

Mobilize the working class to stop the pandemic and the Omicron surge!

Statement of the Political Committee of the Socialist Equality Party (US)
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1. As the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 spreads globally, official claims about the COVID-19 pandemic have once again proven to be totally false. The Biden administration in the United States and capitalist governments globally are approaching the pandemic with criminal recklessness. They are backed by the corporate media, the unions and public health officials, such as Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. Ashish Jha, who are violating their professional responsibility to protect society.

In the two weeks since Omicron was declared a “variant of concern” by the World Health Organization (WHO), it has become clear that the pandemic has entered a new and far more dangerous stage. The variant has now been sequenced in 63 countries, many of which have confirmed community transmission. It is spreading exponentially in South Africa, the UK and Denmark, which conduct widespread variant surveillance and have high immunity against COVID-19. It is forecast to become the dominant variant globally in the coming weeks.

Within days, it was known that Omicron spreads more quickly than previous variants. It is initially estimated to be at least twice as transmissible as the Delta variant that has caused hundreds of millions of infections and millions of deaths worldwide since May 2021.

Daily new cases have skyrocketed throughout southern Africa faster than any previous wave of the pandemic, with South Africa jumping from an average of 420 daily new cases to 22,388 daily new cases in just the past three weeks. With a countrywide test positivity rate of roughly 30 percent, thousands of cases now go undetected each day. The spread of the virus is totally out of control, conditions which are forecast to be replicated worldwide.

Initial studies indicate that Omicron is more capable of causing reinfections and breakthrough infections than any previous variant. On Wednesday, preliminary data was released showing a dramatic reduction in the ability of the Pfizer mRNA vaccine to prevent infection with Omicron.

The studies indicate that, in essence, people who have received a third “booster” shot of vaccine (only 4.1 percent of the world population) have roughly as much protection against infection by Omicron as a double-vaccinated person had against the wild type of the virus. People who have received two doses of vaccine (only 45 percent of the world population) are likely almost entirely unprotected against infection from Omicron. Those who have received only one dose of vaccine or are unvaccinated appear to remain unprotected from infection.

The major scientific question that is yet to be determined is the virulence of the new variant, or the severity of infections, because this is a lagging indicator that will be determined in the coming weeks. However, in South Africa new hospital admissions are now doubling roughly every five days, and within three weeks total hospitalizations have already reached 31 percent of previous peak levels.

2. Contrary to the false claims by capitalist politicians and the corporate media that Omicron will be a “mild” variant that will gently provide immunity to all those infected, many scientists have warned that Omicron threatens to qualitatively deepen the already catastrophic global surge driven by the Delta variant. Even if Omicron is less virulent and the percentage who become severely ill or die is reduced, the sheer volume of infections means that potentially millions more will needlessly be cut down by the virus.

Politicians have made cynical and unscientific comparisons of COVID-19 to the seasonal flu to justify a refusal to implement any public health measures to slow the spread of the virus. In reality, for large sections of the population—in particular, the elderly and immunocompromised—the flu can be catastrophic. Similarly, the policy of “living with” COVID-19 means allowing tens if not hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable sections of society to prematurely die.

Furthermore, the rapid spread of Omicron through global society, in particular, among highly-vaccinated populations will place evolutionary pressures on the virus to further mutate. Every day, the danger grows that an even more transmissible, vaccine-resistant or virulent strain of the virus could emerge.

The evolution of Omicron itself is the result of the policies deliberately pursued by capitalist governments globally. Their malice aforethought, or premeditation, has allowed COVID-19 to spread entirely unchecked or only slightly mitigated by limited vaccination programs. Omicron has wholly exposed the failure of the vaccine-only approach, which has left society several steps behind the virus.

3. Throughout the pandemic, and even in the face of the threat of Omicron, public health has been subordinated to private profit and the social interests of the financial oligarchy. A rising stock market is now a leading indicator of deaths to come.

The rapid spread of Omicron triggered a dip in stock markets globally on November 26. In response, the Biden administration in the US, Johnson in the UK, the new coalition government in Germany, and dozens of other world leaders immediately

reassured the markets that no lockdowns or stringent public health measures would be implemented. With extraordinary rapidity, they all pledged not to contain the pandemic but rather to keep schools and businesses open amid the holiday shopping season.

