

The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2024 US elections

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In the 2024 US elections, the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic has been almost entirely ignored by both major capitalist candidates, Joe Biden and Donald Trump, as well as almost every third party campaign. Only the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates Joseph Kishore and Jerry White have identified the pandemic as a significant ongoing issue and advanced a socialist program to stop it.

Contrary to the lies of the corporate media and political establishment, the pandemic is ongoing, and COVID-19 continues to infect, kill and debilitate masses of people globally each day. There have now been over 28.5 million excess deaths attributable to the pandemic globally, including over 1.4 million in the US, while over 4,000 people continue to die each day globally due to COVID-19 or its myriad health impacts. Studies estimate that hundreds of millions of people throughout the world are now suffering from Long COVID, with their ranks swelling with each new wave of mass infection.

What accounts for the silence of all the capitalist and middle class parties on this world historic event that has impacted every human being and profoundly altered global society?

The pandemic, which began just over four years ago, was arguably the central issue in the 2020 US elections. The horrifying response of the Trump administration, which combined the most blatant pro-capitalist policies with extreme backwardness and hostility to science, shocked millions of Americans.

While Trump whipped up his fascist supporters to oppose limited lockdowns and all other basic public health measures, Biden claimed that he would “follow the science” and stop the pandemic. In the final debate in October 2020, when just over 200,000 Americans had died of COVID-19, Biden declared, “Anyone who’s responsible for that many deaths should not remain as president of the United States of America.”

After winning the election, Biden immediately rejected lockdowns and initiated the full reopening of all public schools before any educators or children were even vaccinated. Since Biden’s inauguration, over 720,000 Americans have died of COVID-19, the majority of the 1,186,671 total official deaths.

Biden’s new CDC Director Rochelle Walensky proclaimed masks the “Scarlet Letter” of the pandemic and encouraged the lifting of mask mandates. After Biden prematurely declared “independence” from COVID-19 in July 2021, the CDC covered up the spread of the Delta variant and breakthrough infections.

The global spread of the Omicron variant in November 2021

prompted the Biden administration to fully embrace Trump’s fascistic “herd immunity” program, steadily abandoning all public health measures and allowing the virus to spread unchecked. Promoting eugenicist conceptions, in January 2022 Walensky deemed it “encouraging news” that COVID-19 predominantly kills people who are “unwell to begin with.”

The normalization of the pandemic culminated in the scrapping of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declaration in May 2023. This led to the dismantling of all pandemic surveillance and mass disenrollment from Medicaid, with over 19 million Americans losing access to healthcare over the past year.

The Biden administration now completely ignores the ongoing dangers of the pandemic, including the growing ranks of those suffering from Long COVID and the ever-present threat of a far more dangerous variant evolving due to unchecked viral transmission. The official narrative is that COVID-19 has become “endemic” and essentially harmless. This delusional fantasy, parroted by the entire corporate media, underpins the Biden administration’s approach to the pandemic in the 2024 elections.

As part of his “Make America Great Again” mythology, Trump has sought to portray his presidency as a Golden Age in US history, covering up his own disastrous response during the first year of the pandemic.

Only in the past couple weeks has Joe Biden begun to raise the pandemic at campaign events, making cheap jokes about Trump’s most extreme anti-science statements about treating COVID-19 through injecting disinfectants or ultraviolet light. But Biden’s record stands as a devastating indictment of the Democratic Party, which is equally culpable in the mass death and debilitation of the American population.

Outside the major capitalist parties, the positions of the third party candidates, with the exception of the Socialist Equality Party, range from far-right anti-vaccine propaganda to complete silence on the pandemic.

The standard bearer for the most unhinged and reactionary anti-science politics is Robert F. Kennedy Jr. A member of the “Disinformation Dozen” responsible for the majority of anti-vaccine disinformation on social media during the pandemic, for decades he has been a leading purveyor of false claims that vaccines cause autism and other developmental disorders among children.

