

UK Tory government weaponises Christmas against COVID restrictions

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Britain recorded more than 100,000 COVID cases in a single day Wednesday, as the highly contagious Omicron variant achieves dominance across the country. The 106,122 cases were up a third on the same day last week.

Another 140 deaths were reported, taking the UK's official total to 147,573. Going by Office for National Statistics data for the number of fatalities where COVID is mentioned on a death certificate, 173,000 people have been killed.

The capital city, London, is the epicentre of Omicron in the UK. Yesterday London recorded a staggering 27,799 cases, up by nearly 50 percent from a week ago. December 20, the most recent day for hospitalisation data, saw London recording 302 admissions—up nearly 80 percent on the week.

On Wednesday, the Johnson government cut the self-isolation period after a positive COVID test for the double-vaccinated in England from 10 days to just seven, claiming this would allow more people to spend Christmas with their families.

The *Financial Times* more honestly wrote of how this was “an attempt to ease staffing pressures for businesses and public services hit by a wave of coronavirus-related absences.” What it means is that around 280,000 people will mix with others while likely still infected.

This is only the latest example of the Conservatives weaponising Christmas to justify a refusal to implement anti-COVID measures. The announcement was made one day after Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed that there would be no further public health measures put in place before Christmas and with no plans for any more restrictions after the holiday either.

The government is maliciously ignoring the numerous warnings from scientists about the scale of the threat of COVID, with Delta and Omicron both in circulation. According to the UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA), Omicron is already dominant in England with

infections doubling every two days. On December 16, the SPI-M-O group of scientists, which feeds into the government's main Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), warned that the UK could be hit by 2 million daily cases of Omicron, up to 10,000 hospitalisations a day and anything between 600 and 6,000 deaths a day. This outstrips by far the death and suffering during the previous height of the pandemic in January and February this year and could rapidly overwhelm the National Health Service (NHS).

The government's brutal determination to keep the profits flowing at all costs is meeting widespread opposition. Workers are defying all instructions from the mass murderers in Westminster to just keep on shopping and socialising in pubs, clubs and restaurants. Millions have stopped using public transport, are working from home and are already limiting their contacts with other people.

On Tuesday, the *Daily Mail* published a photo feature showing scenes of deserted streets throughout London, where shopping footfall has collapsed and the hospitality sector is in crisis. The piece was headlined, “Crowds ABANDON the West End as self-policing Britons put THEMSELVES in lockdown by staying at home and avoiding pubs and restaurants”. The deserted streets included Regent's Street and Oxford Street that would normally be flooded with shoppers and revellers.

In another article, “Britons self-policing on Covid rules to avoid Christmas in isolation” the *Independent* reported on the findings of an Ipsos Mori poll:

- 89 percent of those surveyed plan to wear their face mask more and to sanitise their hands more regularly.
- 81 percent are keeping or plan to keep their distance while socialising.
- 80 percent have followed government guidance by already having or planning to have their booster jab.
- 67 percent plan to use lateral flow tests more

regularly and shop online.

- A majority “are also taking matters into their own hands” with 58 percent planning to avoid public transport, “not attending social gatherings in friends or family’s houses and not going to pubs or restaurants (both 57 percent).”

- 45 percent are going to work from home instead of the office, while 47 percent have no plan to attend their work Christmas party.

- Nearly half (44 percent) said the government’s Plan B COVID restrictions are not strict enough.

The poll findings and actions of millions refutes entirely the narrative of the government and its media echo chamber, who have long claimed that a likely hostile public response was one of the main reasons that no serious measures of containment, such as a lockdown, were possible.

On November 27, the day that Omicron was first detected in Britain, Johnson’s Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty told a panel discussion hosted by the Local Government Association, “My greatest worry at the moment is that people... if we need to do something more muscular at some point, whether it’s for the current new variant or at some later stage, can we still take people with us?”

To divert away from the fact that the population is not, as the *Daily Mail*’s front page declared on Tuesday, “rejoicing” at the fact that Britain has virtually no restrictions in place, the media continues to focus attention on anti-lockdown/anti-vax protests involving at most around 30,000 people nationally and whose numbers have never really grown throughout the pandemic. Dominated by far-right forces, conspiracy theorists and made up largely of disoriented petty-bourgeois, these elements are generally viewed by the population as cranks led by criminals. But the Tories and the media utilise them daily to justify their own herd immunity agenda.

Newspapers across the official political spectrum now sing from the same hymn sheet, complaining that the country is suffering “lockdown by stealth”.

Allison Pearson wrote an anti-science diatribe in the pro-Tory *Telegraph* under the headline, “My cheering Christmas message? It’s time for humanity to prevail over scientists”.

“We are jabbed up to the gills as a nation, but many of us have regretfully curtailed our festive plans thanks to the misery guts on Sage,” she complained. “In the battle for the nation’s future happiness, our PM must soon pick sides between the Scientists and the Humans.”

For the house organ of British liberalism, the *Guardian*’s Rachel Cooke insisted, “Until I get a second pink line on the lateral flow, I’m going to squeeze the pips out of life.” Indicating the self-satisfied layers for which she speaks, Cooke added, “Ridiculous as this may sound, I feel duty bound to go out; to spend what spare cash I have on a ticket for something and a bowl of pasta afterwards.”

This same agenda is the policy of both wings of the Labour Party. Leader Sir Keir Starmer told Times Radio that he was not even in favour backing a circuit-break lockdown post-Christmas, stating “The numbers are a cause for concern. [But] the hospitalisations are different than they were... the autumn before, when we called for the circuit break.”

Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the rump of the Labour left, who now sits as an Independent, last week opposed the compulsory vaccination of NHS staff and even a requirement to present proof of non-infection before entering a nightclub. He has since not made a demand for any mitigation measures whatsoever.

As for the unions, the Trades Union Congress has called only for better statutory sick pay. The teaching unions are busy ensuring that the government avoids any further “education disruption” so that schools can fully return to face-to-face teaching in January.

The powerful sentiment among workers opposing the reckless drive of the government and their stooges to infect everyone with COVID must find political expression.

A policy of elimination must be fought for, with all necessary measures implemented to end the pandemic, including mass vaccination and the temporary closure of non-essential business and schools.

This can only be achieved over the heads of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy through the mobilisation of the working class in its own independent rank-and-file safety committees throughout every sector.



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