An article published Tuesday in the *New York Times* highlights this process. Titled “The Stock Market’s Covid Pattern: Faster Recovery From Each Panic,” the article notes that “Each bout of pandemic-driven volatility in the stock market since February 2020 has been shorter than the one before, and followed by a recovery to a new high. The S&P 500 through Monday had recovered nearly all its losses from its previous peak after Omicron’s existence was announced by officials on Nov. 26.

“Wall Street’s performance,” the *Times* noted, “has at times disregarded the human toll of the pandemic as it instead zeroed in on other factors that could drive corporate profits, like low interest rates and government spending.”

4. There is no modern precedent for world governments expressing the level of indifference to society that they have throughout the pandemic. Their homicidal policies serve the social, political and economic interests of the financial elite, whose wealth has skyrocketed over the past two years. A substantial section of the ruling class views the death of the elderly, with its reduction of life expectancy and lowered welfare costs, as a positive outcome of their pandemic policies.

In 2020 alone, the world’s billionaires amassed \$3.6 trillion while roughly 100 million people were driven into extreme poverty, according to a recent report by the World Inequality Lab. Both figures have substantially increased in 2021, while an estimated over 12 million people have died from COVID-19 worldwide since the start of the pandemic.

5. It is now abundantly clear that ending the pandemic is not primarily a medical question. It requires a political and economic struggle to implement the scientific measures necessary to stop viral transmission in every country. This scientific program has been known since the virus was first eliminated in China in April 2020, followed by other Asia-Pacific countries.

The necessary measures to eliminate COVID-19 include the temporary closure of schools and nonessential workplaces with social supports for all affected workers, combined with mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, the provision of high-quality masks, the rapid vaccination of the world population and other public health measures. These measures are increasingly popular in the working class and would be widely adopted if fully funded, explained through mass media and planned comprehensively.

The maintenance of the elimination strategy in China provides the most critical lessons for the international working class on how to stop the pandemic. Widespread lockdowns from January-March 2020 effectively ended all community transmission of COVID-19 within China, with some regions lifting restrictions in April 2020. This allowed the country to reopen internally while setting up a strict two-week quarantining program for all international travelers to prevent the importation of new cases. Through a massive testing and contact tracing program, whenever outbreaks occur they are quickly stamped out. This policy, combined with mass vaccination, has wide support in the Chinese working class.

China’s effective response, which was mirrored in many other countries, demonstrates that COVID-19 can be eliminated. In a country of over 1.4 billion people, only two people have died from the virus since May 16, 2020, compared to 701,170 Americans and roughly 5 million people globally. The Socialist Equality Party completely rejects the claim that the scientific measures taken in China, which are necessary to save lives, represent a violation of democratic rights.

6. The principal obstacle to ending the pandemic has always been the economic interests of the ruling class, which will not accept any infringement on its personal enrichment. The basic features of world capitalism—the division of the world into rival nation-states and the subordination of social needs to private profit—make impossible all attempts at social planning and a globally coordinated effort to eliminate COVID-19 in every country.

In order to implement the scientific program required to stop the pandemic, prevent the development of more dangerous variants and save millions of lives, the international working class must develop a powerful social movement aimed at fundamentally transforming the economic structure of society. Workers must build rank-and-file committees at every school and workplace, independently of the corporatist unions that have enforced the homicidal reopening policies on behalf of the ruling elites, to initiate this struggle and unify across all industries and national boundaries.

Fundamentally, the fight against COVID-19 is a fight against the capitalist system. The Socialist Equality Party (US) calls upon all workers to fight for a socialist program based on a massive redistribution of wealth and the democratic control of the productive forces by the working masses themselves.

7. The capitalist response to the sixth global surge of the pandemic and the emergence of Omicron is predicated on lies, cover-up and misinformation, and aims to disarm the public in the face of an unprecedented crisis. The Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site* just four days before the emergence of the Omicron variant, is documenting these ongoing crimes as part of a comprehensive investigation into every aspect of the pandemic.

The Inquest is being conducted to educate the working class and lay the basis for a mass struggle to end the pandemic. The SEP calls upon all workers and readers of the WSWS to actively participate in the Inquest and popularize its findings internationally.

As 2022 approaches, we cannot have another year of mass death. The fight against COVID-19 must be deepened on the political, economic and social planes. The coming shocks from the Omicron variant will profoundly alter mass consciousness and lay the basis for the development of a powerful movement to end the pandemic and transform society on a world scale.



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