“What kind of inhumane society is this?”

Outrage among US workers over CDC decision to reduce quarantine guidelines

Our reporters
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Anger is growing in the working class in the United States in response to Monday’s announcement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that it was shortening its guidelines for quarantining for positive cases from 10 days to five. In remarks to the press, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky and Biden’s top COVID adviser Anthony Fauci admitted that the purpose of loosening the restrictions is to ensure the supply of labor for American businesses. This occurs while the surge of the Omicron variant is expected to infect 140 million Americans in the next three months, more than 40 percent of the country.

The announcement amounts to an abdication by the federal government of any pretense of attempting to contain the pandemic. Instead, workers are being told that they must learn to live—and to die—with the virus, in the name of protecting the “economy,” a euphemism for the profit margins and share values of the major corporations. It follows a televised address last week by President Biden in which he rejected new lockdowns of schools and workplaces, and even encouraged Americans not to cancel their holiday travel plans.

However, the spread of the virus itself among airline workers forced the cancellation of thousands of flights. An appeal to the CDC by the heads of major airlines is what immediately prompted the change to quarantine guidelines.

The announcement has stunned and angered workers, who are being confronted with the fact that the corporate and political establishment consider their lives and those of their friends and relatives expendable. One tweet by a worker who was instructed to come to work even though his roommate tested positive was liked more than 360,000 times and retweeted 44,000 times. Workers flooded the replies to the tweet with their own horror stories from work and school.

One such tweet read, “I'm a high school teacher and when I was told two weeks ago during lunch that the group of people I had dinner with tested positive I told my admin that I was leaving to get tested. The [New York City Department of Education] told me if I didn't have any symptoms, I would be docked a half day. I was positive.”

Another tweet read, “My granddaughter’s Daycare sent a text last night that said one of the care givers had tested positive but is asymptomatic and will still be coming to work. Just a heads up in case someone didn’t want their kid exposed. Unbelievable.” Another said, “My sister's workplace told her to just come to work because you could test positive for 3 months so it doesn't matter if you come to work. and they didn’t tell other employees when someone got covid. gotta love america.”

Workers across the country spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

One Southern California nurse said, “To be honest, I have lost a lot of trust in the CDC. This is the same organization that told us it was okay to come to work wearing a bandana [in the opening weeks of the pandemic, in response to widespread mask shortages]. I get it—the country wasn’t prepared and there weren't enough N95s, but they put us at risk and a lot of people got sick.

“Then we were told by Fauci, ‘If you’re vaccinated you won’t get it and you won’t spread it.’ That was also a lie and they have really undermined the legitimacy of the CDC. This is a big issue because it has played into the hands of people denying that COVID exists.”

She concluded, 'You are playing with peoples’ lives and it’s unforgivable. What I want to know is what data are they going off of? Where is the data?'

A general surgeon from the Midwest said, “When I asked my colleague what she thought of the CDC guidelines she burst out with ‘they are a crock of s---!’ She has a young family, and her husband works in the emergency department, so she hears it all.

“I know a lot of people are joking about them, but they are setting a dangerous precedent. This will cost lives, and possibly many young lives. The number of kids getting hospitalized is remarkable.” He added, “I took a test this morning because I got word that the person in my operating room who had a bad cough tested positive last night. I will test again tomorrow, but will have to go to work regardless unless I develop symptoms.”

A flight attendant responded angrily to the fact that the CDC had bowed to the demands of airline executives. “I don’t see how the airlines are allowed to dictate what the CDC decides,” she said. “Their decisions are being based strictly on the economy and the stock market. My friend was triple vaccinated, has emphysema, and Southwest Airlines made her work. Now they are telling her she only has to quarantine five days.”

The decision will have particularly dire consequences for schools, which have functioned as the chief vectors of transmission throughout the pandemic. The number of children

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with severe cases has risen steadily in recent months.

One Philadelphia educator said, “As a teacher, I am disturbed by endless seemingly unscientifically warranted changes to protocol. [Alongside this,] increases are occurring in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths...with the most contagious variants spreading faster than any variants of this virus ever have before. If the peoples’ voices were considered in this supposedly democratic government decision, such decisions would not have been made,” he said. As it is, however, “our voices are being drowned out by corporate voices and their accomplices in the government. Instead, we have societal murder.”

