

LISA NANDY

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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(Please check against delivery (uncorrected copies))

AM: Lisa Nandy, welcome. Thanks for coming in. Can I ask you first of all do you think that everybody who's had a first dose of the Pfizer vaccine should, as the BMA says, get a second dose within six weeks?

LN: Well, the evidence is conflicting on this, and I have a lot of sympathy for the scientists. I think you're going to be talking to the Israeli Health Minister this morning, where conflicting evidence has emerged about the Pfizer vaccine. I have a lot of sympathy for the scientists who are trying to sort of keep up with what is an emerging picture. We've always said it has to be guided by the science. It would be helpful if the government could come forward and level with the public about the basis on which that decision is made. But I guess the overwhelming message to the public would be look, don't panic, the scientists are assessing the evidence, we have regular meetings with SAGE, if you get a call for the vaccine come forward, have the vaccine, and I'm sure there will be an assessment of that evidence and hopefully the government will be much more transparent about the basis on which they're making those decisions in the next couple of days.

AM: Alright. I hear your expressions of sympathy, but this is a choice for politicians now. On the one side you've got the four national medical directors and the regulator, on the other side you've got the BMA, and in the end, therefore, it is for politicians like yourself to come down on one side of the fence or another. Will you?

LN: Well, I think that's right. But we don't have access to any of the data or the science that the government has. They haven't

shared that with us, they haven't shared it with parliament, and they haven't shared it with the country.

AM: With respect, you know what the BMA has said and you know what the medical directors have said. All of that is out in the open and this is just one of those tough moments where politicians have to make a stand and make a choice, and the question is can Labour and will Labour?

LN: I've never been shy of making a stand of getting off the fence, Andrew. I've been someone who's prepared to do that all my life. But I just have to say to you that we've always said in the middle of a pandemic that this has got to be guided by evidence. There is a good reason why the Chief Medical Officer has decided that this is the right approach, because if we're in a race against time to get the vaccine out across the country, and based on the evidence that he has, he believes that getting a 12-week gap is the right gap. Now, if there's new evidence – and it appears there is – to suggest that six weeks might be better, then what we'll be asking for when we next meet SAGE and what we'll be pushing the government on in the House of Commons this week is can you make sure that you level with the public about that, share that information with us, and that people can have confidence in the decisions that are being made. I'm very worried that if you end up with several politicians, particularly those of us who haven't had the benefit of seeing that science, writing our own strategy what you could do is undermine public confidence. And we've got this amazing national effort to get the vaccine out at the moment. We've got to make sure that people keep coming forwards.

AM: So that's in essence, you don't know. but you're explaining perfectly fairly why that is. Let's talk about the vaccine rollout then. Do you think we should close our borders to incoming flights from countries which don't have high vaccine coverage?

LN: Well, I think the problem that's emerged is that although we're seeing new strains of the virus identified in the UK, South

Africa, Brazil and others, these are largely the countries where we have the capacity to actually map and track mutations of the virus. Scientists tell us that there are a number of countries where these strains are emerging that just simply do not have the capacity to map what is happening. So it's not just countries that have identified the strains of the virus that we ought to be careful about, actually what we're likely to be seeing, even if we haven't identified it, is strains emerging all over the world. So there is no question that we need to take border security far more seriously. We've been pushing the government to take tougher measures at the border since last spring. On Monday we've got this delayed announcement yet again delayed. We would fully expect the government to bring in tougher quarantine measures, we would expect them to roll out a proper testing strategy and we'd expect them as well to start checking up on the people who are quarantining. Only three out of every hundred people who are asked to quarantine when they arrive into the UK actually face any checks at all. That's just simply not sufficient.

AM: You've described the new American President Joe Biden as a 'Woke Guy'. What do you mean by woke guy?

LN: I did think you might ask me that. I wondered if you might be a bit baffled by the description. What I mean by that really is that Joe Biden is somebody who knows exactly who he is and what he stands for and is very comfortable with it. He's happy to stand up and fight for the working classes in America and to stand up for minority rights. He stands up against aggression from America's adversaries and he looks out to the world and wants America to be an open, self-confident, tolerant country that plays a role on the world stage. You can call it woke, you can call it progressive, you can call it what you like, but the important thing is that under his leadership America is self-confident, it's comfortable in its own skin, it's reliable partner. It's the sort of leadership, frankly, that we're lacking here in the UK.

AM: All of that is good. I'm just suggesting woke is a trendy word, it may not be a helpful one. Is it unwoke, for instance, to object to the vandalising of Churchill statues?

LN: No, I don't think it is. It's a basic question of decency. I mean, you know, vandalising public property is a bad thing, but when you add into that that Churchill is somebody who means a great deal to a lot of people in this country, who stood up and made the right judgement call at the moment that it mattered to protect this country and to defend our values and our interests, I think no, I don't think that's woke at all. It's about common basic decency.

AM: The reason I'm asking about it is that you attacked the prime minister for, quotes, 'trying to start a culture war,' over this very issues. And I'm just suggesting to you what he was actually doing is standing up for all the things you've just said are decent and right.

LN: Well, I don't think the government's been doing that at all, because the whole country came together united in condemnation of the vandalism of the Churchill statue. There was overwhelming public support for that statue. The only person, as my colleague David Lammy said, who kept going on about it was the prime minister. And just this week – let me give you an example of this because I think this has been a – no, this has been a really sort of controversial issue, but the government cannot be allowed to get away with this. On Monday the Communities Secretary wrote a piece in the Telegraph calling out the so-called Woke Warriors in councils who were renaming streets and pulling down statues. It then turned out that his examples were completely inaccurate. He had to apologise. This is in the middle of a global pandemic when councils are on the front like compensating for the government's failures. I mean, it just simply isn't on.

AM: Okay, let me ask you – let me move from Monday to today, where there's a report in one of the papers of you applauding warmly a Labour think tank report which suggests turning the

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armed services into, and I quote, 'human security services,' whose job is to damp down violence. And you were delighted by that. Does that represent your views?

LN: No, it's complete and utter rubbish, and the journalist was told so. I mean, the difficulty is that this –

AM: You applauded the report and he's quoted the report.

LN: Look, I didn't applaud the report. That is complete and utter nonsense, and he was told so before he wrote the story. I find this quite extraordinary really, that the government has spent significant amounts of time since the prime minister got himself into a complete mess over whether Joe Biden was woke, trying to dig up scurrilous stories about me, most of which you won't see in the newspapers this weekend because they're not true. And I just think this sort of nonsense is ridiculous. We've always stood up for the armed forces, we've always stood up for this country. When I first got appointed as Shadow Foreign Secretary I said that national security would be our top priority. I'd really just urge the government to get on with the task in hand, get a grip on this virus, start to rebuild our economy, and stop dividing this country, start bringing us back together. These silly games are just not worthy of the government.

AM: Lisa Nandy, we know the government is listening, or at least one member of the government is listening because Matt Hancock is waiting to talk to me. But for now, thank you very much indeed for coming in and talking to us.

LN: Thank you.

(ends)