

The international working class must fight for the eradication of COVID-19

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The online discussion hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* on Sunday, “For a Global Strategy to Stop the Pandemic and Save Lives!,” provided an overwhelming, scientifically grounded case for a policy of elimination and eradication of the COVID-19 virus. The scientists speaking at the event explained clearly and convincingly what should have been done from the beginning but was not—and what must be done now but isn’t.

The three scientists who spoke at the event—Professor Michael Baker of the University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand; Dr. Małgorzata Gasperowicz of the University of Calgary in Canada; and Dr. Yaneer Bar-Yam from the New England Complex Systems Institute in the United States—are all leading experts in their fields and have decades of experience analyzing and responding to pandemics and other infectious diseases. Taken together, their factual presentations are a staggering indictment of the policies adopted by most countries over the past nineteen months.

Professor Baker’s presentation made clear that a different policy could have been pursued. He recounted his “back-of-the envelope” calculation in January 2020, at the very beginning of the global spread of the virus, that “30 plus million people across the globe” would die if the pandemic were not stopped. He referred to a World Health Organization report in February 2020—when the global death toll was *less than 3,000*—documenting China’s success in containing the virus and showing that a policy of elimination and eradication was possible.

And yet, particularly in the United States and the major countries of Europe, the measures advocated by scientists were rejected. “I just assumed,” Dr. Baker said, “that governments around the world would follow that advice [for an elimination approach] ... and they did nothing about it, most countries.”

In her own presentation, Dr. Gasperowicz showed that emergency, coordinated action at the start of the pandemic could have successfully eliminated the virus in a relatively short period of time. Her data showed that, even without vaccines, aggressive public health measures—lockdowns, travel restrictions, universal testing and contact tracing, and the isolation of infected individuals—could have brought new cases to zero in 37 days. If such measures had been implemented in early 2020, the global death toll would be measured in the

thousands, not millions.

The scientifically necessary actions were not taken, however, and the horrific consequences are evident throughout the world. Nearly 4.5 million people are now dead, according to official figures, with 10,000 more added daily. Countless millions will suffer from the still little understood consequences of “long COVID.” With the spread of the more infectious Delta variant, hospitalizations and deaths are again on the rise. The United States is again at the epicenter of the global pandemic, with nearly 1,000 deaths and nearly 150,000 new cases every day.

Most horrifically, the new strain of the virus is severely impacting young people, overwhelming children’s hospitals that are running out of ICU beds to care for the sick and dying.

The presentations made clear, however, that even now emergency action can bring this terrible disease under control. With the assistance of powerful vaccines, Dr. Gasperowicz explained, aggressive public health measures can eradicate the virus in the space of two months. But vaccines alone are not sufficient. “The Delta variant is our wake-up call,” she said. “We need everything we have in our toolbox to stop it, to slow it down.”

The major governments, however, are not deploying the “toolbox” of public health measures, but reversing the inadequate measures that have been adopted. Rather than implementing lockdowns and other social distancing measures, schools are being opened, with children sent into overcrowded classrooms where they are almost guaranteed to catch and spread the coronavirus.

During the meeting, contributions from teachers in the US, Brazil and Australia provided first-hand accounts of the terrible choices facing educators throughout the world. “Unlike last year, there are no plans or protocols to keep faculty, staff, students and the community safe from infection as new cases are set to surpass the worst of the winter surge,” a teacher from Tennessee, Donna, explained. “Despair, resignation and anger are common themes in my conversations with colleagues.”

Lisa, a parent, described the catastrophic situation in the UK, which Professor Baker described as “this almost barbaric experiment on the British people.” Not only are schools being reopened, but children are being told that they cannot wear masks and parents are being threatened with fines and even

prison if they do not send their children back to school. “When I say there is no mitigation in classrooms in England,” Lisa said, “there’s nothing. There’s no masks, there’s no social distancing, there’s no ventilation, there’s no HEPA air filters.”

The information and knowledge provided by the scientists at the *World Socialist Web Site* forum should, by any objective standard, be on the front page of every newspaper and featured on television programs throughout the world. However, there has been nothing approaching the discussion on the WSWS forum in the mainstream media.

In the media, the spectrum of the official debate is contained within the framework of those advocating “herd immunity”—which, as used by capitalist politicians, means the rejection of even the most basic public health precautions, such as masking—and “mitigation,” which advocates reopening of schools and the economy, accompanied by vaccination, masking and other measures. Both are premised on a rejection of lockdowns and school closures—that is, what scientists say is necessary to cut off the spread of the virus to eliminate and eradicate it.

In the United States, the *New York Times*, speaking for the Democratic Party and the Biden administration, is aggressively campaigning for a reopening of schools. While Republican-controlled states are seeking to ban even the requirement that children wear masks, the National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins said on Tuesday: “What we don’t want is lockdowns, shutdowns, school closures.”

The Swiss daily *Tages Anzeiger* headlined its Tuesday edition, “Business organizations want to prevent a new lockdown by any means.”

In Germany, the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that it is stopping the use of the coronavirus infection rate as a measure for deciding on restrictions on economic activity to avoid having to implement them. “Another lockdown must be avoided in any case in the interests of a functioning economy,” declared Economics Minister Wolfgang Tiefensee of the Social Democratic Party.

In Australia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Monday that any restrictions to stop the rapid spread of the virus must be ended once the country reaches a vaccination target of 70 percent of the eligible population (which does not include children). “We have to deal with it; otherwise we stay in the cave forever.”

The presentations at the event on Sunday made clear that these claims are a lie. If the necessary actions were taken at the beginning, the present catastrophe could have been avoided. And the only way to stop the pandemic and save the lives of millions more people throughout the world is to take them now. The virus can and must be eliminated and eradicated, but vaccination alone is not sufficient.

The stark contradiction between what science says is necessary and what is almost universally being implemented by governments can be understood only in relation to more

fundamental causes. In his concluding comments to the event on Sunday, WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North noted that “everything that has been said has made a powerful and overwhelming case for a policy of elimination and eradication.”

However, North added, “There is an old saying, ‘If geometric axioms impinged on material interests, an attempt would be made to refute them.’ Now we have scientific truth presented very clearly, overwhelmingly, so one is forced to recognize that there are powerful material social and economic interests that have prevented the implementation of these policies.”

With every great issue and great crisis—and the global coronavirus pandemic is among the greatest—the class issues emerge. The social force blocking a rational and scientific approach to the pandemic is the capitalist ruling elite. It is the working class—educators, parents, autoworkers, logistics workers, health care workers and the entire working class internationally—that must be organized and mobilized to put an end to the needless suffering produced by the pandemic.

In “The eradication of the COVID-19 is the only way to stop the pandemic,” the WSWS stated:

The basic principles guiding the eradication strategy are based on science and the insistence that there can be no limit on the amount spent to eradicate COVID-19 worldwide. The social interests of masses of people worldwide interact powerfully with scientific truth.

For this strategy to be successful, its proponents in every country must be imbued with a deep scientific understanding of the pandemic. The working class values and relies on the support of scientists, and the scientific program necessary to eradicate COVID-19 can only be implemented to the extent that great masses of people take up this struggle.

The WSWS event on Sunday demonstrated this perspective in practice. It must now be carried forward through the development of a powerful international and unified mass movement of the working class to fight for it.



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