

An open letter to all workers: The pandemic must be ended and lives saved in 2022!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (UK)
31 December 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we approach the end of the year, workers in the UK and throughout the world must decide to act collectively and finally put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2022 must not be another nightmarish year of mass infections, illness and death!

The social catastrophe of the last two years is the outcome of the criminal subordination of public health to the relentless accumulation of corporate profits and the private wealth of mega-millionaires and billionaires.

In terms of its cost in human lives, the pandemic ranks among the greatest tragedies in British history. When this year began 73,570 Britons had succumbed to the virus. Today, that figure stands at 148,421, more than doubling in a year despite the rollout of life-saving vaccines. Office for National Statistics data for the number of fatalities where COVID is mentioned on a death certificate show more than 173,000 people have been killed.

Life expectancy—the most critical indicator of public health—has fallen drastically. The King's Fund reported in April 2021 that the pandemic had resulted in “a sharp fall in life expectancy the magnitude of which has not been seen since World War II.” Compared with 2019, life expectancy in England in 2020 was 1.3 years lower for males and 0.9 years lower for females.

Officially, 2.49 million Britons were infected by the virus during the first year to December 31, 2020. With the ending of lockdowns, and the government doing nothing to stop the spread of the Delta and now Omicron variants, by the end of 2021 case numbers stand at a staggering 12.74 million—an increase of over 10 million.

In addition to the growing death toll, an estimated 1.2 million people (1.9 percent of the population) were experiencing Long COVID as of October 31. This affliction can impact every organ system in the body, persist for years, and leave the infected individuals with serious physical health problems and brain damage even more severe than that associated with lead poisoning.

Virtually everyone has a friend or family member who has

died from this horrible virus. Many of you reading this will have yourselves been infected and may be suffering from Long COVID.

The rapid spread of Omicron carries with it the danger that the new year will be even worse than 2020 and 2021. The UK reported 189,213 new COVID cases December 30, up 116 percent in a week. Deaths rose by 332, up 127 percent on a week ago. Experts have warned that COVID infections in England could reach 1.4 million a day and deaths 3,000 a day if no additional measures are taken, even assuming Omicron is only half as severe as Delta. Daily hospitalisations could reach 15,000.

Repeated promises to prevent the National Health Service from being overwhelmed have been trashed, as each day brings a new record number of infections with hospitalisations, including hundreds of children. Instead, the government has announced plans to build a few “surge hubs” in hospital car parks with 4,000 extra beds but no extra staff.

Amid this unprecedented crisis, the stock market continues to soar because the Johnson Conservative government, with the full backing of Labour and the Scottish National Party, refuse to take any measures that may undermine corporate interests.

Misinformation and falsehoods from the government feed a sense of discouragement, which is then used to promote outright defeatism towards the pandemic. The corporate-controlled media now argues that we have to “live with COVID,” which they say will inevitably become endemic. What does this even mean? What is the end goal of this policy, and when will the needless suffering and deaths of millions stop?

In fact, with the appropriate measures, the virus can still be eliminated over the course of only a few months. In China, the Zero COVID strategy led to the elimination of the virus by April 2020, with only two recorded deaths since May 2020. The methods used in China are well known and developed out of more than a century of experience fighting infectious diseases.

The principles of science and public health are constantly being ignored and falsified to impose a narrative to justify fully reopening businesses and the economy.

The government has already reduced quarantine and isolation periods to seven days after two negative lateral flow tests and is now considering emulating the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reducing quarantine and isolation from 10 to five days. This is only the latest in an unending series of destructive actions. The government's policy is to allow COVID-19 to spread indefinitely and to become endemic. This not only allows the Omicron variant to wreak havoc, but for further mutations to develop which the World Health Organization warns could be "fully resistant to current vaccines or past infection."

The reckless insistence on keeping factories and other workplaces open, and sending kids into school, flies in the face of everything that has been learned in the fight against infectious diseases. Centuries of scientific study have given humanity an arsenal of knowledge to fight disease. This knowledge was used in the 20th century to eliminate viruses that were once leading causes of death, including polio, smallpox, measles, malaria, and yellow fever.

Modern science has shown that the closure of all non-essential workplaces and the transition to remote learning for all schools for a period of two months could quickly bring viral transmission under control and lay the basis for the full-scale elimination of COVID-19. These necessary lockdowns must be accompanied by the provision of full financial and social supports for all workers and small-business people affected.

Two-month lockdowns must be combined with the globally coordinated production and distribution of vaccines and high-quality masks to all countries, as well as the use of mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation and treatment of infected patients, and a dramatic expansion of health care infrastructure. At every essential workplace and hospital, workers must have access to the highest quality FFP3 or better masks, as well as modern filtration and ventilation systems. All non-essential domestic and international travel must cease immediately to allow for the elimination of the virus in each country.

The working class must take matters into its own hands. The fight to end the pandemic must be based on the following principles:

1. The present policy of "herd immunity"—i.e., allowing COVID-19 to spread throughout the population—must be repudiated. A new strategy, directed toward the elimination and eradication of SARS-CoV-2 must be adopted.

2. The policies implemented to stop viral transmission must be determined by the needs of public health. The

protection of human life and safety must take absolute and unconditional priority over all corporate-financial interests. The costs of fighting the pandemic—including the payment of wages and salaries, compensation to small business owners, full medical coverage for the ill, and payments to bereaved families—must be borne by corporations and a 100 percent tax on the windfall pandemic profits obtained by large investors through the run-up in the stock market.

3. The fight against the pandemic must be conducted on a global scale. The pandemic cannot be stopped unless SARS-CoV-2 is eliminated in all countries. British workers must demand that vaccines be provided in necessary quantities, free of charge, to their class brothers and sisters in the less developed countries.

The Tories and Labour, big business and the corporate-controlled media will declare that these policies are 1) impossible to implement and 2) incompatible with the existing capitalist system.

The answer to the first objection is that it is impossible to accept the infection of millions of people and the massive loss of life.

As for the second objection, the answer is simply this: If capitalism can offer no solution to a crisis that threatens the lives and well-being of the vast majority of the population, then it should be gotten rid of and replaced with a socialist system that prioritises life over profits.

The fight against COVID is, in essence, a struggle against capitalism. The tragedy of the past two years has made the case for the reorganisation of the world economy in the interests of the working class.

We urge all workers to circulate this statement, initiate discussion at your workplace, form rank-and-file committees and win support for collective action to stop the spread of the pandemic.

Contact the Socialist Equality Party and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. We are anxious to discuss with you the situation in your workplace and to assist you in organising the fight to end the pandemic.

Fraternally,

Socialist Equality Party (UK)



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact