

# Over 1,200 doctors and scientists condemn UK COVID-19 policy as “dangerous and unethical”

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More than 1,200 scientists and doctors have signed the open letter to *The Lancet* medical journal of July 7 opposing the UK government’s plan for mass infection as a “dangerous and unethical experiment.”

Just over 120 experts had signed the letter when it was first published. A week later, that number has increased tenfold.

On Monday, eleven of these signatories issued an emergency statement sharpening their criticisms of Britain’s coronavirus policy.

The statement correctly identifies the Conservative government’s strategy as one of “herd immunity by mass infection,” which will “place 48% of the population (children included) who are not yet fully vaccinated, including the clinically vulnerable and the immunosuppressed, at unacceptable risk.”

It indicts Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his government for “recklessly exposing millions to the acute and long-term impacts of mass infection” and accuses them of an “abdication of the government’s fundamental duty to protect public health.” The authors cite head of the World Health Organisation Emergencies Programme Mike Ryan’s comment that “the logic of more people being infected is better, is I think logic that has proven its moral emptiness and its epidemiological stupidity previously.”

At an emergency press conference organised the day the statement was released, Dr Helen Salisbury, a lecturer at Oxford University and columnist for the *BMJ* (formerly, *British Medical Journal*) described the government’s pursuit of herd immunity by infection, rather than vaccination, as “criminal.”

Dr Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of *The Lancet*, condemned the government’s chief medical officer Professor Chris Whitty and chief scientific adviser Sir

Patrick Vallance. Horton stated, “The faux deference that you saw from both of them to the prime minister [at Monday’s Downing Street press conference] in trying to shore up his decision making, I thought, was an abdication of their independent role as government advisers.”

Referring to Whitty’s claim that there was “widespread agreement across the scientific community” with the government’s position, Horton commented, “I’m afraid you have to conclude that the chief medical officer is wilfully misrepresenting scientific opinion across the country, and that is extraordinary to observe.”

The massive response to the original letter to *The Lancet* provided a damning refutation of Whitty’s claims of consensus. Its assessment of the Johnson government’s policy is devastating. Warning of the “dangers of relying on immunity by natural infection,” it listed as risks: “creating a generation left with chronic health problems and disability,” creating “a reservoir of infection, which will probably accelerate spread when schools and universities re-open in autumn,” providing “fertile ground for the emergence of vaccine-resistant variants,” and “applying further pressure” to the health service “at a time when millions of people are waiting for medical procedures and routine care.”

The letter added that the policies would “continue to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and marginalised, deepening inequalities.”

That these warnings are now so widely endorsed by those who know best testifies to the scale of the crime being pioneered by the UK ruling class, swiftly followed by its international counterparts.

Since signalling its intention to end all public health restrictions on July 19, the government has announced plans to end travel quarantines and school bubbles and

remove mask mandates. Health Secretary Sajid Javid has admitted NHS waiting lists could rise to 13 million.

The European Championship football semi-final and final became massive super-spreader events as the government used every dirty trick to proclaim a “return to normality.”

Infections have continued to surge, on their way to the 100,000 cases a day admitted by the health secretary and far beyond. Hospitalisations and deaths are also rising markedly, both increasing by 50 percent in the last week. Last Thursday, roughly 74,000 school children were off school with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19.

The situation in the Netherlands points to the even larger explosion of infections to come. After restrictions on cafes, restaurants, clubs and nightclubs were lifted in June, cases of coronavirus have increased 500 percent in the last week.

Strengthening opposition among scientists reflects broader and growing opposition to these criminal policies in the population. Multiple polls show large majorities in favour of maintaining social distancing and mandatory mask wearing in indoor settings. An *Opinium* poll of the *Observer* found that 50 percent wanted the July 19 reopening date delayed.

But neither this popular sentiment nor the informed warnings of scientific experts find any political articulation within the framework of capitalist politics. Rather, the principled statements opposing the policies of social murder have been made in the teeth of a determined campaign of censorship and the McCarthyite witch-hunting of scientists.

It requires a forensic level of attention to the national media to find any evidence of the recent criticisms made of the government and its advisers by Horton et al., or of the massive increase in support for *The Lancet* letter. Reports are for the most part buried in the inside pages and kept well outside of online top stories. The worst culprit is the nominally liberal *Guardian*, which makes only the briefest of references to the latest statement and does not mention at all the number of new signatories to the original letter on its page eight story in Wednesday’s print edition.

Editors are reinforcing the united front in the ruling class in favour of reopening. The scientists’ emergency statement argues that “the government is pursuing policies that will appease a political minority of its own backbenchers and lobbyists.” But the truth is that ending restrictions is the majority policy of big business, which is also represented, with a greater degree of nervousness

about the socially explosive consequences, by the Labour Party along with their corporatist trade union partners.

The same conspiracy of silence greeted two *BMJ* editorials earlier this year accusing the government of “social murder” and creating “a maelstrom of avoidable harm.” By isolating principled scientists, the ruling elite seek to clear the field for the most violently reactionary forces. In the right-wing press and on the Tory backbenches, popular opposition to the government’s pandemic policy is decried as “idleness” or “cowardice,” and scientific criticism is vilified as the plotting of freedom-hating, “communist” would-be dictators. Similar treatment has been meted out to scientists opposing the political lie—designed to facilitate the policy of social murder and agitate for war by scapegoating China—that COVID-19 originated in a Wuhan lab.

The brutal, anti-scientific agenda of Johnson and his media attack dogs dictates developments despite expert and popular opposition because it is supported by the wealth and power of the ruling class. A scientific, rational and humane programme for combatting COVID-19 requires its own allied social force.

Success in the struggle against the pandemic depends on the political mobilisation of the international working class, independent of the social democratic and pseudo-left parties and the trade unions, in the struggle for socialism.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is working to establish a global network of rank-and-file safety committees which, working closely with scientific and medical professionals, must shut down unnecessary and unsafe workplaces and ensure the strictest safety measures in necessary production and distribution. These committees will lead the fight for full pay for workers required to stay at home, fully funded and effective test-and-trace systems, ventilation and other essential workplace safety measures, and a swift and equitable rollout of vaccines, all to be paid for out of the obscene wealth of the multi-millionaire and billionaire oligarchy.

Workers and the most principled scientists and medical professionals must be united on this perspective.



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