

With 900,000 dead from COVID-19, US capitalism doubles down on mass infection

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On Thursday, the United States passed the grim milestone of 900,000 deaths from COVID-19 according to the Worldometer tracker. All other major trackers will pass this horrendous figure within one week.

With the Omicron variant pushing COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations to record levels, 53,000 Americans have lost their lives so far this month. One American has died every 45 seconds. The seven-day average of deaths now stands at 2,514, higher than the peak of any previous surge except last winter.

In the year 2020, 351,754 Americans lost their lives to COVID-19. In the year 2021, 475,680 succumbed to the virus. If January's death rate continues throughout 2022, 636,000 more Americans will be dead in the third year of the pandemic.

The massive death toll is now simply ignored in the print and broadcast media. On Friday, a day that BNO newsroom reported that 3,826 people died from COVID-19, NBC Nightly News did not even mention the pandemic in the first half of its broadcast, focusing instead on the weather and the New York City police.

Far from doing anything to stop the ongoing wave of mass death, every institution in American society, from the Biden administration to state and local governments and major corporations, are flooring the accelerator on mass infection.

The tone has been set by the Biden White House. Having forced the reopening of all schools and businesses and the end of social distancing measures, the Biden administration has set its sights on the only two remaining measures to stop the spread of COVID-19: masking by the general public and the isolation of those who are actively infected with COVID-19.

In an interview with Politico this week, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky advocated ending masking and isolation. She stated, "If cases are high, severity will be such that we're in an OK spot in our hospitals... our masks might be more likely to come off. And then if you get a case of a runny nose, you might say, 'Okay, well, I'm going to stay home, because that's what I do when I have a runny nose.' But you don't necessarily have to isolate."

All serious public health experts and epidemiologists advocate masking and isolation under conditions where a disease that kills and maims at the rate of COVID-19 is spreading throughout society. Doing otherwise is a recipe for

the continual infection and reinfection of the entire population, which is now the deliberate policy of the US government.

The Omicron variant will "find just about everybody," Dr. Anthony Fauci said earlier this month. "Most people are going to get COVID," said Janet Woodcock, the director of the Food and Drug administration.

Walensky's calls for ending masking and isolation were taken up this week by a group of academic proponents of mass infection, calling themselves "Urgency of Normal." The group is led by Monica Gandhi, a school reopening advocate who has ties to the White House and has continuously downplayed the pandemic and the dangers facing society.

In a statement, the group writes, "Masks should become optional in US schools (we suggest, by February 15), and we can also return to pre-pandemic norms for quarantines: if you are sick, stay home."

The comments by Walensky and the statement by Gandhi, et al. have been accompanied by a massive anti-masking propaganda barrage in the US media, including media outlets aligned with the Democratic party. Recent headlines include, "The case against masks in schools" in the *Atlantic*; "New questions about whether kids should wear masks" by NPR; "Should kids wear masks in schools? Maybe not" in the *San Francisco Chronicle*; and "Let Kids Take Their Masks Off After the Omicron Surge" in the *New York Times*.

The importance of wearing masks, and especially high-quality masks, in reducing the spread of COVID-19 is not, and never has been, in dispute. But from the standpoint of the ruling class, masking is a constant reminder that the pandemic is not over and that the population should take measures to protect itself. For the sake of herding workers back on the job, masking must go.

These demands are already being implemented around the world. On Tuesday, the city of San Francisco will end its indoor masking requirements for offices and gyms, setting the stage for other cities to follow suit.

In Denmark, where COVID-19 cases are surging due to the new, more infectious subvariant of Omicron called BA.2, the government is ending its mask mandate on February 1. Starting Thursday, face coverings will no longer be required anywhere in the UK.

In practice, even the totally inadequate five-day guidance on isolation from the CDC is a dead letter. A survey by Harvard University's Kennedy School noted that "nearly two-thirds of workers who reported being sick in the last month during the survey period said they worked through the illness," according to the *Wall Street Journal*, with many citing "financial reasons" and "fear of reprisals."

In May 2021, Walensky, acting under the direction of Biden and White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeff Zients, called on vaccinated people to stop all social distancing and masking, saying, "Anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities, large or small, without wearing a mask or physical distancing." This prompted nearly every state to end mask mandates in the ensuing weeks, setting the stage for the catastrophic surge of the Delta variant that killed over 175,000 Americans.

According to the *New York Times*, "Mr. Biden, Mr. Zients and others in the White House were ecstatic" at Walensky's announcement last May. "Take your mask off. You've earned the right," Biden told the public that month.

After the end of these restrictions led to a surge in cases last summer, Walensky and Biden were forced to backtrack and once again urge the population to mask. But amid record case rates, with 3,000 people now dying every day and hospitals fuller than at any other time during the pandemic, the Biden administration is renewing its push against all public health measures.

In May 2021, the dropping of masking recommendations was justified with the false claim that vaccinated people do not transmit COVID-19. Today it is accompanied by the open promotion of mass infection through an embrace of the "herd immunity" strategy first implemented by the Trump administration.

At this month's World Economic Forum, the annual conclave of oligarchs, Dr. Anthony Fauci was asked, "Is 2022 actually the year that we go from pandemic to endemic and on the current speed up (sic) the process given its ability to spread and offer immunity through infection?"

In other words, is mass infection with COVID-19 the appropriate response to the pandemic?

To this, Fauci replied, "I would hope that that's the case," adding, "it is an open question as to whether or not Omicron is going to be the live virus vaccination that everyone is hoping for."

In 2020, Fauci and White House Coronavirus Coordinator Deborah Birx warned that those who promoted the benefits of mass infection—led by Trump adviser Scott Atlas—were "dangerous." Birx wrote in an email that Atlas's views were "a true threat to a comprehensive and critical response to this pandemic," calling the proponents of his views "a fringe group without grounding in epidemics, public health or on the ground common sense experience."

Birx warned that following a "herd immunity" approach

would lead to hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths and have immense public health ramifications, stating, "We all know the long-term consequences of simple viral infections—we have seen the pericarditis, myocarditis, even cardiomyopathy, vasculitis, and the long continued open question of the relationship to autoimmunity."

In the year and a half since Fauci and Birx made these secret warnings, the entire political establishment has embraced the murderous policies promoted by Atlas and Trump.

COVID-19 is to become the "new normal," in the words of the eugenics advocate Ezekiel Emanuel. The public must embrace the benefits of "natural immunity," as a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed recently declared.

Most troubling of all, the daily reporting of COVID-19 cases and deaths is under attack. On February 2, the US Department of Health and Human Services will end its requirement for hospitals to report COVID-19 deaths every day.

The only remaining source of death reporting will be the CDC, which receives its reports from state health departments. Most states, however, do not report daily, and a growing number are moving toward once-a-week reporting in the near future.

The *modus operandi* of the ruling class and its media apologists is clear: The COVID-19 pandemic is to continue in perpetuity. Hundreds of thousands of people—predominantly the sick and elderly—will die, and the health of millions more will be compromised each year. Deaths and cases will be reported less and less each day, and the media will, day by day, stop reporting on it.

But the ruling class's strategy for a perpetual pandemic is coming into headlong collision with a growing movement of the working class and young people determined to resist mass infection, taking the form of a wave of strikes and struggles to demand protections from the pandemic.

This growing movement of the working class must embrace a Zero COVID strategy, based on ending transmission of COVID-19 through contact tracing, isolation, quarantine and the temporary closure of all schools and nonessential businesses with full compensation for all affected workers and small business people.

The struggle against mass infection is a political struggle against the financial oligarchy and the entire capitalist system. The most critical task is to build a revolutionary socialist leadership in the working class, fighting for a unified global strategy to stop the pandemic and save lives.



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