

“They look at people like statistics, like our lives don’t mean a thing”

Workers respond to Socialist Equality Party open letter calling for movement to end the pandemic

Our reporters
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Workers from across the United States are responding with interest and enthusiasm to Thursday’s statement from the Socialist Equality Party, An open letter to the working class: The pandemic must be ended and lives saved in 2022!

The statement declared that the “new guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reducing quarantine and isolation periods from 10 to five days, are the latest in an unending series of destructive actions. The government has openly declared that its policy is to allow COVID-19 to spread indefinitely.”

Pointing to the long-established medical knowledge on containing pandemics, which has been rejected by the corporate elite and both big business parties in the interests of safeguarding profits and share values, the statement called on workers “to take matters into their own hands.” It explained, “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.”

In answer to objections from the capitalist elite that such measures are “impossible” or conflict with the structure of capitalist society, the Socialist Equality Party responded that what is really impossible is “to accept the infection of millions of people and the massive loss of life.”

“As for the second objection,” the statement concluded, “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 prioritizes life over profits.”

The statement was widely distributed shortly after its publication by SEP members across the United States to working-class supporters. We include a selection of responses to the statement and the CDC guidelines from workers below:

Claire, a pharmacy tech in a retail pharmacy in Arizona: “The new guidelines are absolutely ridiculous, reckless... [i]t’s all because of the shortage of workers in all areas. The government should be ashamed of themselves. Vaccine mandates are good, but that is not stopping this spread [by itself]. Have a lockdown for a couple weeks. Mandate masks, especially for us workers.”

Margaret, a pharmacist at a retail chain: “We currently have 5 techs out with COVID and don’t know how to get everything done. We are open 9-9, I go in early. Those who can work are working overtime with limited lunch breaks. Today is my day off after working three days in a

row before working four days in a row. I am physically and emotionally exhausted. I feel like my thought process is not clear because I am so tired, but I have to work to provide for my family.

“I have lost four unvaccinated friends ages 49, 51, 60, and 61, to COVID. Such unnecessary deaths. I do not think the quarantine time should have been decreased. They do not know enough about the Omicron variant to know if we need longer or shorter quarantine times. My daughter is in college and tested positive for COVID today. I can’t go to take care of her because I can’t miss work.”

Liz, a teacher from Hawaii: “It is clear the guidelines aren’t based on empirical evidence but on the needs of employers to further discipline and manage their workers. At my school, teachers and educational assistants are being ‘asked’ to fill in for missing staff who are not showing up due to quarantine, vaccine and testing mandates, stress leave or simply up and quitting. Cutting back on quarantine days will only make this worse! The CDC’s handling of the pandemic is a testament to the claim that government agencies have been completely captured by corporate profit-motives. At a time when the CDC’s primary concern should be protecting health and building trust in its scientists, it is doing exactly the opposite. These poor decisions bolster the far-right-wing conspiracists and anyone who already believed government institutions are not there to serve everyday working people.

“It is crystal clear to me that if there is any hope for a viable world into the future, it’s going to take people like us to defend it against total destruction. Thank you for helping me to see clearly how things actually work in this world.”

A retired ExxonMobil worker in Texas: “We’re going to live with this. Delta, Omicron, what’s the next variant? Or should the question be, ‘what’s the final variant?’ It’s all about the dollar. Billionaires taking joy rides to space for a 10-minute thrill! Mother earth is dying a little bit every day. A former president that is a criminal walking, living off the people’s taxes. For God’s sake, it’s almost 2022, and we still have hatred and wars. As for the open letter, it is very much on point, and I couldn’t agree more.”

Yolanda, an autoworker at Stellantis’ Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit: “Why in the hell would you shorten the time frame? That only benefits the companies, that’s just what the company wants. They are so hell bent on trying not to shut down; but it is getting too bad. They say it’s bad for business, but people are catching COVID at a massive rate; people are not going to come to work; something has to be

done.

“It will shorten the timeframe for being paid. But even now most people are not getting paid at all. If you go through medical and test positive, they pay you for three to five days. But I heard that most people aren’t getting paid. Then to get reinstated it’s an ordeal. People who are out for Christmas can’t be reinstated because medical is closed. It’s almost set up to fail.

“Autoworkers can start off [a movement to shut down nonessential production], but it is bigger than us. It needs to be a collective effort, a global effort. I think it is obtainable, it’s imperative, it needs to happen. If we wait on the powers that be, it will never happen. They will wait until the bitter end, and that’s what they are trying to do.

“I think many people do understand this. Everyone I talk to is on board with what has to be done. But I think it’s more a question of someone taking the initiative, that’s the main thing. If that happens, more will follow. There is power in numbers. The initiative will never come from the unions. Of course not. No one believes that.”

