

From “herd immunity” to “endemic”: The ruling class policy of perpetual mass death

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Throughout the world, capitalist politicians are scrapping all remaining public health measures that slow the spread of COVID-19. Many have done so by falsely claiming that the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 has caused the virus to become “endemic” in society or will do so in the near future. The implication of this false and unscientific claim, the corollary to misleading statements that Omicron is “mild,” is that the virus is now no more harmful than the flu or even the common cold.

The term “endemic” implies a predictable and controllable level of disease in a given geographic region. The trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic is the exact opposite.

In the span of just over two months, Omicron has caused a record wave of infections and has been second only to the Delta surge in terms of global deaths. Roughly 140 million people have officially been infected with COVID-19 since the end of November, with the real figure believed to be well over 1 billion. According to the *Economist*, the number of excess deaths from Omicron reached a peak of 41,200 per day on Monday.

Contrary to the claims that letting Omicron rip through society will produce “endemicity” and “natural immunity,” there are now growing signs that the BA.2 Omicron subvariant could cause another global surge in cases in the coming weeks. It is believed to be at least 30 percent more infectious than BA.1 and can reinfect people within weeks of a BA.1 Omicron infection. BA.2 rapidly became dominant in Denmark and the UK and is rising quickly in the US, where its percentage of cases tripled over the past week.

The corporate media has played a leading role in spreading misinformation that COVID-19 is becoming “endemic.” On Monday, the *New York Times* asked, “What Would Covid Being Endemic Mean For Travel?” On Tuesday, Forbes ran an article titled, “Pandemic Endgame: What ‘Endemic’ Covid Means—And When We May Get There.” The *Financial Times* warned its readers, “Living with endemic Covid will not be painless.”

Over the past month, dozens of similar articles have appeared misusing the term “endemic,” while uncritically accepting politicians’ use of this term to justify the lifting of all mitigation measures.

On Wednesday, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that laws in England which require people infected with COVID-19 to self-isolate could be lifted by the end of February. Last month, Johnson declared, “As Covid becomes endemic, we will need to replace legal requirements with advice and guidance urging people with the virus to be careful and considerate of others.”

Also Wednesday, all pandemic restrictions and wide-scale testing were completely ended in Sweden, the birthplace of the homicidal “herd immunity” strategy implemented by the most right-wing

governments in 2020. Announcing the abrupt end of these measures last week, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson stated, “It’s time to open up Sweden. The pandemic isn’t over, but it is moving into a new phase.”

As fascist supporters of the Freedom Convoy continue to occupy Ottawa, Canada, their demands for the lifting of all COVID-19 mitigation measures are being implemented. In Alberta, Premier Jason Kenney announced Tuesday that the proof-of-vaccination system will end at midnight Wednesday, saying the province must “move on from a widespread pandemic response, to get our lives back to normal.” Nearly all restrictions will be lifted in Quebec by mid-March, with Premier François Legault stating Tuesday, “We will need to learn to live with the virus. There may be a sixth wave eventually, but we will have to live with COVID.”

Amid a rollback of restrictions in Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez stated in January, “We are heading towards an endemic illness rather than the pandemic it has been up to now.”

Across the United States, Democratic governors have begun a campaign to remove all mask mandates and other measures that were reestablished during the Omicron surge.

In California, Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom announced Monday that the state’s mask mandate will expire on February 15 as part of his “endemic plan,” which will be fully unveiled next week. This is expected to include the lifting of mask mandates in schools and other remaining COVID-19 mitigation measures.

On Wednesday, New York’s Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul announced that the state will end its mask mandate for most indoor public settings. In New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut, Massachusetts and other Democrat-led states, mask mandates in schools were lifted this week.

These moves have clearly been sanctioned by Biden and White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeff Zients, who meets weekly with the National Governors Association. Following last week’s meeting, the association’s vice chairman, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, told reporters that the discussion centered on the question, “What does the road from pandemic to endemic look like, and how do we keep score?” He added, “There was broad agreement that that’s the task before us.”

On Wednesday, *Politico* revealed that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is considering updating its guidelines for states on when to lift public health measures, such as mask mandates. The CDC, which has repeatedly manipulated science to suit the needs of corporate America, is expected to change its metrics to be based on hospitalization data instead of infection data, under conditions in which the Department of Health and Human Services

(DHHS) last week stopped collecting a wide range of daily data from hospitals, including deaths, hospital capacity and more.

While the White House has been careful to not yet officially declare COVID-19 “endemic,” top officials have repeatedly alluded to this conception as part of an effort to disarm the public.

