UK Labour Party backs Johnson government ending lockdown in "national interest"

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On the day when the UK's Covid-19 death toll passed 75,000, Parliament voted to end the national lockdown that had been in place for just four weeks.

In its place will be the three tier system, whose limited restrictions will be made all but redundant due to the government allowing the reopening of the economy, the movement of tens of millions nationwide during the festive season and allowing Christmas family gatherings for five days. While the partial national lockdown managed to cut infections in the UK by a third, they remain very high at over 13,430 yesterday, an increase of over 2,000 on the same day last week. It should be noted that the government's daily tally of cases is substantially below that of Imperial College London's authoritative monthly REACT survey of 105,000 people, taken between November 13 and 24, which found there were 72,000 infections per day.

An increase of 60,000 to 75,000 deaths, according to whether COVID appears on the death certificate, took place during the period of the lockdown. Lifting the lockdown's limited restrictions, as workplaces, schools and universities remain open, must see an exponential increase in fatalities.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020 was passed with the support of 291 Conservative MPs and comes into effect today. Expressing the insistence of big business that restrictions on making profits must end, Johnson suffered the largest rebellion of Tory MPs since the general election—with 55 voting against the Tier system out of a total of 78 MPs in opposition. Another 16 Tories did not vote.

This was despite a series of concessions Johnson made in recent days to limit a rebellion. Among the Tories opposed were senior figures including Sir Graham Brady, Greg Clark, David Davis, Iain Duncan Smith, John Redwood, and Tom Tugendhat.

Also voting against were 15 Labour MPs, 8 Democratic Unionist Party MPs and 2 Independents. One of the Independents was former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who has had the Labour whip removed by party leader Sir Keir Starmer, as part of the witch-hunt of the party's left in the anti-Semitism campaign. The Labourites voting against Johnson did so citing complaints that constituencies in the north of England were being treated unfairly, with businesses suffering and requiring more bailouts, due to being put into the highest Tier Three. They sided with several local Labour councils who are in alliance with northern based Tory MPs, including Brady, chairman of the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers.

Johnson was ultimately able to win the vote by a large majority thanks to most of Labour's 200 MPs abstaining, with Starmer abiding by his cynical pledge to only "constructive" opposition to the government.

The Tier system will be reintroduced with some modifications from its previous incarnation. All non-essential shops, gyms, hairdressers and other personal care businesses in England will be allowed to reopen, along with places of worship. Pubs and restaurants are to be fully closed under Tier 3 restrictions and can only open fully in Tier 2 areas if they serve "substantial meals"—which could be a scotch egg.

The so-called "rule of six" will be reinstated, allowing up to six people from different households to meet indoors or outdoors in Tier 1 areas, only outdoors in Tiers 2, and in limited outdoor settings in Tier 3.

Even these limited restrictions will be scrapped for a period over Christmas, with up to three households able to meet up during five-days from December 23-27. This was agreed between Johnson and the leaders of

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In a decision catastrophic to public health, the government is allowing all shops to open 24 hours a day through December and January.

The profit lust of the ruling elite means that nothing is being overlooked to wring every last penny out of the population in the run up to Christmas. This week the Arcadia group retail chain went into administration threatening 13,000 jobs and was followed within hours with the collapse of the Debenhams chain store into administration, with a further 12,000 jobs at stake. Without missing a beat it was announced Tuesday that Debenhams will be open today in a bid to sell off all remaining stock at its 124 shops, in what has been dubbed as a national "Wild Wednesday" of shopping.

Areas of the country in Tier 2 will be allowed to have fans back in football stadiums for the first time in nine months, with Arsenal the first Premier League club to host home supporters for their Europa League tie with Rapid Vienna Thursday. Ten Premier League clubs are located in Tier 2 areas and will be able to allow 2,000 fans to watch their games from today.

In the debate Johnson said the lockdown was ending even as he admitted, "The latest ONS [Office for National Statistics] figures suggest that, out of every 85 people in England, one has coronavirus—far more than in the summer. Between 24 November and yesterday, 3,222 people across the UK lost their lives."

He then reassured business and his rebels that what was being proposed was "not another lockdown, nor is this the renewal of existing measures in England. The tiers that I am proposing would mean that from tomorrow, everyone in England, including those in tier 3, will be free to leave their homes for any reason. When they do, they will find the shops open for Christmas, the hairdressers open, the nail bars open, and gyms, leisure centres and swimming pools open."

He then declared, "I am not seeking open-ended measures … on the contrary, the regulations come with a sunset clause at the end of 2 February … they can be extended beyond 2 February only if this House votes for them."

A review of the tier system on December 16 would be more "granular", he added, with an aim of allowing some areas to move to an even less restrictive tiers. "We will try to be as sensitive as possible to local effort and to local achievement in bringing the pandemic

under control," he declared.

The *DailyMail* reported that Tory "whips have been assuring Conservatives with constituencies in high tiers that they will be downgraded within weeks, while London Tories are pushing for a pledge that the city will not be upgraded to Tier 3."

Starmer responded, "Labour has supported the government in two national lockdowns … We recognise the need for continued restrictions, but it is not in the national interest to vote these restrictions down today and we will allow them to pass."

Tory MP Jeremy Wright summed up the position of the anti-lockdown, anti-tier Covid Recovery Group rebels, stating that the new measures were "profoundly damaging to hospitality businesses in particular, which will be obliged to close during the most lucrative part of the year ... a decision to relax restrictions at a review on 16 December would take effect only from 19 December, meaning that most, if not all, of the crucial pre-Christmas season would be lost in an area where the visitor economy is crucial."

The Johnson government was the first to declare openly in favour of a herd immunity policy, before growing public opposition and a series of strikes by workers forced it into a national lockdown. But this has continued to be its undeclared policy throughout. It ended the initial lockdown within three months, with all schools, colleges and universities opened by September, vastly increasing the spread of the deadly disease.

Speaking about the number of deaths of elderly people of coronavirus, and whether the government could "protect every old person," Tory MP Sir Charles Walker felt able to state openly, "No government can abolish death, it is impossible—615,000 people die every year in this country and not every death is a tragedy … Please can we change the narrative when we talk about death? Not all deaths are equal—there is the same outcome, but to compare the death of someone of 90 with the death of someone of 19 is not right."