. For example, we could have predicted that sooner or later, he would hide behind the home secretary's heritage and so I would argue that it may be useful if the leader of the opposition could have called out this technique for what it is: tokenism-no better than saying "I'm not a racist, I have black friends".

Another example would be having the foresight to know that if Johnson is being accused of racism, he would settle for a predictable ad hominem attack by waving about the Batley and Spennings flyer. It would be nice to be able to confront that challenge head on or in fact maybe what Starmer did was ideal: by ignoring the challenge he made the prime minister look ridiculous in his petty stunt of waving that photocopy around instead of answering a simple 'yes or no'.

Although some of the attacks on Boris Johnson's absurd response to the changing tide in the country (following the Sun's predictable and hypocritical about turn on its mistreatment of the England players) were strong, some of the comments Starmer made, like about Johnson wearing the England shirt over his shirt and tie, seem a little superficial, lightweight, and lacking in sting. My suspicion is that Keir is at his best when he plays the sober forensic lawyer. When he attempts the jocular style so beloved by Johnson- it has a faintly hollow ring- his John Lewis wallpaper photo massively backfired across the board. And so, I think there's a fundamental lesson to be learnt by that response: he can never match Johnson's avuncular, Falstaffian, and comedic personality so the best policy in pmqs is to play the severe, high-minded lawyer.

One of my favourite moments was seeing Starmer's genuine moral outrage and anger when he said to the government benches: "the house might want to listen", because his outrage and severity of tone seemed not only justified but powerfully authentic. Let twitter do pictures of Johnson in football shirts and the obvious cheap stuff and allow the leader of the opposition to go high.

For example, the final question evoking the pain of Julie Hambleton highlighted what is most appealing about Starmer: a man who earnestly cares and has the mental acuity to solve. His instinct has served him very well in life and so my primary advice to him as a 16-year-old would be to not listen too closely to the advice of 16-year-olds. Let social media and the forces of progression advise from their keyboards and leave Keir Starmer to operate on a well-honed instinct.