

Ontario care worker denounces political establishment over disastrous conditions in care homes

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The *World Socialist Web Site* reported yesterday on the COVID-19 deaths of five care workers at long-term care homes in little more than a week—two in Ontario, two in Alberta, and one in Quebec. These entirely preventable fatalities are a direct product of the criminal policies of the ruling elite, whose governments have prioritized corporate profits and investor wealth over the protection of human lives throughout the pandemic.

The WSWWS received a letter from a Toronto-area care worker in response to these latest tragic developments. It is reprinted below.

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One of the most remarkable aspects of this “second wave” of COVID-19 infections among residents and staff of LTC (long-term care) and Retirement facilities in Ontario is that it is worse than the first.

As a worker in this field, I lived through a serious outbreak at my facility in April of last year. The pandemic, to a certain extent, took everyone by surprise. There was conflicting information, and workers in these communities, as well as the general public, were frightened and confused about how to handle the situation. Over time, however, as our knowledge increased, so should have our preparedness. Our knowledge and training in PPE (personal protective equipment) improved, and protocols should have been put in place and enforced that would have significantly mitigated the effects of a second wave.

Somehow this has not happened in enough cases, and there are currently more communities in outbreak in my area now than there were in March or April of last year. Many communities are facing far larger and more devastating outbreaks than ever before.

Politicians are actively denying that these

communities are facing staffing crises when they clearly are, based on their own numbers and frequent reports by workers within them. 2,877 COVID-related deaths have occurred in care homes in Ontario, fully 61 percent of all COVID-related deaths in the province. An outbreak at a property I had worked at previously has nearly 60 infections now, with at least 25 staff infections.

Large numbers of staff infections such as these put the facility under tremendous pressure, forcing them to seek help from outside agency workers. These workers are often put in a terrible position: under-trained, under-prepared, poorly paid and forced by the nature of their work (and lack of full-time employment at a liveable wage) to go from facility to facility, endangering themselves, their families, and the people they care for. We have had several instances here of workers being sent to our home, having not been informed by their agency that we were in a situation of active outbreak.

Some operators I know, based on direct conversations with workers within them, are not reporting their infection figures accurately to the public, or even to their own staff. Workplace transmission has been clearly identified as the major cause of community spread here, and it is not slowing down.

The Ontario government has made promises of putting an “iron ring” around seniors, but from the level of the individual workplace, nothing has changed. Our workers are treated with the same indignity they always were, paid low wages with now vastly increased expectations on them, and at far greater personal risk.

The government of Ontario is attempting, despite their rhetoric, to put a mask of normalcy on this situation, by ignoring or downplaying an unfolding tragedy, and sending citizens back to work and children

back to school.

While the Long-Term Care crisis is getting media attention, sectors such as “retirement living,” facing the same challenges, are not, and the tragedy is more widespread than commonly known. Our fragile seniors here are confined to their rooms, lonely and isolated, growing weaker by the day as this disease—made in its effects far worse by systemic problems workers in this industry have long complained about and reported to no avail—continues its devastation.

The operators of these homes and residences, meanwhile, protect themselves with legislation. Steps have been taken to indemnify companies from prosecution and lawsuits by residents’ family members. The company I work for is facing multimillion-dollar lawsuits (and was even before the pandemic).

Several former politicians are personally profiting from their role in presiding over the privatization of LTC and seniors’ care. A case in point is former Conservative Premier Mike Harris. He is the chair of Chartwell, one of the main for-profit operators, and is now being awarded the Order of Ontario by the Ford government.

At the moment there is no clear end in sight. We cannot wait for things to be “over,” or to “settle down,” before taking stock of this situation and addressing how the desire for profit and for corrupt political gain has come at the cost of some of our dearest and most beloved citizens, whose lives must be valued above all such concerns.



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