Twitter Thread by Conor Gogarty

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I witnessed a really powerful moment today in court. A judge read the harrowing words of a junior doctor to a man who had been on a mass protest against lockdown.

The truly brilliant District Judge Lynne Matthews was addressing a 53-year-old man who had marched against lockdown with 400 other Covid sceptics in Bristol.

Judge Matthews started the hearing by reading out an article she'd seen in the Times during her lunch break. It was written by a doctor on a high dependency ward. Here is some of what the judge read:

"The patients don't ask many questions, mostly because they need to spend all of their energy breathing.

"I try to work out if one of my patients isn't answering my questions because she is delirious, because she doesn't speak English, or because she is depressed. I work out that it is probably the latter; her notes say that her husband died just before new year, from Covid.

"The most distressing part of their struggle is the air hunger. You can spot these patients easily, as they grasp the masks to their faces with both hands and gasp visibly for air.

"I almost never have good news to deliver. Hearing people cry on the other end of the phone, knowing that I am them bringing news of the worst day of their lives, is heartbreaking."

Judge Matthews read for about five minutes. Afterwards, there was near silence. Everyone in the courtroom seemed affected by what they'd heard.

Sadly, everyone except the defendant. He had been rifling through his notes almost throughout. When the judge finished, he didn't waste time launching into conspiracy theories.

He was well-spoken and mostly polite, but his words were completely baseless and dangerous. I do not know how anyone could downplay the severity of the virus after hearing what he had just heard.

At one point, he pointed to me in the press gallery and accused my paper of “gaslighting”, presumably because we have reported on the danger of coronavirus.

The judge did her utmost to reason with him. It didn’t do any good. It ended with a £1,500 fine, but there was a feeling of hopelessness I couldn’t shake.

The defendant couldn’t have had a more human illustration of what Covid does... and it didn’t even make a dent. I find that pretty scary, especially because the defendant is far from alone.

I guess there are probably parallels between Covid-deniers’ blind refusal to accept reality and what we saw at the Capitol yesterday. I think social media is having a toxic impact on our world in so many ways

Anyway, here’s the court report https://t.co/f0x73rYWUL

And here’s the hugely powerful piece in The Times https://t.co/GJLtYgnLRi