

The Great Barrington Declaration: A manifesto of death

Andre Damon
16 October 2020

This week, the White House officially embraced a policy of herd immunity in the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively declaring that the mass infection of the population is a positive good.

This took the form of a public endorsement of the Great Barrington Declaration, a manifesto by the free market American Institute for Economic Research, which calls for the abandonment of all measures to contain the pandemic. The declaration was developed in close coordination with Trump adviser Scott Atlas.

The eight-paragraph declaration cites no scientific data and does not seriously attempt to argue its case. It is, rather, a series of assertions constructed retroactively from the demand by US big business to abandon public health measures to contain the pandemic: “Schools and universities should be open for in-person teaching. Extracurricular activities, such as sports, should be resumed. Young low-risk adults should work normally, rather than from home. Restaurants and other businesses should open. Arts, music, sport and other cultural activities should resume.”

The document makes no mention of any public health measures to contain the disease, from testing to contact tracing to quarantine for the sick. This is not an omission, it is deliberate. That is because, from the standpoint of the authors of the article, mass infection, with its ensuing mass death, is a benefit to be sought.

Trump was asked at a televised town hall last night whether the policy of the administration was in fact “herd immunity.” He responded by making clear that it was, repeating again the mantra first proposed by the *New York Times*’ Thomas Friedman that “the cure can’t be worse than the problem itself”—that is, that there will be no return to restrictions on economic activity aimed at slowing the spread of the virus.

The official embrace of herd immunity is an

admission that the White House’s sabotaging of testing efforts, its failure to provide protective equipment and its misleading of the public were all deliberately designed to sacrifice human lives for the sake of the “economy.”

Most importantly, the White House’s embrace of the document is a statement of intent for mass homicide. It plans to allow additional hundreds of thousands of people to die amid a global resurgence of the pandemic caused by the premature abandonment of business closures and other efforts to contain the pandemic.

The herd immunity strategy has rightly drawn scathing condemnations from the world’s premier public health organizations. On October 15, the British medical journal the *Lancet* issued a statement condemning the policy as “a dangerous fallacy unsupported by scientific evidence.”

It argued that “there is no evidence for lasting protective immunity to SARS-CoV-2 following natural infection. Therefore, “Such a strategy would not end the COVID-19 pandemic but result in recurrent epidemics, as was the case with numerous infectious diseases before the advent of vaccination.”

The *Lancet* concluded decisively, “The evidence is very clear: controlling community spread of COVID-19 is the best way to protect our societies and economies until safe and effective vaccines and therapeutics arrive within the coming months.”

The *Lancet*’s statement followed an earlier declaration by 17 leading public health organizations, including the Big Cities Health Coalition and the American Public Health Association. They state: “If followed, the recommendations in the Great Barrington Declaration would haphazardly and unnecessarily sacrifice lives. The declaration is not a strategy, it is a political statement. It ignores sound public health

expertise.”

The public health organizations’ statement concludes that “There is no evidence that we are even remotely close to herd immunity. To the contrary, experts believe that 85 to 90 percent of the US population is still at risk of contracting SARS-Cov-2.”

It adds, “We have seen the failure of the herd immunity experiment in nations such as Sweden, which has the highest mortality rate among Nordic countries,” concluding, “It is illogical to ignore public health and scientific evidence when so many lives are at stake.”

As Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University, made clear, “Two to six million deaths is a perfectly reasonable back-of-the-envelope calculation” for how many people would die if the US proceeded with its herd immunity policy.

The open embrace of herd immunity by the White House is a declaration of war on the working class by the capitalist oligarchy. It makes clear that capitalism will no longer abide even the pretense that all human lives have value. If workers are not content to return to workplaces where the virus is rapidly spreading, they will be compelled to do so by economic compulsion or far-right and state violence.

This is why the promotion of herd immunity has been accompanied by the cutoff of all federal emergency aid and the ending of restrictions on utility shutoffs and evictions. This week, leaders of both parties made clear they have no interest in passing another economic assistance package, while states, one after another, are gutting all protections for vulnerable workers.

With the revelation last week of a far-advanced plot by militia to kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, it has become clear that a section of the ruling class views the mobilization of fascistic organizations as a necessary weapon in the enforcement of the policy of the financial oligarchy.

While the Trump administration has spearheaded the policy of mass infection, it has the broad support of the entire ruling class. Biden, when asked at his own Town Hall Thursday night how he would have responded to the pandemic, replied only that more resources needed to be made available to allow businesses and schools to reopen. The Democrats propose no measures to contain the spread of the virus, and Biden rejected any return to a “lockdown,” by which is meant a shutdown of non-

essential production to protect workers.

As for the pseudo-left organizations in and around the Democratic Party, *Jacobin* magazine, affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America, has publicly promoted Martin Kulldorff, one of the lead authors of the Great Barrington Declaration, who absurdly claimed that herd immunity is a “left-wing” position.

The fact that the herd immunity policy has found support not only within the capitalist oligarchy, but among sections of the upper-middle class speaks to the profound disorientation of this social layer. As in the 1930s, sections of the middle class, disoriented by cataclysmic events and hostile to Marxism, are gravitating toward the “cult of death” and violence embodied in fascist movements.

Workers around the world must welcome the categorical and courageous stand taken by public health experts in opposition to the ruling class’s policy of herd immunity. But this struggle will not be won by arguments.

The ruling class’s drive to allow the mass infection of the population can be imposed only by violence. In response, the working class must harness its own social and political strength in opposition to this homicidal policy.

Workers must form rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, fighting to ensure their own health and safety. The struggle against the pandemic is fundamentally not only a medical, but a political struggle, inseparable from the fight for the socialist transformation of society.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact