

Democratic Party pursues the deadly policy of herd immunity

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Little more than one year ago, the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee convened to review the rapid and dangerous developments in the spread of the novel coronavirus in Wuhan city, Hubei Province, China, and neighboring countries and as far as the United States.

On January 30, the committee reached a final decision warranting a Public Health Emergency of International Concern declaration, the strongest recommendation to the world to prepare for an outbreak of pandemic proportions.

One year later, having squandered every opportunity to eradicate the pandemic once and for all, the United States under the control of the Democratic Party is doubling down in pursuit of what has correctly been termed a policy of herd immunity that places profits over the well-being of its population.

In March of 2020, the WSWS aptly characterized the ruling class's aim as malign neglect, where "governments are making a deliberate decision to minimize their response, to adopt an attitude of indifference to the spread of the virus." The Democratic Party only offers a somewhat more polished form of this policy compared to Trump's more crude and raucous approach. Their goals, however, are the same—an economy unrestrained by the demands of the pandemic.

Barely a full day into his presidency, President Joe Biden delivered the following astounding remarks to a world audience, saying, "There is nothing we can do to change the trajectory of the pandemic in the next several months." On Friday, he added, "A lot of America is hurting. The virus is surging. We're 400,000 dead expected to reach well over 600,000."

Nothing we can do, Mr. President?

The *New York Times*, the premier newspaper of the

bourgeois press, has provided information from health experts indicating there are measures that could indeed be taken to curb the death toll. Writing on Sunday, the *Times* says that "millions more will still be infected and become ill unless people continue to wear masks and maintain social distancing measures until midsummer or later, according to a new model by scientists at Columbia University."

It bears reviewing the data provided to the *Times* by Dr. Jeffrey Shaman, an epidemiologist at Columbia. According to his estimates, more than 105 million people have been infected across the US. This is four times higher than the COVID-19 tracking dashboards because most infections are either asymptomatic or mild enough that they have gone unnoticed. Millions more will continue to be infected until a sufficient number of people develop immunity, including those who have been vaccinated, to drive the reproductive number under one. However, many infectious disease researchers speaking to the *Times* warned that it would take months before enough people in the US are vaccinated to allow for a return to a more normal way of life.

However, if restrictions were to be lifted in February, Dr. Shaman's team estimated that there would be 29 million additional total infections by July. He said, "There are people who are going to want to relax the controls we have in place. If we start thinking, 'We've got a vaccine, there's a light at the end of the tunnel, we can stop in a couple of months,' that's way too soon." Even if restrictions were lifted by mid-March, their modeling notes there would be 6 million additional infections above current estimates.

On the other hand, if more substantial restrictions were immediately implemented and kept in place until late July, there would be 19 million fewer infections.

The difference here is almost 50 million infections, the difference between the policy of herd immunity and death versus the mass implementation of public health measures to save lives and livelihoods. This means roughly 250,000 deaths could be averted. Clearly, the president, with all his access to advisers, scientists and epidemiologists, is aware of these calculations as well as those by the financial oligarchs.

Every analytical model works with certain assumptions that must be held constant to reach statistical conclusions. Dr. Trevor Bedford, an associate professor in the Vaccine and Infectious Division at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and the University of Washington, noted that the pace of vaccine rollout is unknown and would impact these conclusions. This means that if the vaccine rollout is much slower, the loosening of restrictions will lead to even more infections.

COVID-19 vaccine production globally has been challenged by delays. AstraZeneca is facing shortages as its yield from its production facility is 60 percent under projections, threatening Europe's vaccine rollout, which will strain supply and distribution of the existing vaccines.

Also, Pfizer has recently relabeled its vaccine vials, saying they are suitable for six doses instead of five, which means the US will now be receiving 16 percent less in bulk vaccines. The extra sixth dose to be drawn requires a special syringe called a low dead space syringe. Though the CDC said it would adjust to increase the number of needles they are shipping with the vaccines, they may not be the correct syringes that can extract the sixth dose. This will lead to considerable vaccine wastage.

More concerning, and not incorporated in Columbia University's model, are the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 variants. Specifically, the B.1.1.7 virus also known as the UK variant has been shown to be more contagious and now also more deadly. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted on Friday, "We have now learned that, in addition to spreading more quickly, the new variant of the virus may also be associated with a higher degree of mortality. It is therefore more important than ever that we all follow the rules and stay at home, protect the NHS [National Health Service] and save lives."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, there are now nearly 200 cases of the B.1.1.7 detected in the US across 22 states. Florida, California and New York have the largest number of such cases. There are concerns that by March, the B.1.1.7 variant will be the dominant strain in the US. Epidemiologists fear with the dominance of the new strain there will be a surge of infections in the spring.

Dr. Michael Osterholm, a member of Biden's coronavirus taskforce, told CNN, "The data is mounting—and some of it I can't share—that clearly supports that B.1.1.7 is causing more severe illness and increased death. Already we know this variant has increased transmission, and so this is more very bad news."

The president's pandemic policy, to see schools and workplaces open in the first 100 days of his administration, seeks to see the entire workforce at their stations generating profits for the corporations. However, there is much that can be done to avert more death and suffering. Workers and teachers must be forewarned that the course pursued by the Democratic Party is no different than that of the Republicans under Trump. It is to Wall Street that all of them have sworn their allegiances.



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