



THE PANDEMIC & THE VACCINE

MOVING TOWARD GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH

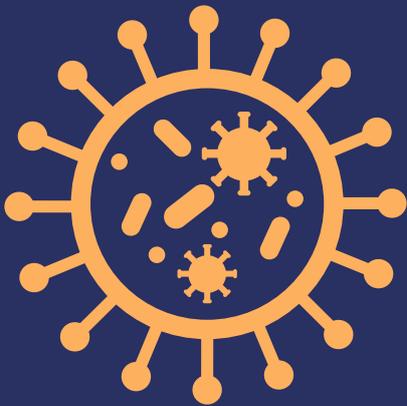


LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

As of spring 2021, it has been over a year since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also been just over a year since the British government reluctantly announced the first of a series of half-measure "lockdowns," as part of a wider pandemic response that deliberately channeled the virus into care homes, left people without the necessary support to isolate properly, and forced health and service workers to continue labouring under unsafe conditions.

The past year has been one of enormous loss and struggle. Even as "lockdown" is lifted, with the government angling for a final and permanent "reopening," we must reckon with the fact that the capitalist state's approach, as ever, is fundamentally at odds with human life and wellbeing.

Despite all the talk of "reopening" and "things going back to normal," the reality is that nothing will ever be the same again. We can never magically return to a pre-COVID world. The pandemic has brought to the forefront many pre-existing issues around systemic ableism, ageism, racism, healthcare and eugenics, education, accessibility, tenants' rights, worker safety — issues of deep-rooted injustice which must be faced directly.



With the pivot from "lockdown" measures to vaccination and reopening, just like before, the state's plan is designed for the benefit of itself, the ruling class, and the entire capitalist system rather than for the benefit of the people.

THE VACCINE

Evidence suggests that the COVID vaccines are safe and effective at preventing infection. But no vaccine can completely stop *transmission* (passing the virus to another person), so vaccination cannot eliminate the virus altogether until a majority of people are vaccinated, achieving herd immunity. This takes time under the best of circumstances, and it is even more of a challenge when **distribution of the vaccine is severely unequal and inequitable.**

In Britain, the vaccine rollout has prioritised the elderly and disabled – a futile attempt to distract from the state's prior eugenicist policies which intentionally caused mass death in these very same populations. On the other hand, the vaccine is still being withheld from many workers and younger people who are likely (or required) to be attending work and school, as well as other at-risk groups such as the homeless and those without GPs. **This allows transmission to continue among unvaccinated populations, keeping the virus spreading.**

Beyond British borders, some countries are struggling to access the vaccine at all. These countries, many of which have been severely underdeveloped (exploited) by British colonialism and neocolonialism, are charged exorbitant prices for the same vaccine that imperialist nations can get much more cheaply. The imperialist nations have the resources to distribute vaccines and assuage this crisis, but it isn't in their interests to do so. **As the pandemic has made clear so many times now, capitalists are only out to make money; where there is no profit to be made, containing the virus is not a priority.**

Vaccines, as well as the specialised processes and equipment needed to manufacture them, must not be patented and held hostage behind capitalist opportunism.

The health of the world's people should be prioritised above profit – but British capitalists have never taken that responsibility, and they never will.



Also concerning is the possibility of "vaccine passports": documents proving a person's vaccination status, possession of which would be used to restrict access to services and spaces.

This would simply create new barriers for people who have not been able to access the vaccine because of the state's own refusal to distribute them fairly. It would also increase the state's powers of surveillance and punishment, part of its ongoing fascist turn. It's clearly not about safety; if the state cared about improving public health and creating virus-free spaces, we would have seen a totally different initial response from the outset of the pandemic, as well as a totally different response right now.