In an interview Tuesday, Biden’s chief medical advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci told the *Financial Times*, “As we get out of the full-blown pandemic phase of Covid-19, which we are certainly heading out of, these decisions [on mitigation measures] will increasingly be made on a local level rather than centrally decided or mandated.” Appealing to the most backward forms of American individualism, he added, “There will also be more people making their own decisions on how they want to deal with the virus.”

In lieu of using the term “endemic,” Fauci instead used the euphemism “equilibrium” to vaguely describe this same process. He stated emphatically, “There is no way we are going to eradicate this virus. But I hope we are looking at a time when we have enough people vaccinated and enough people with protection from previous infection that the Covid restrictions will soon be a thing of the past.”

Speaking last month at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Fauci stated, “It is an open question as to whether or not Omicron is going to be the live virus vaccination that everyone is hoping for.”

All of these policy changes and claims that COVID-19 is becoming “endemic” are completely unscientific and will create the conditions for new, potentially more dangerous variants to evolve that will cause further surges of infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

In a comprehensive interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*, Boston University epidemiologist Dr. Eleanor Murray spoke on these issues surrounding endemicity and made clear that it is entirely premature to proclaim COVID-19 endemic. She noted that those politicizing the term “endemic” are intentionally exploiting the ambiguity of the term, which has multiple definitions.

Dr. Murray stated, “The first thing is that a pandemic is an epidemic at a much grander scale, and endemic is not on that spectrum, it is an entirely separate idea. The official World Health Organization (WHO) and CDC definition of a pandemic is a disease spreading out of control in two or more regions of the world.”

She noted that the term “endemic” can refer to a mathematical model in which a disease “infects one new person for each current infection over that period,” adding, “there’s a slightly more vague definition of a disease that is just behaving predictably over a sort of long-term period in a given area.”

Commenting on the way in which the latter definition of “endemic” has been misused during the Omicron surge, she stated, “They’re saying that if COVID is endemic, we don’t need to do anything any more. And that is a ridiculous prediction. What they are implying by calling COVID endemic is that we will no longer have any COVID, which is patently false.”

Dr. Murray pointed to the dangers of this policy, stating, “Every infected person is a chance for a new variant to arise, and we have so much infection right now there is no reason that there couldn’t be a complete immune-escape variant. There’s no reason we couldn’t have something twice as severe as Delta.”

The deliberate misuse of the term “endemic” is comparable to the distortion of the scientific concept of “herd immunity” by Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Jair Bolsonaro and their right-wing co-thinkers internationally. While previously applied to the level of *vaccine-induced* immunity needed to protect a given population, in 2020 this

concept was manipulated to justify the premature reopening of all businesses and schools in order to achieve a mythical “herd immunity” based on mass infections.

In effect, this homicidal strategy has been embraced by Biden and other world leaders that previously maintained a pretense of seeking to end the pandemic through limited mitigation measures. Their distortion of the term “endemic” serves the same purpose and same interests of a ruling class determined to maximize the extraction of profits by fully reopening every school and workplace.

It is now clear that at the start of the Omicron surge, the Biden administration made a cold-blooded decision to allow the virus to rip. Undoubtedly, there were private meetings at which they asked, “How many Americans will be infected and die in this wave?” When told that millions would be infected and hundreds of thousands could die, they carried out a cost-benefit analysis and chose to proceed with this homicidal plan. As a result, over 100,000 Americans have now died during the Omicron surge.

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a lively debate within the scientific community about whether the best response to COVID-19 is an all-out effort to eliminate or eradicate the virus, or whether it can be managed through aggressive mitigation.

But reality is rendering this question moot. On one hand, the experience in China has shown that it is possible to save millions of lives through an elimination strategy, even in the world’s most populous country. Throughout much of the rest of the world, making COVID-19 “endemic” has become a slogan for ending all restrictions on the spread of the disease, meaning that the death of 1 million Americans in the US will soon become two, three and more.

In other words, mankind is confronted with two possible responses to the pandemic: The ruling class’s demand for mass infection, under the guise of “herd immunity” and “endemicity,” or the demand of the working class, articulated by the Socialist Equality Parties and the *World Socialist Web Site*, for the global elimination of COVID-19.

The fight to end the pandemic will only be taken forward by the working class, independently of all capitalist parties and their backers in the trade unions. The most critical task is to build a revolutionary socialist leadership, armed with a scientific understanding of the Zero COVID strategy and a political understanding of the social and historical forces that have caused the pandemic.

The Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, initiated by the WSWs just days before the emergence of Omicron, will serve as the central axis to educate the working class on the scientific, political, economic and historical dimensions of the pandemic. All scientists and workers determined to stop the pandemic and save millions of lives are encouraged to fill out the form below to participate in the Inquest.



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