

Embracing far-right Freedom Convoy's demands, Canada's governments rapidly drop remaining COVID-19 public health measures

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Proceeding under the cover of relentless war propaganda against Russia, federal and provincial governments across Canada are rapidly dismantling the few remaining COVID-19 public health measures.

Premiers in every province are shamelessly regurgitating the same lies they have told countless times before, that the pandemic is “over” and that the population, which has suffered almost 37,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations, must learn to “live with the virus.” In so doing, they are fully embracing the fascistic, anti-scientific measures demanded by the far-right Freedom Convoy, which occupied downtown Ottawa for over three weeks and blocked US border crossings in early February.

These herd immunity policies, cribbed from the fascistic Great Barrington Declaration, are being carried out as the country exits the fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent wave was fueled by a combination of the highly transmissible Omicron variant and a relentless drive by governments to keep all workplaces and schools open.

Implicit in the claim that workers must “live with the virus” is that a significant number of the elderly, the immunocompromised, and even healthy individuals will needlessly die from the virus. The ruling class, purely for the sake of enlarging its already immense wealth, is ready to infect the entire population with COVID-19.

Having declared that the Omicron variant was “mild” from the outset, the ruling class and its government representatives then presided over a deadly winter surge of the pandemic. Principled scientists and health care professionals warned that failure to reverse government reopening policies, including the rollback of widespread PCR testing, would lead to mass infection and death. This is precisely what occurred.

There has been a concerted effort by capitalist governments and the corporate press to sweep the past three months under the rug, despite it being one of the worst phases of the pandemic to date. The working class is told, day in and day out,

that the “worst is behind us,” without an actual accounting of the massive toll this past winter took on human life.

The first COVID-19 case in Canada caused by the Omicron variant was documented on November 28, 2021. In the preceding three months, the Delta variant ravaged the country during a fall surge of the pandemic, which reached its ebb in early December.

No sooner had the new variant begun rapidly spreading within Canada than governments claimed that Omicron was impossible to stop and would infect everyone. They framed this as a net positive, supposedly leading to herd immunity. This was despite research demonstrating that infection with Omicron conferred no significant long-term immunity to COVID-19. Many people previously infected with Omicron have been reinfected with the BA.2 sub-variant.

Less than two months after the first confirmed case, on January 26, Omicron produced the highest single-day death toll of the pandemic, with 226 deaths recorded across the country. During the three months from December 1, 2021 to February 28, 2022, COVID-19 killed approximately 6,500 people. Only the first wave of the pandemic, in the spring of 2020, and the second wave, in the winter of 2020, produced greater death tolls, with approximately 8,500 and 9,700 dead, respectively.

The sobering impact of this level of death can only be appreciated when one recognizes that at the height of the fifth wave, over 80 percent of the Canadian population was fully vaccinated, with around 45 percent further inoculated with a third booster dose. In comparison, a vaccine was not yet developed during the first wave, and only a small proportion of the population was vaccinated with even one dose at the height of the second wave.

Even these staggering mortality figures are likely undercounts. Dr. Tara Moriarty, an infectious disease specialist at the University of Toronto, estimates that only Quebec has accurately reported its number of COVID-19 deaths, while a province like British Columbia, governed by the “progressive”

New Democratic Party, underreports its COVID-19 deaths by a factor of three.

According to Dr. Moriarty's modeling, BC is only behind Alberta in per capita excess deaths during the pandemic, which is viewed as a more reliable indicator of the real COVID-19 death toll under conditions where provincial governments have throttled public testing to hide the extent of the pandemic from the population. BC's excess deaths per one hundred thousand people reached a high of 125 by the end of November 2021, compared to Alberta's at 200.

In total, at least 1.48 million Canadians officially contracted COVID-19 during the fifth wave according to Worldometer, representing almost four percent of the total population. However, the Coalition Avenir Quebec government has admitted that at least three million Quebec residents have been infected with Omicron, representing over one third of the population. If one assumes that a similar ratio of infection per head of population has occurred across the country, upwards of 13 million out of Canada's 38 million inhabitants may have been infected by Omicron.

Even using a conservative estimate of ten percent of all infections, the number of infected individuals who will go on to develop symptoms of Long COVID is mind-boggling. What has been prepared through the mass infection of millions of Canadians in such a short amount of time is chronic and potentially debilitating illness for countless people for years or decades. Research has drawn the comparison between COVID-19 infection and lead poisoning when it comes to a person's cognitive faculties, and the disease has been shown to attack many of the human body's critical systems.

Case numbers, hospitalizations, and deaths are all on the decline. This is largely the result of the virus burning its way through vulnerable sections of the population, and not because the federal and provincial governments have done anything to stop its spread. Major disruptions to public health care systems persist. After being brought to the brink of collapse during the fifth wave, hospitals continue to suffer unprecedented levels of staff attrition.

Nevertheless, prominent provincial leaders, such as the hard-right Premiers Jason Kenney in Alberta and Doug Ford in Ontario, have struggled to contain their enthusiasm to eliminate the public health measures that constitute an intolerable drain on profits for the banks and corporations they serve.

Alberta, which Kenney previously reopened to great corporate fanfare in the summer of 2021, only for the province to subsequently suffer its worst wave of the pandemic, has along with Saskatchewan dropped all public health measures. This includes indoor capacity limits and mask mandates for all but the highest-risk settings, such as long-term care homes. Vaccine passports have also been eliminated.

In Ontario, Quebec, BC, and Manitoba, all indoor capacity limits have been lifted, and government figures in each province have openly mused about dropping mask mandates by

the end of March. The maritime provinces are following suit, with New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador set to drop mask mandates by the middle of the month.

All of this is taking place as early signs point to a resurgence of the pandemic. Wastewater sampling in Ontario and Saskatchewan shows elevated levels of COVID-19, suggesting the beginning of a new wave driven by the new BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron. In addition, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Kieran Moore has stated that the number of people newly infected with COVID-19 in Ontario each day is likely ten times the recorded number of 2,000.

Meanwhile, the federal Liberal government, led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, is once again facilitating the provincial governments' imposition of the dictates of Bay Street, while cynically posturing as an opponent of herd immunity policy. Not once during the whole previous course of the pandemic did the federal government invoke the Emergencies Act to declare a national emergency and coordinate a national response to eliminate the virus, even though this could have saved tens of thousands of lives. Instead, their response to the pandemic has been to shore up the profits and wealth of the ruling class, including by granting them over \$650 billion in bailout money starting in spring 2020. On the other hand, the Trudeau government extended poverty rations through the limited CERB benefit for workers laid off during the pandemic.

Chief responsibility for the calamity that has befallen workers in Canada lies with the trade union bureaucracy and the NDP, who have propped up the minority Liberal government for the duration of the pandemic and are complicit in the deaths of tens of thousands of people.

Instead of fighting for the safety of their members and their families, the labour bureaucracy has smothered and sabotaged all workers' efforts to oppose herd immunity policy and create safer working conditions. This includes, but is not limited to, shutting down all talk of strike action to oppose the dangerous reopening of schools and unsafe working conditions, and actively intervening to forestall left-wing counterdemonstrations against the Freedom Convoy.

The dismantling of COVID-19 public health measures will lead to a resurgence of hospitalizations and deaths. To oppose these homicidal policies requires the building of a movement to fight for a COVID-19 elimination strategy, which must be based in the working class and unite workers of all countries in a common struggle against capitalist herd immunity.



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