During the pandemic, RFK Jr. took this propaganda to a new level, organizing numerous rallies to oppose vaccine mandates and

other basic public health measures required to stop the spread of COVID-19. Along with large sections of the political establishment and corporate media, he has also promoted the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory, which aims to foment anti-Chinese racism and prepare the grounds for direct military confrontation with China.

Another third party candidate, Cornel West, has adopted a thoroughly reactionary policy on vaccines and adapted himself to the right-wing campaign against scientists and science. On his campaign website, West lists as one of his demands, “Convene a federal panel of scientists and experts to study the safety and utilization of vaccines for infectious diseases.”

What cynicism and cowardice! Will West’s “panel” review the safety of the decades-old vaccines for chicken pox, influenza, measles, mumps and rubella and others? Will they go back and review the safety of the vaccine which successfully eradicated smallpox in 1980? West advances this position under conditions in which measles is spreading across the US due to declining vaccination rates, an expression of social backwardness to which he is appealing. To revive a phrase from the 1960s, West is not part of the solution, he is part of the problem.

In an interview with far-right comedian Jimmy Dore last September, West stated, “I think the kind of concerns that you and RFK Jr. and others have certainly are well-grounded.” Asked whether he agreed with a right-wing December 13, 2021, statement from the National Black Caucus of the Green Party that denounced the party’s support for vaccine mandates and passports, West stated, “If I had another chance, I’d be leaning much more with the Black Caucus.”

After West withdrew from the Green Party race to run as an independent, Jill Stein launched her presidential campaign last November, two months after West’s interview with Dore. She has never commented on this interview, and her campaign website entirely omits the pandemic.

In an interview with Kim Iversen, Stein was asked the same question as West about the Green Party’s position on vaccine mandates. Distancing herself from this and appealing to anti-vaccine sentiment, Stein said, “Mandates are not workable, and they can be wrong, and in some ways they were wrong.” She also intimidated her support for the Wuhan Lab Lie, stating, “The whole issue of where did COVID come from has not been addressed and must be addressed.”

Despite being a Harvard-educated physician, before the pandemic Stein repeatedly used anti-vaccine rhetoric, including the promotion of baseless claims about mercury poisoning from vaccines.

The campaign of the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), a neo-Stalinist party which split from the Workers World Party (WWP) in 2004, has also largely ignored the pandemic. Their campaign website only briefly refers to the pandemic in the past tense, and a video on the pandemic released by the PSL’s presidential candidate, Claudia de la Cruz, was widely denounced by anti-COVID advocates. The PSL quickly deleted the video without comment, and since then has resumed their de facto policy of simply ignoring the pandemic.

The only campaign which has placed the pandemic as a central

theme of its campaign is that of the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates Joseph Kishore and Jerry White, who have advanced a scientifically-grounded socialist public health program. In numerous statements and videos posted on social media, the SEP’s candidates have advocated for masking, while stressing that this must be combined with a broader strategy aimed at eliminating COVID-19 globally.

In a campaign statement posted on Long COVID Awareness Day, March 15, Kishore wrote:

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and our election campaign insist that elimination remains both viable and necessary. We advance a globally-coordinated elimination strategy, in which the entire world’s population acts in solidarity and with a collective determination to enforce a broad-based public health program.

Such a strategy includes mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation and treatment of all infected patients, the universal use of high-quality masks, and the renovation of all public buildings to provide clean indoor air through HEPA filters and the safe implementation of Far-UVC devices. There must be a vast expansion in funding for Long COVID research and a systematic program of scientific education.

After four years of the pandemic, however, it is abundantly clear that such a strategy will never arise under world capitalism, which subordinates all public health spending to the insatiable profit interests of a money-mad financial oligarchy. It can only be implemented through a turn to the working class and the building of a mass movement fighting to restructure society on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The response of different political tendencies to the pandemic makes clear who are the genuine socialists and whose program represents the interests of the international working class. Despite the efforts of the media and official politics to cover up the pandemic, its devastating and ongoing toll will continue to affect mass consciousness and contribute to the deepening political radicalization of the international working class. This opposition must be unified on a world scale and aimed at the socialist overturn of the decaying capitalist system.



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