

Johnson government adopts “dying with COVID” strategy for the UK

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Britain’s government has finalised its “living with COVID” strategy. Speaking to parliament yesterday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson made clear this should properly be called a plan for workers “dying with COVID”. He announced:

- From today, the end of guidance that school staff and students test twice weekly.
- From this Thursday, the end of the legal requirement to self-isolate after a positive test, routine contact tracing and self-isolation support payments.
- From March 24, the end of COVID sick pay provisions.
- From April 1, the end of free testing for the general public.

Every word uttered in defence of this murderous policy is based on a lie. Johnson told the BBC on Sunday, “We are now one step closer towards a return to normality and finally giving people back their freedoms while continuing to protect ourselves and others.”

The Conservative government’s strategy is based on the removal of all protections and will not lead to “normality”.

Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE) member Professor Robert West told *Times Radio* that the government had decided to “abdicate its own responsibility for looking after its population,” adding, “It looks as though what the Government has said is that it accepts that the country is going to have to live with somewhere between 20,000 and 80,000 COVID deaths a year and isn’t really going to do anything about it.”

Medium-term scenarios outlined on February 10 by SAGE in a universally ignored briefing raise even graver concerns. Professor Maggie Rae, President of the Faculty of Public Health, called the ending of free testing “incomprehensible”. There is no sound scientific or medical basis for the government’s policy.

Johnson blurted out his real motivation in his BBC

interview. “We need people to be much more confident and get back to work... We don’t need to keep spending at a rate of £2 billion a month [on testing].”

The super-rich view any public health response to the pandemic as a state-subsidised interruption of the flow of profits, which must end. Their “new normal” does not mean doing away with the virus, but with the victims of the virus who will be forcibly exposed to COVID-19 in their workplaces.

The “work till you drop” drive has reached such a pitch that Britain’s 95-year-old monarch has been enlisted as the royal face of the campaign. “Queen vows to carry on working with Covid,” cheered the *Daily Telegraph*; “Queen, 95, hit by Covid... but she vows to work on,” the *Sun*; the *Mirror* reported, “Queen gets Covid but she carries on”; the *Metro* ran the inevitable “Queen keeps calm and carries on”; and the *Daily Mail* touted “Queen’s Covid example to us all”.

The boardrooms and their media outposts have worked themselves into such a frenzy that no one in the corporate media has asked whether risking the life of the head of the British state at a time of extreme political crisis, including within the monarchy, is a good idea.

The second lie is that COVID-19 can now be managed by, in Johnson’s words, “encouraging personal responsibility.” He added cynically, “It’s very important we should remain careful”.

How, exactly? Interviewed on *Sky News* yesterday, Business Minister Paul Scully said that for people who contracted COVID, “like any transmissible illness you’d stay at home... but it’ll be down to themselves or down to their employer.” In fact, it will be entirely “down to their employer” with workers doubly pressured by having no access to even limited sickness and self-isolation payments.

Without free testing, moreover, most people will have no way of knowing whether or not they even have a

COVID infection. The virus will be allowed to run rampant.

Enter the third lie, that the combination of the Omicron variant and the vaccination programme have ended any serious threat from COVID. The UK is “in a different world,” Johnson said Sunday. “I want to be able to address the problems of the pandemic with a vaccine-led approach.”

It is Johnson and his supporters that are living “in a different world” or trying to sell the myth of one. Omicron is still taking a significant toll on health and lives, with the long-term implications still unknown. Vaccinations, a vital tool in the fight against COVID-19, are being continually undermined by the removal of other public health measures, allowing the virus to circulate and new variants to develop.

As the government’s Chief Scientific Officer Sir Patrick Vallance admitted yesterday, there is “no guarantee” that the next variants will be less severe. “We expect there to be further variants and they could be more severe.”

More than 1,000 cases of the more transmissible BA.2 subvariant of Omicron had already been detected in the UK by the start of this month. Preliminary results from a study at the University of Tokyo suggest it may be more severe and resistant to treatments. Deltacron, a hybrid of the more deadly Delta and Omicron variants, has also been confirmed in the UK.

Even with additional shots, immunity from vaccination is waning. A recent study of triple-jabbed people by the US Centre for Disease Control found that protection against hospitalisation fell from 91 percent during the first two months to 78 percent after four. For protection against visits to urgent care and emergency departments, it fell from 87 percent to 66 percent. After more than five months, effectiveness fell to 31 percent, though the researchers note the estimate was “imprecise because few data were available”.

Plans for a fourth jab in the UK, announced by Health Secretary Sajid Javid yesterday, are being limited to people aged 75 and over, the immunosuppressed and residents in old age care homes.

As SAGE advisor Professor West told *Times Radio* he would be “very surprised” if the “living with COVID” strategy would be cost effective, given the economic costs of Long COVID and hospital admissions. But this underestimates the brutality of what is planned.

From the beginning, the government’s preferred “herd immunity” policy has been to trade the lives of the old

and the clinically vulnerable off against the profits of the rich. Its attacks on social security payments and underfunding of the National Health Service show it has no intention of caring for the aged and infirm. Seeing them die is seen as a positive boon, as Johnson made clear in October 2020 with his infamous declaration, “No more fucking lockdowns. Let the bodies pile high in their thousands!”

Johnson is given a free hand to act by the Labour Party and the trade unions. He made his statement to a parliamentary chamber that looked half asleep.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer raised some pro-forma concerns, to be forgotten in a week’s time, advancing Labour’s obscenely-named plan to “live well with COVID”, framed as a more responsible version of the government’s policy. He said, in reference to testing, “If you’re 2-1 up with ten minutes to go you don’t sub off one of your best defenders.”

The UK is not “2-1 up”, it is 180,000 lives down.

Trades Union Congress General Secretary Frances O’Grady agreed with Johnson, that “We are all looking forward to getting on with our lives,” before appealing to his criminal government to “put the country and public health first” by maintaining free tests and improving sick pay. This is something neither she nor any union leader has any intention of fighting for.

Johnson’s announcement applies specifically to England, with the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland following their own timescales. But whatever political points they try to score today over the Tories, they will follow suit in short order, as they have done throughout the pandemic.

At home with the pandemic and abroad with the war plans against Russia, the Johnson government and its supporters are dragging the working class over the precipice. Workers must urgently organise a joint fight against COVID-19 and the danger of war on the only possible basis—the struggle for international socialism.



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