As Britain "reopens" and the bourgeois political parties prattle on about "recovery," we must be prepared for the forms of oppression that were intensified throughout the pandemic to continue adapting along with this agenda. **The state is never going to start acting in the interest of working class and oppressed people – not in Britain, nor internationally.**

REOPENING...FOR BUSINESS

The government is not "reopening" Britain because it is safe or beneficial to the majority of people to do so. It is reopening because capitalism is in crisis, and the system needs workers to keep it shambling along. Having killed over 100,000 people — many of whom were workers — through its piecemeal pandemic strategy, the capitalist state now wants to pick itself up and dust itself off as quickly as possible.

"Back to normal" is what capitalism wants. But "normal" was already falling apart. There was already labour exploitation, imperialist war, healthcare inequality, systemic racism, police violence, the climate crisis — the pandemic only worsened these problems. The reopening is just the capitalists' anxious attempt to kickstart an economic system that was already doomed.

That is to say, reopening is not actually about letting people get back to the forms of in-person connection that many have been missing out on for so long. Rather, it's about getting people out making money and spending money again — in other words, **it's about getting people back to work generating profits for the wealthy.**



Throughout the pandemic, the state's restrictions have not been based on what is safe, but on what is economically productive.

Family members are not allowed to go to each other's houses to help with housework or childcare, but they are allowed to hire a cleaner or a nanny. The first situation is relatively low-risk, but no one is getting paid for it. In the second situation, the risk is higher for everyone involved, but it creates economic activity. The reason the latter is permitted while the former is banned is simple: the state's priority is not the health of people, but of the capitalist economy.

So what does reopening actually mean for the health of the working and oppressed classes?

Accommodations for remote work and study — which were often denied to disabled people before the pandemic — are now commonplace. However, these measures were implemented not for the sake of health or accessibility, but for the sake of continuing economic activity in any way possible. **We will likely soon begin to see attempts to withdraw these accommodations and force workers back into the workplace, removing any autonomy they may have gained over their working conditions.**

We should resist these rollbacks on worker autonomy. However, it is important to recognise that the most vulnerable and heavily exploited workers — particularly those in the service industry, such as line cooks and delivery drivers — have *never* had this autonomy, and have been subjected to the most dangerous conditions throughout the pandemic. Going forward, while some workers may be able to continue with work-from-home arrangements that prioritise their safety, workers in jobs that cannot be done remotely (and which enable others to work remotely) will continue to be forced to accept in-person work and its associated risks. **We must act in solidarity with these workers and support their ongoing labour struggles.**

We must also recognise the ongoing damage to public health caused by certain forms of capitalist violence which are rife in Britain: **evictions and homelessness, deportations, and imprisonment.**

Although the Coronavirus Act 2020 put a temporary ban on evictions, it will soon be legal again for landlords to throw people out onto the streets, where the virus is only one of many threats to health.

Meanwhile, deportations and detainments have continued unchecked, subjecting society's most marginalised populations to unhygienic, unsafe, and fundamentally inhumane conditions.



It cannot be overstated how severely the British state, along with other capitalist states like the US, has exacerbated and prolonged this global health crisis through racist and imperialist policies of private property, criminalisation and border control. **Now more than ever, we need to direct our energy towards ensuring that this state is dismantled – it has proven that even in the most extreme scenarios, it will not act in the interests of humanity.**

OUR DEMANDS

- **Vaccine distribution based on risk of exposure** – not age
- **No vaccine passports** or discrimination based on vaccination status
- **No vaccine apartheid** – excess doses ordered by Europe and the US to be immediately distributed internationally
- **Immediate investment in vaccine manufacturing for the Global South**
- **Investment in infrastructure and equipment** to enable continued remote work/study where possible – no mandatory returns to physical attendance
- **No more deportations or evictions**
- **Immediate release and housing** of prisoners, refugees, and asylum seekers

ABOUT RED FIGHTBACK

We are an intersectional Marxist-Leninist party building collective power to resist capitalist exploitation and construct a socialist alternative: a system in which the priority is not making a profit, but making sure all people's needs are met.

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