

Starmer Labour government organises pandemic Day of Reflection as UK COVID deaths mount

Robert Stevens, Our reporters
12 March 2025

The official response of the Starmer Labour government to the fifth anniversary of the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic confirmed the ruling elite's determination to carry on with policies that led to mass death.

The UK-wide COVID-19 Day of Reflection was the second such event after the outgoing Conservative government organised the first last March—as recommended by the UK Commission on Covid Commemoration. An ongoing public inquiry is designed to ensure that those responsible for over 200,000 deaths and over a million people suffering with Long COVID evade justice.

The only national event organised was a procession along the National Covid Memorial Wall in London, a minute's silence and flowers being cast from nearby Lambeth Bridge. A minute's silence was also observed at midday at Euston, one of the largest rail stations in London.

The wall, which faces Parliament along its entire 550-metre length, features over 200,000 painted hearts added by bereaved relatives, and is a searing reminder of the vast loss of human life overseen by the Conservatives that continues under Labour.

Commenting on the fact that no senior government figures in Westminster took part in any of the proceedings, the National Covid Memorial Wall organisation tweeted on its X account, "It is indeed the duty of our ministers as leaders and public servants to mark the Covid-19 Day of Reflection on Sunday. Sadly, the silence is deafening. DIY commemoration it is then."

A few hundred participated, with many bringing photos of their loved ones which they added to the wall.

Only a few minutes were allocated for speeches, featuring representatives of the Labour Party, which runs

the borough of Lambeth within which the Memorial Wall is located. Local MP Florence Eshalomi, council leader Claire Holland and Mayor of Lambeth Councillor John-Paul Ennis did not raise a single political criticism of Boris Johnson's criminal "Let it rip" pandemic policy.

Eshalomi made a single mention of Johnson, but only in reference to how staff at the nearby St. Thomas's Hospital had saved his life when he fell ill with COVID. No Labourite could denounce the Tories for ending all mitigations given that Labour had the same policy.

Almost 250,000 people have now died in Britain over these five years, but one would never know given the statements of the government.

The Tories' policy of mass infection and indifference to mass death was summed up when Johnson blurted out in October 2020, "No more fucking lockdowns. Let the bodies pile high in their thousands". The stone-cold heart of the British capitalist class was again in evidence a few months later with Johnson's statement that the COVID virus was "just nature's way of dealing with old people".

But the Tories were only able to enforce their ending of lockdowns and reopening the economy due to the total support they secured first from Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and then his replacement Sir Keir Starmer.

In the March 25, 2020 parliamentary debate on the pandemic, his last as party leader, Corbyn said of Labour's approach, "Our immediate task as the Opposition is to help arrest the spread of the coronavirus, support the government's public health efforts while being constructively critical where we feel it is necessary to improve the official response."

Starmer was the driving force in demanding that schools be reopened, a policy that allowed a devastating further mass spread of the disease and which was enforced through Labour's partners in the trade union bureaucracy.

He posted on X on August 16, 2020 *only five months after WHO declared a global pandemic*, “My message to the Prime Minister: I don’t just want all children back at school next month, I expect them back at school. No ifs, no buts”.

Writing on the *Canary* website when Labour announced the second Day of Reflection in December, Sam Williams, a Long COVID sufferer noted, “What about marking the day of reflection by reading the names of all of the people who have died of Covid since Labour took power? At the date of writing [December 18, 2024], that’s 4,655 people. That’s an average of over 200 people a week. It’s really upsetting me how the Labour government has gone out of their way to bury (pun intended) the Covid deaths. Over one person has died of Covid every hour since Keir Starmer was elected PM.”

The COVID-19 Day of Reflection event in Sheffield, South Yorkshire heard a recorded message from **Fran**, a Long COVID sufferer who was unable to attend for COVID-related health reasons. She was the only person to raise the ongoing risks from COVID and the concerted campaign by those in power to bury the lessons of the pandemic.

Her message explained that she was a fit and healthy veterinary surgeon who after a single COVID infection in 2022, has suffered “relentless and torturous symptoms”. She has been unable to leave her bed and now suffers from severe ME/chronic fatigue syndrome, POTS (Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome), migraines and other health problems, and is completely reliant on others.

Fran is part of a network of sufferers, some with even more severe symptoms. “There are some so sick, they cannot eat and are being tube fed, some have died, some have committed suicide or requested assisted suicide,” she explained.

“The common reaction has been to mock victims and claim it is all psychosomatic. There are virtually no services. I am lucky as I have support and funds and have got private treatment which has helped. Long COVID sufferers are just gaslighted by politicians and others.”

Fran reviewed some of the statistics: “There has been a 15-fold increase in those who have ME. One in 10 people who get COVID, get Long COVID. Your chances of getting Long COVID increases with every infection. There is next to no health support. You are put on cognitive behavioural therapy courses, which makes your symptoms worse.

“COVID is not over, it is still killing people. In the US, [President Donald] Trump abolished the COVID Advisory Committee. They want to disappear the statistics. There has been no shielding for five years. Basic medical precautions must be available. Air filters should be placed in public spaces, masking must continue to protect those who are vulnerable. We must bring back community care. No government rhetoric will change the fact that there are risks.”

Fiona, another Long COVID sufferer, had suggested to the organisers that Fran’s message should be heard. She told WSWs reporters, “I organised for some of the people who can’t be here due to Long COVID to contribute messages that have been written on leaves, hanging on the tree. I thought it is important that patients and sufferers have a voice.

“Long COVID clinics are closing or services are being reduced and less is offered. They say it’s because fewer people are getting referred but we don’t know how much Long COVID there is as no-one is testing.”

Diane has ME and was very aware of the dangers of post-viral infections and how one COVID infection could ruin someone’s life.

“I am really disgusted by the fact that the government and public health has abandoned mitigations and public health measures that could protect people. This is going to lead to an absolute crisis in health care, which we are already seeing and that is only going to continue. I wanted to be here, wearing a mask to represent the point of view of the reality that COVID isn’t over, and we still need to mask up and protect ourselves and each other.

“I know Fran. I thought her speech was extremely powerful and represents those who tell the truth that the pandemic is ongoing and can be devastating for people with Long COVID. I am a member of a COVID-conscious community called Breathe Easy Sheffield. We have events where everyone is masked to support each other. Sadly, people are being gaslighted and told they have anxiety, not Long COVID and the narrative must change.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact