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European Languages

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By Andre Damon
22.09.2020

Jacobin magazine embraces Trump administration's murderous "herd immunity" policy

On Saturday, *Jacobin* magazine, which is affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America, published an article promoting the policy of "herd immunity" advocated by the Trump White House and the fascistic right.

The article takes the form of an interview with Katherine Yih and Martin Kulldorff, a pair of academics advocating the so-called "Swedish model" of allowing large sections of the population to become infected with COVID-19 in the name of achieving "herd immunity."

During the interview, Kulldorff argued, "Schools and universities should reopen" because "young, healthy people contribute to the herd immunity that will ultimately benefit all." *Jacobin* reporter Nicole Aschoff tossed softball questions at Kulldorff and Yih, failed to challenge any of their claims, and then added her own observation that the closures of businesses has caused "additional pain" beyond the impact of the pandemic.

In a passage approvingly retweeted by *Jacobin* publisher Bhaskar Sunkara, Kulldorff declares, "The lockdown is the worst assault on the working class in half a century."



Workers wearing personal protective equipment bury bodies in a trench on Hart Island, April 9, 2020 [Credit: AP Photo/John Minchillo]

By choosing to publish this article, the editors and publishers of *Jacobin* have endorsed the Trump administration's homicidal response to the pandemic, which has killed 200,000 Americans so far. Trump's entire response to the pandemic was based around crippling all measures to contain the disease and reopening businesses and schools as quickly as possible. Last week, Trump publicly embraced the strategy advocated by White House COVID-19 advisor Scott Atlas, who is the United States' leading advocate of allowing the pandemic to spread unchecked throughout the population. "With time, it goes away... You'll develop, like a herd mentality... I think it will go away very quickly." Trump continued, "a lot of people do agree with me. You look at Scott Atlas."

Among those who agree with both Trump and Atlas is Kulldorff, who *Jacobin* presents as a leading authority on the pandemic. Last week, Kulldorff defended Atlas and his "herd immunity" policies against 98 Stanford epidemiologists, doctors and other scientists.

The Stanford academics, expressing the overwhelming sentiment among all reputable scientists, published an open letter stating they had "both a moral and an ethical responsibility to call attention to the falsehoods and misrepresentations of science recently fostered by Dr. Scott Atlas."

The letter concluded that "encouraging herd immunity through unchecked community transmission is not a safe public health strategy. In fact, this approach would do the opposite, causing a significant increase in preventable cases, suffering and deaths, especially among vulnerable populations, such as older individuals and essential workers."

But Kulldorff unequivocally defended Atlas. In a letter to the editor of the *Stanford Daily*, he wrote: "It is natural and reassuring that Atlas also consider plummeting childhood vaccinations, postponed cancer screenings, worsening cardiovascular disease outcomes, deteriorating mental health and more house evictions, just to name a few."

Kulldorff has been even more explicit on Twitter. Responding to a statement by Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, "If the president had done his job... all the people would still be alive," Kulldorff wrote, "Naïve/dangerous to think all COVID deaths can be prevented. Such strategies increase deaths. We minimize deaths with age-targeted strategy advocated by [Scott Atlas] @SWAtlasHoover... & me."

In the *Jacobin* interview, Yih advocates for abandoning measures to keep the disease from spreading, "There is a kind of simplistic goal of keeping people from getting infected, period. Now this may seem like a worthy goal, but with a highly contagious respiratory virus to which most of the world's population is probably still not immune, people *are* going to get infected. The virus will spread, quickly or less so, until herd immunity is reached." *Jacobin* reporter Nicole Aschoff abdicates her basic duty as a journalist to point out that China, South Korea, and Singapore have all contained the pandemic through rigorous testing and contact tracing, in combination with lockdowns.

Among the lies told by the advocates of herd immunity is that governments would protect the elderly while they allowed the rest of the population to get infected.

The reality behind this policy was shown in Sweden, where keeping schools open, with the direct intention of infecting the broadest segment of the population, was accompanied by the abandonment of efforts to protect the elderly in nursing homes, leading to some of the highest death rates in Europe.

When confronted with this reality, the advocates of herd immunity say that the high death rates in Sweden were the result of a failure to properly implement protections for the elderly. But this, too, is a lie. The massive death toll for the elderly in Sweden is a direct consequence of its herd immunity policy.

The claim put forwarded by Kulldorff and Yih, and echoed by Aschoff, that lockdowns benefit the "managerial class" while "throwing the working class under the bus," is so stupid that it is degrading to even answer it. It is self-evident that reopening factories, schools, and

other non-essential workplaces while the pandemic is raging endangers workers and their families. *Jacobin* accepts the entire framework of the ruling class' response to the pandemic. They accept that resources will not be made available to workers who cannot work because of the pandemic. They accept that no safety measures will be put in place to ensure the health of workers in essential industries.

Socialists argue that workplaces must remain closed until the pandemic is contained, and that workers must be provided full pay and benefits while workplaces are not in operation. Even this modest demand, elementary from a public health standpoint, is inconceivable to both the *Jacobin* interviewer and the interviewees.

Kulldorff welcomed the *Jacobin* article on Twitter, declaring, "In the United States, there is a now second front against lockdowns, from the left."

The first front, of course, is led by the neo-Nazi right, which organized anti-lockdown protests throughout the country in April and May, and by every government in North America, Europe and the global south, which governments have abandoned effectively all efforts to contain the pandemic.

In reality, there is only one "front" against vigorous efforts to contain the pandemic, and this "front" is an attack from the right against the working class. *Jacobin* has allied itself with the Trump administration in its homicidal efforts to get workers back on the job to generate profits for Wall Street.

Just two months ago, the DSA published a statement opposing the premature reopening of schools, declaring "The ruling class... are forcing a premature return to in-person learning in schools just as COVID-19 rates spike across the country."

It continued, "The push to reopen schools by both major parties is an act of political violence. We demand NO reopening until our schools are safe for students and all staff."

This statement by the DSA stands as an indictment of the policies now advocated by *Jacobin* and, by extension, a substantial portion of the leadership of the DSA itself.

The timing of the *Jacobin* interview is significant. Throughout the United States, school districts are herding teachers and students back into classrooms that are hotbeds of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are being assisted by the trade unions, which have worked to sabotage all independent resistance to the back-to-work policy, including the recent strike by graduate students at the University of Michigan. *Jacobin*, speaking for the privileged sections of the upper-middle-class that staff the trade union bureaucracy, finds itself increasingly opposed to all measures to combat the pandemic, even amid mounting working class resistance to Trump's back-to-work campaign.

At the same time, *Jacobin* is preparing the arguments that, in the event that Biden assumes office following the election, would be used to carry out essentially the same policies as the Trump administration.

It should be noted that Thomas Friedman, the columnist for the *New York Times*, the house organ of the Democratic Party, first developed, in late March, the slogan "the cure can't be worse than the disease" in opposition to lockdowns—a phrase that was embraced by Trump and used to carry out a nationwide premature return to work with the assistance of Democratic governors. *Jacobin's* open embrace of Trump's herd immunity policies stands as a confirmation of every warning made by the *World Socialist Web Site* about the brand of middle class politics embraced by the DSA. In defining these organizations as "pseudo-left," we explained that this was not a slur, but a sociological definition.

Words have meaning. By embracing and openly advocating the policies of the Trump administration, the publishers of *Jacobin* have made themselves complicit in the administration's crimes. The millions of working people whose friends and loved ones died needlessly will not forget the words and actions of *Jacobin*

21 September 2020