

Biden's message to Wall Street: Mass death will not interfere with corporate profits

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As the World Health Organization (WHO) warned of the “very high” risks posed by the Omicron variant of COVID-19, President Joe Biden appeared on national television Monday to make clear that the US government is opposed to any measures, apart from vaccination, to save lives in response to the new danger.

Biden declared that his administration would not implement “shutdowns or lockdowns,” vowing to “reopen our country ... reopen our businesses” and ... “reopen our schools.”

On Friday, US financial markets had their largest one-day selloff of 2021, fueled by concerns that the Omicron variant, which could potentially evade vaccines and pre-existing immunity, would force governments to take emergency measures.

“Friday confirmed for us that COVID is still the investor narrative,” Greg Bassuk, the CEO of AXS Investments told NBC News. “Up until last month or two, we were seeing a lot of strength in the market.” The concerns of Wall Street—and the financial oligarchy—is that the Omicron variant could disrupt its speculative frenzy.

But Biden delivered to Wall Street a clear message: There is no level of mass death that will compel the US government to interrupt the holiday shopping season through life-saving social distancing measures.

The market immediately rallied. “The S&P rose by as much as 1.5 percent Monday,” NBC News noted, “as investors seemed to be reassured by President Joe Biden’s remarks.”

His rejection of critical public health measures is not based on science but on the economic interests of the capitalist ruling class. Workplaces must remain open so that workers can continue producing surplus value and profit for the capitalists. Schools must remain open so that parents can be kept at work. Workplaces and schools are the principal vectors for the spread of COVID-19

throughout the entire population, with the working class, and its children, hit the hardest.

In other words, the lives of the American population are completely meaningless as far as the financial oligarchy is concerned.

Biden justified his declaration by pointing to the availability of vaccines, the effectiveness of which could be undermined by the Omicron variant. “If people are vaccinated and wear their masks,” Biden said, “there’s no need for a lockdown.”

By counter-posing vaccination to public health measures, Biden only undermines vaccination. As WHO technical lead Maria Van Kerkhove has said over and over and over, the mantra must be “Vaccines AND, not vaccines only. ... We can regain control of this virus through a combination of public health, social and medical interventions.”

Biden’s declaration that vaccines will protect the public without any other public health measures is further undermined by the abject failure to provide vaccinations for much of the world’s population, including Africa—where the new variant apparently originated—and where just 7 percent of the population is fully vaccinated.

Moreover, a substantial section of the American population itself remains unvaccinated, the product of the reactionary ravings of the fascistic right, abetted by the Democratic Party, and the absence of any systematic campaign to educate the population.

Biden, who as president has overseen the preventable deaths of 392,000 Americans, gave his speech in front of Christmas decorations, saying that it “was great to see so many families getting together this Thanksgiving.”

The speech was full of lies. After a month in which 75,000 Americans had died from COVID-19, Biden said, “We’re seeing deaths from Delta come down.” On Monday, Michigan announced that its COVID-19 hospitalization rate had hit the highest level ever, after

requesting assistance from the military to staff its hospitals. Nationally, the gradual decline in cases has leveled off and begun to rise, following a surge of new cases.

Biden added that the new variant of COVID-19 was “not a cause for panic,” echoing Trump’s declaration in 2020 that he sought to “play down” the threat of COVID-19 because he did not “want to create a panic.”

The president presented an absurd picture of the current state of the pandemic, saying, “We’re in a very different place as we enter the month of December this month compared to where we were last Christmas.”

He did not refer to the most terrible comparison between today and a year ago. At the end of November 2020, some 287,000 Americans had died and total cases stood at 14.3 million. At the same point in 2021, the death toll has risen to nearly 800,000 and the number of infections to nearly 50 million.

There will be far more empty seats at family dinner tables this holiday season. One in every 35 people in America aged 85 or older has died of COVID-19.

The US propagandist machine immediately took up Biden’s efforts to downplay the threat posed by the new variant. Article after article told the public not to “panic.” A piece by the *New York Times*’s David Leonhardt was typical.

“To be clear, there is genuine uncertainty about Omicron,” Leonhardt wrote. “Maybe it will prove to be worse than the very early signs suggest and cause more severe illness than Delta. But assuming the worst about each worrisome new variant is not a science-based, rational response.”

In fact, a basic principle of public health is the “precautionary principle”—that if the threat is unknown, then maximal measures must be taken until it is fully understood. Leonhardt advocates the opposite. Based on unfounded claims that the Omicron variant might not be “worrisome,” he advocates that nothing be done to protect the population—until it is too late.

The Delta variant is killing 1,000 Americans every day and thousands more across the globe. Under these circumstances, the *Times* seeks to convince its readers that a “science-based, rational response” is to ignore the WHO’s warnings about the “very high” risks of the new variant.

There is no doubt that Biden owes his victory in the 2020 elections to mass revulsion at Trump’s refusal to fight the pandemic, including his indifference to mass death and hostility to necessary public health measures.

But Biden’s policy today is essentially no different from Trump’s policy of a year ago.

In a tweet on November 1, 2020, Trump declared that there will be “NO LOCKDOWNS” as COVID-19 cases in the US spiked to new highs. “Biden wants to LOCKDOWN our Country, maybe for years. Crazy!” Trump declared.

Today, it is Biden who pledges “no lockdowns” and, like Trump, boasts about the supposedly booming economy. At the White House Monday, he touted “record job creation, record economic growth of this country.”

Biden has embraced the homicidal policy demanded by the US financial aristocracy. In his speech Monday, he made clear that there is no level of death that will lead Wall Street and its government in Washington to accept any measures that interfere with profit-making.

The measures necessary to stop the pandemic can only come through a mass movement of the working class that does not accept the prerogatives of the capitalist system.

The interests of the working class, in the United States and internationally, are diametrically opposed to the policies of the two big business parties and the capitalist class they serve. Workers must demand the implementation of critical emergency measures to stop the pandemic, based on a strategy of elimination and eradication.

These demands offer a way forward for the international working class against the capitalist perspective of mass infection and mass death. To investigate the causes of the pandemic catastrophe and develop the independent movement of the working class, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International have initiated the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The WSWS has already begun taking testimony from workers and scientists. We urge working people and students to support and participate in the work of this Inquest and to take up the fight for socialism.



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