

UK COVID memorial wall anniversary: The pandemic still raging, the criminals still at large

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Today's day of reflection, marking the first anniversary of the National Covid Memorial Wall in London is one of the few genuine expressions of the popular response to the pandemic. It combines sorrow at the enormous and needless loss of life with a call for those responsible to be brought to justice.

The wall was begun when the first red heart was painted on the 500-metre wall facing the Houses of Parliament, across the River Thames. It is the project of campaign group Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK.

A silent procession along its length will take place at 3.30pm, with a petition calling for the wall to be made a permanent memorial to be handed into Downing Street at 4.30pm. It currently has over 100,000 signatures. A candlelit procession will take place at 8pm.

These vigils are held in the face of a government determined to erase the memorial wall in the heart of Westminster. Last May, Prime Minister Boris Johnson pointedly endorsed a different memorial tucked away in St Paul's Cathedral, telling Parliament: "Like many across this Chamber I was deeply moved when I visited the COVID memorial wall opposite Parliament and I wholeheartedly support the plan for a memorial in St Paul's cathedral which will provide a fitting place of reflection in the heart of our capital."

Johnson et al fear and despise the memorial wall as a testament to the crimes they have committed and now continue, and of the overwhelming popular hostility to his government.

Each individually drawn heart represents one of the more than 188,000 lives lost to the pandemic. This appalling death toll is the direct result of government policy, summed up by Johnson's infamous outburst, "No more fucking lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" A day after this statement became public,

Johnson scurried to the memorial at night so he could claim to have visited without having to encounter the people whose loved ones his government murdered.

A deadly and highly infectious novel virus has been allowed to run rampant through the population for the last two years. Its spread was only briefly interrupted by lockdowns forced on the Conservatives by an angry public and implemented to prevent a revolt in the working class prompted by the collapse of the National Health Service.

With every reopening of the economy, the government moved closer to its objective of "learning to live with the virus".

The consequences are staggering. As well as the terrible loss of life, three quarters of a million have at some stage been hospitalised with the virus. As of January 31, 1.5 million people were suffering with Long COVID—685,000 of them had been ill for more than a year.

In remembering the dead, the memorial wall is an indictment of those responsible. It also draws attention to the ongoing dangers posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which the government is doing its best to hide.

Having ended all public health measures to combat the spread of the virus, reporting of cases is being steadily scaled back and funding to key surveillance studies cut. Testing will no longer be universally free from next month.

But for all these efforts, the reality of "living with COVID" is becoming ever clearer. According to the weekly Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey, nearly 3.5 million people were infected with COVID in the week ending March 19, a *one million increase* on the week before. England's infection rate of one in 16 people is close to its historic high of one in 15 and Scotland's rate of one in 11 is the highest ever.

Government claims that the vaccination programme has rendered these numbers irrelevant are lies. Vaccination is a vital instrument in controlling the virus, but is undermined by a vaccine-only strategy which allows it to both continue circulating and mutating.

Imperial College London Professor of Immunology Danny Altmann published yesterday, “Why the UK can’t rely on boosters to get through each new wave of Covid”. He writes, “The vaccines rapidly induce hugely high levels of protective, neutralising antibodies in most people, but these levels wane within months of each sequential dose...”

“[N]ew evidence from the past two years suggests that encounters with different variants of Covid or different vaccine types can alter the effectiveness of later jabs in surprising ways—an effect called immune imprinting. This raises the possibility that booster performance could be even less predictable and effective in the future.”

As of January 31, nearly 600,000 of the then 14.8 million total recorded infections in the UK were re-infections. Many people have been fallen ill three times with different variants.

Moreover, there are indications that the government’s relentless propaganda to declare the pandemic “over” is sabotaging the vaccine rollout. Less than half of the 560,000 severely immuno-suppressed people in the UK have received a fourth vaccination shot, on offer since the end of January.

Claims that the emergence of the Omicron variant means that COVID’s spread can be tolerated are proving disastrous. Driven by the rising wave of infections, hospitalisations have risen significantly, with the number of COVID patients increasing from 10,554 on February 26, to 17,440 last Thursday. For over-75s, the weekly rate of admission for COVID patients is at its highest level in a year. The number of people being treated primarily for COVID increased 50 percent in the two weeks to March 24.

Since Johnson announced his “Living with COVID” strategy on February 21, nearly 4,000 people have been killed by the virus at a rate of 110 a day, equivalent to roughly 40,000 a year. According to the latest survey Long COVID figures jumped by 200,000 in a month, with 35–49-year-olds in the most deprived areas the most likely to be affected.

Unable to simply sweep the pandemic and its response under the carpet, the government has sought to defuse public anger using the tried and tested method of a public inquiry. Like every other before it, this is a stage-managed

affair, designed to spend as long as possible asking the wrong questions. The chairperson, retired judge Lady Hallett, was directly appointed by Johnson. Her terms of reference exclude bringing the guilty to justice.

Anyone who wants to know where this is heading should look at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, looking into 72 deaths in one tower fire on one night, now in its fifth year and with no end in sight. In that time, the corporations involved in the refurbishment of the tower, still raking in profits, have been granted immunity from prosecution.

Johnson can promise a “frank and candid” COVID inquiry because he knows his own protection is assured.

The Labour Party poses as a supporter of the memorial wall and the campaign to make it permanent. This is revolting cynicism. The Johnson government could not have got away with its crimes in the last two years if it had not been supported by Labour every step of the way—with the party and the trade unions signing up to every unsafe reopening of the economy and of schools that became the main vectors for the virus.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is conducting a Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, designed to expose criminal governments and their enablers through the testimony of workers and scientific experts around the world. Through the Inquest, the WSWS is building support for a scientific policy aimed at the globally coordinated elimination of COVID-19. We encourage those affected by the pandemic to contact us today.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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