

As US death toll hits 200,000, Trump calls for herd immunity

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On Tuesday, the day that the United States reached the threshold of 200,000 deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic, President Donald Trump openly defended the US government's de facto policy of "herd immunity," that is, allowing the virus to spread without restraint.

"You'll develop herd," Trump told a televised town hall event, before apparently catching himself and substituting the term "herd mentality" for "herd immunity." He continued, "Like a herd mentality. It's going to be—it's going to be herd-developed, and that's going to happen." As a result, he said, the pandemic will "disappear."

In openly defending "herd immunity," Trump has let the cat out of the bag. In fact, herd immunity has been the guiding principle of his government's response to the pandemic, underlying his efforts to downplay the virus, handicap testing, and get workers back on the job as quickly as possible.

As a strategy for responding to COVID-19, the advocates of herd immunity argue that the disease should be allowed to spread freely throughout the population, based on the claim that, at some point, enough people will become infected that the spread of the disease will slow down.

Dr. Scott Atlas, whom Trump recently appointed as a COVID-19 advisor, argued for this approach in July, declaring, "Low-risk groups getting the infection is not a problem. In fact, it's a positive."

Despite the strategy's pseudoscientific trappings, it means nothing more nor less than allowing large numbers of the population, primarily the elderly and the sick, to die in a sort of mass eugenics program potentially costing millions of lives.

Trump has spearheaded this policy and, as revealed in the tapes released by Bob Woodward, deliberately downplayed the threat and lied to the population.

However, it has been supported and implemented by both the Democrats and Republicans. In late March, it was *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman who praised the herd immunity policy being pursued by the Swedish government, criticized lockdowns to stop the spread of the virus, and declared that "the cure can't be worse than the disease." His column was followed by a *Washington Post* editorial praising Sweden for what it called an "appealing model."

Officially, every government in the world denies that it is carrying out a policy of herd immunity. White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said Wednesday, "Herd immunity has never been a strategy here at the White House." She said that Scott Atlas "never proposed herd immunity as a strategy, nor has the president." These are lies.

Such denials have been issued by all the leading government advocates of this policy, including Sweden and the UK.

Sir Patrick Vallance, the chief scientific adviser to the Johnson government in the UK, told the media in March, "It's not possible to stop everyone getting it, and it's also not desirable because you want some immunity in the population." Subsequently, the government, baldly lying, declared "herd immunity has never been our policy or goal."

Sweden, which left schools open while other European countries closed them, has likewise denied it is pursuing a herd immunity policy. But last month, leaked emails revealed that chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell advocated leaving the country's schools open precisely because it would lead to a wider spread of the virus.

"One point might speak for keeping schools open in order to reach herd immunity more quickly," wrote Tegnell secretly on March 14 to his Finnish counterpart.

The fact is that herd immunity is the policy of governments throughout the world. They are all lying about it because their actions, allowing large sections of the population to become infected, are criminal, inhuman and indefensible.

As they accelerate their back-to-work campaign, governments are dropping even the most threadbare efforts to claim they are actively combating the disease. “To overcome the health crisis, we must learn to live with the virus,” French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted last month.

Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, for his part, said not enough politicians were “thinking like health economists trained to pose uncomfortable questions about the level of deaths we might have to live with.” He said the response to the disease should be more akin to “electing to make elderly relatives as comfortable as possible while nature takes its course.”

On Wednesday, the regional premier of Madrid, Spain likewise embraced herd immunity, declaring, “It is likely that practically all children, one way or another, will be infected with coronavirus.”

For years, the rising life expectancy of the working class in developed countries has been presented as a “problem” by US and European think tanks.

A 2013 paper by Anthony H. Cordesman of the Washington think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) presented the increasing longevity of ordinary Americans as a crisis for US imperialism. “The US does not face any foreign threat as serious as its failure to come to grips with ... the rise in the cost of federal entitlement spending,” Cordesman wrote, saying the debt crisis was driven “almost exclusively by the rise in federal spending on major health care programs, Social Security, and the cost of net interest on the debt.”

In other words, after workers are too old to serve as sources of surplus value and profit, their pensions and health care benefits become drains on money that could be better used to pay corporate bonuses and fund the military.

From the standpoint of the ruling class, the pandemic has had very real benefits. It has created a pretext for the transfer of more than \$4 trillion in bailouts to corporate balance sheets, sending stock values soaring. By creating mass unemployment, it has broken up a tight labor market, lowering wages. And most of all,

with the median age of those who die being 78 years old, it means that money earmarked for pension funds, social security and health care for the elderly can now be handed over to the financial oligarchy.

The United States is now in the midst of reopening schools and universities, creating a surge of new outbreaks all over the country. In light of the emails by Sweden’s state epidemiologist saying that leaving schools open will create more infections, it is clear that the White House is working with an estimate of the number of people who will become infected and die as a result, and is proceeding regardless.

Two hundred thousand people have now lost their lives because of the criminal policies of the US ruling class. If the present policies continue, according to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, another 215,000 will lose their lives over the next three months.

If this catastrophe is to be averted, the response to the pandemic must be taken out of the hands of the criminals responsible for the present disaster. No election, whether in the United States or anywhere else, will end the pandemic. As made clear by the complicity of the US media and the Democratic Party in covering up the pandemic in January and February, all factions of the political establishment are united in prioritizing the wealth of the financial oligarchy over human life.

The prerequisite for containing and eradicating the pandemic all over the world is the mobilization of the working class on a politically independent basis in the struggle for socialism.

Andre Damon

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