

The pandemic must be ended and lives saved in 2022!—an open letter to the working class

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
5 January 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the new year begins, workers in Canada and throughout the world must decide to act collectively to end the COVID-19 pandemic once and for all. 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 Canadian history. When 2021 began, 15,600 Canadians had already officially succumbed to the virus. Today, the official figure stands at 30,456, an increase of 14,856 deaths since the beginning of 2021 despite the rollout of life-saving vaccines.

The reality is that the death toll is much higher. A Royal Society of Canada report published last summer estimated that the actual death toll from COVID-19 is double the official tally, i.e., over 60,000. This discrepancy is above all due to the failure of the authorities to record COVID-19 deaths that occurred at home, as well as the impact of delayed diagnoses and treatments of other illnesses because of the overwhelming of health care systems by successive waves of mass infections.

In 2020 and again in 2021 thousands of seniors died under horrific conditions in long-term care facilities across the country. Life expectancy—the most critical indicator of public health—fell by 0.4 years or five months during 2020 alone. In Quebec, the province with the highest pandemic death toll and per capita COVID fatalities, life expectancy plunged by 0.84 years for females and 0.8 years for males. Such sharp declines in life expectancy have not been seen since World War II, when the fall in life expectancy was caused by the loss of many young men.

Canada's pandemic death toll now surpasses the estimated 45,400 military fatalities Canada suffered during the six years of World War II.

Officially, 2.35 million Canadians have been infected by COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, but the real figure is far higher due to inadequate testing and contact tracing. In addition to the growing death toll, hundreds of thousands of people are grappling with the effects of Long COVID. This

affliction can impact every organ system in the body, may well persist for decades, and can leave infected individuals with serious physical health problems and brain damage even more severe than that associated with lead poisoning.

Many of you reading this will have a work colleague, friend or family member who has died from this horrible virus. Others will have themselves been infected and may be suffering from Long COVID.

But even after two years, there is the ominous prospect that, because of the rapid spread of the Omicron variant and the potential for the emergence of still greater vaccine-resistant variants, the coming year will see an even greater health catastrophe than 2020 and 2021. Over the past two weeks, Canada has broken one record after another for daily new COVID infections, with 37,410 daily infections reported this Wednesday (Jan.5.) alone. The US-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation estimates that 3 billion people could be infected globally with Omicron in the next three months.

Under conditions in which provincial hospital systems are already strained to the breaking point, hospitalizations are once again surging across the country. The seven-day moving average for hospitalizations across Canada is currently 3,252, with 566 people in intensive care as of January 5.

Amid this unprecedented crisis, the stock market continues to soar because the federal Liberal government and the provincial governments, regardless of whether they are led by Conservatives, New Democrats, Liberals, or the “Quebec First” Coalition Avenir Québec, refuse to take any measures that could undermine corporate interests.

Misinformation and falsehoods from government authorities 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, so as to swell corporate profits and investor wealth.

The new guidelines issued by the Ontario and Quebec provincial governments, reducing quarantine and isolation periods from 10 to five days in line with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are the latest in an unending series of destructive actions. The federal and provincial governments have openly declared that their policy is to allow COVID-19 to spread indefinitely.

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, including in Canada, to eliminate diseases that were once leading causes of death, including polio, smallpox, measles, malaria, and yellow fever.

Modern science has shown that the closure of all nonessential 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 N95 or better masks, as well as modern filtration and ventilation systems. All nonessential 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. Canadian 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 Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats, big business, and the corporate-controlled media will all 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 prioritizes 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 reorganization 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 organizing the fight to end the pandemic.

Fraternally,

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact