

Denmark scraps all pandemic restrictions as Omicron subvariant runs rampant

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Beginning on February 1, Denmark's Social Democratic government will scrap all public health measures designed to limit the spread of COVID-19. Requirements to wear a mask in public, maintain social distance from others, and trace contacts of infected people will be abandoned in what the homicidal advocates of "herd immunity" are gleefully labelling "Freedom Day 2.0." The only public health measure remaining in place is for people who test positive to isolate for four days, well short of the incubation period for COVID-19.

Like its northern neighbour Sweden in the early stages of the pandemic, Denmark is emerging as one of the most ruthless proponents of a criminal herd immunity strategy that, unless opposed, will make mass infection and death a permanent feature of daily life. The policy shift is made all the more criminal given the fact that Denmark's infection rate was last week the highest of any European country, apart from the tiny Faroe Islands, and the potentially more infectious Omicron subvariant BA.2 is raging across the country.

The Social Democratic government declared last week that COVID-19 no longer represents a "danger to society." Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen asserted, "The critical phase of the pandemic is behind us." She confirmed that businesses will be free to decide whether to retain COVID-19 protections in the workplace. A government recommendation to allow employees to work from home where possible will be abolished.

In line with the advocates of the fascistic Great Barrington Declaration, those promoting the lifting of all restrictions in Denmark openly declare that infections will skyrocket. Epidemiologist Tyra Grove Krause from the State Serum Institute (SSI) noted, "The coming weeks could be difficult, because many people will get sick and will have to stay at home."

Health Minister Magnus Heunicke stated that 63 percent of new infections are linked to the BA.2 subvariant. The

SSI reported that BA.2 could be up to 1.5 times more infectious than the original Omicron variant. The health agency also warned that BA.2 can reinfect people who already suffered an Omicron infection. Krause was forced as a result to acknowledge that the peak of the Omicron wave, previously assumed to occur in late January, would not be reached until mid-February. Repeated reinfections pose a serious risk to individuals with weak immune systems and pre-existing health conditions.

Several medical experts have spoken out against the reopening plan. "The infection rate has risen rapidly in recent days, and we're so close to the goal that it makes no sense to relax controls," remarked Eskild Petersen, professor emeritus for infectious diseases at the University of Aarhus. "I'm quite astonished. I've always been a proponent of doing one thing after the other. We should keep the mask, because that ensures that the virus stays in your mouth when you're infected. Why in the world are we doing this? We currently have 918 COVID-19 patients in hospital and we know that there will be a new variant."

This is the second time in less than six months that the Danish government has proclaimed the pandemic to be over. In September, Frederiksen declared an end to all public health restrictions and oversaw the organisation of a massive rock concert to celebrate "freedom day." Within less than two months, the spread of the Delta variant pushed infections and hospitalisations up, compelling the government to reintroduce a COVID-19 pass for access to public spaces that required people to be either fully vaccinated or have a negative test. However, the Danish government never returned to significant restrictions on gatherings prior to the emergence of Omicron. The fact that virtually no public health measures were in place played a major role in making Denmark one of the European countries hit hardest by Omicron, as a series of superspreader events transmitted the extremely

infectious variants throughout society. Only when cases rose to record levels were limited restrictions reimposed for several weeks.

Denmark has recorded over 3,700 coronavirus deaths since the beginning of the pandemic and more than 1.5 million infections. With a population of 5.8 million, this means that more than one in four inhabitants has been infected. Denmark's death rate equates to about 60,000 deaths in a country the size of Germany.

The population has thus far been spared a far worse loss of life thanks to the country's comparatively well-developed public health system. All COVID-19 testing is centrally organised by the government, and all tests are screened for variants, which is part of the reason why Omicron was detected so early on. Denmark also achieved a very high vaccination rate, with well over 80 percent of the population having received at least two doses.

Yet this makes the latest decision to scrap all non-pharmaceutical measures even more criminal. By letting the Omicron subvariant run free, the government is creating perfect conditions for the emergence of a new variant, which may prove more resistant to vaccines or more lethal. Even if this worst-case scenario does not materialise, working people will face a growing number of COVID-19 reinfections, which could produce severe long-term health problems and an increase in deaths.

The Social Democratic government has prioritized the profit interests of big business over the protection of workers' health throughout the pandemic. Billions of kroner in state-backed loans, tax breaks for big business, and other bailout measures have enabled Danish companies and investors to profit from COVID-19. The *Economist* magazine, a mouthpiece of "free market" liberalism, put Denmark in top spot of its rankings for the best-performing OECD economy during the pandemic. The rankings were based on factors such as share market performance, capital investments, GDP growth and government debt.

The Social Democratic government has also launched attacks on workers. Last August, it passed an emergency law in parliament to end a 10-week strike by 6,000 nurses by imposing a meagre 5 percent pay increase over three years. The government-imposed deal, which falls well short of inflation and did nothing to rectify years of low pay for health care workers, had previously been voted down by the nurses in June in a rebellion against their union's support for the agreement.

Last month, the government reached a compromise with

opposition parties to reform the labour market in the interests of business, including measures to encourage retirees to return to the workforce to free up labour shortages.

Frederiksen's ending of all public health restrictions followed a sustained weeks-long campaign by corporate executives and lobbyists for a return to "normalcy." "We will experience this year after year, and we can't just shut down society, reopen and close again," commented Brian Mikkelsen from the Danish Chamber of Commerce. "It costs far too much money, jobs, and prosperity. That's why we need planning certainty for businesses."

"We need a strategy for the future that doesn't always have us in a state of emergency," stated Jannick Nytoft of Horesta, the trade organisation for hotels and restaurants. "We would like COVID-19 to become a disease that is treated like all others."

The Danish government's pro-business record during the pandemic is particularly politically revealing because it depends on the support of two self-styled "socialist" and "left" parties in parliament. The Socialist People's Party and ex-Stalinist Red-Green Alliance/Unity List, which includes the Danish section of the Pabloite United Secretariat, the Socialist Workers Party, reached an agreement with Frederiksen in 2019 to make her prime minister.

Denmark's decision to abolish all pandemic-related public health measures is being seized on by governments and political forces across Europe who want nothing more than to follow Copenhagen's example, regardless of the horrendous levels of infections and deaths it will produce.

In the neighbouring northern German state of Schleswig-Holstein, the Christian Democrat-led state government is discussing the option of a "Danish path," according to regional broadcaster NDR. Minister President Daniel Günther (CDU), reacting to the abolition of restrictions in Denmark, asserted Thursday, "They're a little ahead of us on Omicron, have a higher vaccination rate as we have in Germany. So, the Danish path can be a bit more courageous ... I think that in Germany, too, we can move on it very, very soon."



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