A teacher from Massachusetts told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “If there was any remaining doubt that the CDC was taking its cues from corporate lobbyists as opposed to science, the new quarantine guidelines have eliminated it. The scarier part is that the Biden administration has encountered so little resistance from [the unions] throughout the pandemic that it no longer feels compelled to obscure this reality. Airline CEOs requested shorter quarantines, the CDC obliged, now Biden’s surrogates are all over the news talking about how this was done to get workers back to work faster.”

“What kind of inhumane society would see the number of COVID hospitalizations multiplying, and at the very same time decide to shorten the quarantine guidelines?” a teacher from Westchester County, New York asked. “They have even been bold enough to admit that the goal post has been moved ‘mid-game’ solely to keep the workforce in place. To me, this reeks of the ‘Hunger Games’ mentality, in which segments of our population are deemed expendable. We have arrived at a remarkably horrific crossroads in history, one in which our failure to fight for our youngest members will mark us as barbarians for generations to come.”

Autoworkers throughout the country spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the situation in their plants, where infections are spiraling out of control. One Ford Kansas City Assembly worker said he suspects COVID cases to be on the rise at that plant because he and others are always being called in to cover shifts. He said that he hears from other workers that the reason why is because more workers are under quarantine. However, neither the United Auto Workers union nor management ever tells workers the truth about why their coworkers are not coming to work or why they’ve died.

Within the last three weeks, he said, two workers from the plant have died, one 46 and the other 51 years old, with no cause of death given. The 51-year-old worker died at the door of the plant, but no one gave the cause of death. “He seemed to be in good health before. His shift started at 11:30 at night and his shift times changed around a lot. He dropped and was rolling around on the ground. They said he couldn’t breathe. By the time the ambulance got there, he was gone.”

A worker at a General Motors parts warehouse in Memphis, Tennessee told the WSWS, “Since all the COVID started, we are damned if we do and damned if we don’t with reporting cases. The people who have tested positive are sent out, but the others that worked side-by-side with them are never notified. Everything is all hush-hush, and we are told to mind our own business.”

A worker at the Dana auto parts plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana said, “COVID in the plant is spreading. I believe it is spreading faster because of the Dana’s COVID policy. People are being forced back to work and I think they are still contagious. You don’t need a negative result to come back to work. Human Resources treated this more seriously in the beginning, but now they try [to] minimize it.”

A young worker at the Stellantis Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit said, “The CDC’s decision just shows they don’t care about our lives. So many workers are sick in my plant. The company is working the TPTs (temporary part-time workers) 12 hours or more to make up for all the workers out sick.

“Now they are talking about converting some other plants in the area to ‘critical status,’ so they can work you 90 straight days. To me, the only reason you should designate any plant ‘critical’ is when it reaches a critical number of COVID cases, and it should be shut down immediately. That’s what’s happening now.”

An auto parts worker at the Faurecia plant in Saline, Michigan explained that an infected forklift driver had spread the virus to several coworkers, and now half of the worker’s line is out without any explanation from management or the UAW.

“They were infected, and the company covered it up. They did not even sanitize their workstations. They just sent people in to replace them.” She went on to contrast the complete disregard for human life in the US to the situation in China where public health measures were taken, including temporary lockdowns of schools and businesses, to prevent the transmission of the virus.

“In China, the government really took action to stop the spread, and the people followed in line and supported that. The corporations are running our country. They are trying to make profit. In China it looks like they are concerned about the health of the people. So, they make sure that the people follow the rules. In our country the government is doing what the big corporations say as opposed to the people. That’s what I fear.

“I don’t support the government of China. But it shows you can stop the virus. The working class needs to step up. We have to figure out how, because we all work for the corporations and need to stick together so we don’t feel threatened.

“We know that the union is not relevant to help us. We have to do it on our own, the working class and our communities including the schools and the small businesses, as opposed to the corporations.”

We urge workers to contact the WSWS with information about the spread of infections in your workplaces. All information will be kept anonymous.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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