James, a Stellantis worker in Kokomo, Indiana: “It is beyond horrific when people are actually dying and losing family members because they are just trying to make a living. The United Auto Workers International and regional reps are allowed to work from home drawing a 40-hour paycheck, but us floor workers are getting sick and screwed out of money. We are having to file unemployment and sub pay, and we all have to sign up differently each and every week. Then it gets protested every time there’s any kind of mistakes, and our unemployment gets put under review. This is causing people to lose everything they have worked for. All the workers should walk out of all the plants until our lives mean something.”

Michael Hull, a former teacher and founder of the Teachers against Dying Facebook Group: “Here is the truth: The Democratic Party and their highly paid cortège of union bureaucrats, media pundits, and Ivy League masterminds have utterly failed to rise to the tasks at hand. Benjamin Franklin said we had a Republic, but only if we could keep it. Make no mistake, the Republic is dead. Our outmoded, socioeconomic arrangements have eroded our most basic institutions and coopted our government.

“The coronavirus pandemic has laid this bare before us in bold relief. Just look at how the United States, the richest, most powerful country in world history responded and continues to respond to the onslaught of death and suffering caused by the COVID-19 virus. We always had it in our power to overcome this. Instead, being that our political and economic systems are set up to benefit the rich, the crisis was used as an opportunity to transfer wealth upward, solidify monopoly, and divide the working class with the false choice of ‘living with it’ or going broke.

“President Joe Biden, who over 80 million Americans, including myself, put in charge to change the course of this pandemic and ‘follow the science’ has repeatedly put the economy of his corporate donors ahead of public health and safety. On May 13, the CDC relaxed mask guidelines, and President Biden told people to take off their masks if they were vaccinated. Recall, in February, Biden told a concerned second grader at a town hall, ‘Kids don’t get COVID very often. It’s unusual for that to happen.’ Yet, COVID-19 continues to remain a leading cause of pediatric hospitalization and death.

“Back in March of 2021, Randi Weingarten, a DNC chairwoman and president of the American Federation of Teachers, told me, ‘What may happen with the variant may happen, then we are going to close the way in which things have gotten closed.’ Well, this is now the second variant to emerge since then, and it affects children more severely. All she has done is spend 5 million dollars’ worth of our dues on a national school reopening tour and even sponsored a roundtable with anti-mask quack doctors from OpenSchoolsUSA!

“The broader working class must come to terms with the fact that the

business unions and the establishment Democrats are a controlled opposition that serves at the behest of corporate America. Only then can we form our own independent resistance to fascism, inequality and corruption. That is, undeniably, our only hope.”

Joe, a nursing home worker in Washington state: “Biden’s policy is absolute surrender. It’s like [British Prime Minister] Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement to Hitler. Biden is saying ‘Let’s just let it spread, everything will be fine. Sure, it might be a little tough, but Wall Street has to make money and you have to live with it.’ The rich people will always be able to afford the best medical care, regular testing, and they can work at home while the rest of us go off to work.

“The level of anger on social media is enormous, especially against the CDC. People are putting out a meme of the CDC saying it’s healthy to brush your teeth with peanut butter. They’re joking on the surface, but there is underlying anger and worry about their kids being sent back to school.

“I’ve been in touch with a few nurses, and they’re neck deep in it. Things are getting worse. The hospitals are at capacity and nurses are working so much overtime, they have no family life and they’re going home exhausted. I know one ER nurse who says she can’t take it anymore and is about to quit.

“At the nursing home where I work, there we are short of staff too. Management says they are trying to hire full-time workers, but they claim then can’t find anyone. So, they are hiring temps, they have some fancy name for them, but they’re temps. Many of these workers are African immigrants, they work real hard and are trying, but they have zero training. Families are trusting their parents and grandparents to workers with no expertise. In the kitchens, it is short-staffed every week, and everyone is burned out.

“It’s hard to wrap your head around numbers like 54 million infections and 825,000 deaths in the US. I remember Biden saying anyone who let 200,000 people die should not be president. Well, he’s allowed twice that much. They look at people like statistics, like our lives don’t mean a thing. Biden has been a political operative his whole life, and he and the rest of the politicians inhabit a different world from us.

“The administration claims Omicron is ‘mild.’ But if it were mild, the hospitals wouldn’t be filling up; the kids wouldn’t be getting sick. The CDC reduces its quarantine period guidelines without any explanation. It was the airlines pressuring the CDC because if airline workers are quarantining, they would have to cancel flights. If it wasn’t the airlines, it would be another industry dictating health policy.

“I’m part of the generation who benefited from the campaign against lead in gasoline and in paint. I remember the ads. Now a whole generation of kids in is danger of being COVID-poisoned.

“The SEP’s open letter to the working class sums up perfectly the current situation and what we have to do. We can stop the pandemic. The Chinese did it. We can do it. But we have to stop grumbling and take action together. We’ve been fed propaganda, but it is possible to fight and to win. We’re always talking about masks, well, the mask is off on society, and everybody can see what capitalism is. They can see exactly what the Democrats and Republicans are about. It’s a great time for solidarity among all workers.”



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