

UK government: 50,000 annual COVID-19 deaths are “acceptable”

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Britain's *i* newspaper has revealed that Prime Minister Boris Johnson has conducted “a cost-benefit analysis” to determine whether “saving lives” through further lockdowns can be justified based on the “effect of deaths on the UK economy.”

Two government advisors told the *i* that closed-door discussion had established an “acceptable level of Covid-19 deaths” at around 1,000 deaths a week.

According to one adviser, Johnson had privately accepted that there would be at least a further 30,000 deaths in the UK over the next year, and that he would “only consider imposing further [COVID-19 safety] restrictions if that figure looked like it could rise above 50,000.”

Johnson, who has the social conscience of a Heinrich Himmler, put the acceptable cost of saving the life of a COVID-19 patient at £30,000. However, this proposed upper limit for treating a patient was then combined with a calculation of “how much each life lost costs the UK economy.”

According to the two sources, “the analysis shows that the cost of keeping the annual death rate below 50,000 would outweigh the cost to the UK economy of allowing it to rise above this level.” This translates to “deaths from Covid of 137 a day, or just under 1,000 a week.”

Professor Graham Medley, chair of the Government’s pandemic modelling group Spi-m and member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), told the *i* by way of justification, “Measures such as vaccinating children against meningitis or imposing speed limits on roads reduce death and disease, but also cost money and limit freedoms.”

The *i*’s sources stressed that “it won’t be an immediate reaction” and that only a “sustained rate of death of around a 1,000 a week for two or three weeks” would “lead to discussion on restrictions being reimposed.” Not even a “discussion” on lockdowns will

take place. The proposed trigger for such a possible reconsideration was meant solely to legitimise the ending of lockdown and the removal of all measures of mitigation on July 19. It was never intended to be implemented.

Sympathising with Johnson’s supposed *dilemma*, the *i*’s source states, “Unfortunately, prime ministers have to weigh up the cost of saving lives to the impact on the economy. No one wants to talk about that’s how it works.”

But Johnson has previously made clear exactly “how it works.” His embittered former adviser Dominic Cummings revealed WhatsApp messages sent by Johnson to his advisers last October, declaring of COVID fatalities, “The median age is 82–81 for men 85 for women... There are max 3m [million] in this country aged over 80. It shows we don’t go for nationwide lockdown.”

Events have moved on since these criminal calculations were made. Based on data over the past seven days in the UK, deaths from COVID-19 have already reached just under 800 a week or 110 every day. For three of those days the death toll exceeded the 137 figure. By next week, the death toll will almost certainly exceed 1,000 over seven days, an annual equivalent exceeding 50,000.

A month from now, predictions of 50,000 deaths a year will look wildly optimistic.

Next week will see all primary and secondary schools reopen in England and Wales, a super-spreader event of massive proportions. Since schools reopened in Scotland from August 16, daily cases have risen from 1,567 to 6,835, well over 300 percent. In the past week alone, they have risen by 114 percent.

Yesterday, the modelling group of SAGE warned that ministers must plan for a huge rise in COVID-19 cases as schools return “by the end of September 2021.”

That is why the government’s response to the leaks to the *i* newspaper was to state, “There is no set number of

acceptable deaths from Covid.” This was not to deny the 50,000 figure being cited, but to make clear that no number of deaths will prompt a change in the government’s murderous policy of letting the virus rip through the population.

The citing of costs versus benefits is merely an alternative version of Trump’s insistence that “the cure must not be worse than the disease.” What “cost benefit analysis” means in the discussion on the pandemic is that working people will pay with their lives and health to preserve capitalist profitability.

The policy of the ruling class in Britain and internationally remains that which was so bluntly stated by Johnson after being forced to agree to a second truncated lockdown late last year: “No more fucking lockdowns—let the bodies pile high in their thousands.”

Ending this catastrophic situation demands the independent political intervention of the working class.

The pandemic has claimed over 155,000 lives in Britain and officially over 4.5 million worldwide. The true figure is more than 10 million. None of this needed to happen. A properly conducted policy of lockdowns, involving the closure of schools and the maintenance of only socially necessary production, combined with the use of track and trace technology and scientifically approved personal protective equipment, could have successfully eliminated the virus before its spread worldwide and before the emergence of more deadly strains, especially with the development of vaccines.

Instead, apart from occasional and limited lockdowns, the virus was given almost free rein as the capitalist class prioritised private profit over public health.

The political allies of the banks and corporations stretched across the official political spectrum, with Johnson and Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, Donald Trump and Joe Biden, and their counterparts internationally all united in opposition to the fundamental interests of working people and their families.

On August 20, the *World Socialist Web Site* issued a call for workers in every country to mount a strategic, life and death struggle for the eradication of COVID-19. We not only called for the rejection of the “herd immunity” agenda advanced by Johnson and his ilk, but also of policies limited to “mitigation” seeking only to limit the pandemic’s impact through vaccination, masking, social distancing and similar measures.

The rapid escalation and global spread of the highly infectious Delta variant have confirmed that “herd immunity” cannot be realised and that mitigation alone

only allows the virus to spread, mutate and claim millions more lives. The WSWS concluded, “Therefore, the only viable strategy is eradication, based on the policies advanced by the foremost epidemiologists, virologists and other scientists throughout the pandemic. Eradication entails the universal deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat COVID-19, coordinated on a global scale, to stamp out the virus once and for all.”

Eliminating COVID-19 demands a unified struggle by educators, parents, autoworkers, transport workers, logistics workers, health care workers and the entire working class internationally.

To this end, on August 22, the WSWS organised an online discussion, “For a Global Strategy to Stop the Pandemic and Save Lives!” The event brought together eminent scientists, Professor Michael Baker of the University of Otago, New Zealand; Dr. Małgorzata Gasperowicz of the University of Calgary, Canada; and Dr. Yaneer Bar-Yam from the New England Complex Systems Institute in the US, to explain the necessity of an elimination strategy, with teachers in the US, Brazil and Australia on the frontline of the fight against the criminal policies of the ruling elite. Also participating was Lisa Diaz, a parent opposed to sending her children into an unsafe school environment, whose description of the situation in the UK prompted Professor Baker to describe Johnson’s policies as a “barbaric experiment on the British people.”

The meeting provided workers and young people with a scientific approach to combating the pandemic. It advanced the necessary political perspective on which such a fight must be based, insisting that no limits must be placed on what is spent to eradicate COVID-19. The necessary resources must be taken from the fabulous wealth hoarded by the banks, major corporations and the super-rich and put to the service of humanity. This is the perspective that must now be taken up by millions the world over.



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