

Scientists make powerful case for global COVID-19 elimination

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In the October 24 webinar, “How to Stop the Pandemic,” sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), a panel of leading scientists from around the world made a powerful and overwhelming case for the global elimination of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Along with an earlier webinar organized by the WSWS two months ago, Sunday’s event was the only effort to devote time to allow scientists and public health specialists to explain to the public the nature of the pandemic and what must be done. To the extent that there is any discussion of the science of COVID-19, it is mainly confined to scientific journals with a very small circulation, not public events to which working people have direct access.

The webinar was also unique in its international scope. The eight scientists and doctors spoke from five different countries: New Zealand, the UK, the United States, Canada and Pakistan. During the event and in the first 12 hours after it was broadcast, several thousand people from more than 100 countries throughout the world listened in. Among the countries with the highest number of viewers were the US, Canada, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Sri Lanka, Ireland, France, India, Spain, Malaysia and Brazil.

The event was moderated by WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North and WSWS writer and practicing physician Dr. Benjamin Mateus. In opening the webinar, North drew attention to the colossal loss of life over the past two years, with the official global death toll now approaching five million people. Citing the *Economist*, North noted that the real number of deaths is far higher, between 10 and 20 million people. “The world has already paid a terrible price for the deliberate refusal of governments to listen to scientists,” he said.

While originally scheduled for two hours, the webinar lasted for three and a half. Many of the scientists came prepared with detailed slides presenting factual information on the impact of different measures to contain the virus, the health consequences of the disease, and how it is transmitted.

Certain salient facts emerged from the reports that are vital for the public to understand.

Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz, a developmental biologist and researcher at the University of Calgary in Canada and cofounder of Zero COVID Canada, presented a report on “The Case for SARS2 Elimination.” She documented the extreme disparity in cases and deaths between provinces in Canada that pursued an elimination strategy and those that pursued a “mitigation” or containment strategy. She also presented mathematical models showing that vaccines alone are not sufficient to stop the spread of the virus.

Dr. Gasperowicz said that her models show that in countries with a high vaccination rate, aggressive measures—including the shutdown of nonessential production and aggressive testing, tracing and isolation—could eliminate the virus within two to three months. While there was some discussion on the length of time that would be required,

all the scientists agreed that such a strategy was both viable and necessary.

“Some people claim it is too late, that it is not possible to eliminate now because we have [the Delta variant], because the virus is everywhere,” Dr. Gasperowicz said, but these claims are false. “The math works the same. If we can bend the curve, if we can bring the R value [transmission rate] to a low level, we can eliminate.”

Dr. Michael Baker, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand, who served on the New Zealand Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Technical Advisory Group, delivered a presentation, “Progressive elimination of Covid-19: Is it feasible and desirable?”

Elimination strategies, he concluded, “definitely, definitely do work.” He noted that the World Health Organization has pursued an elimination strategy for many diseases, including polio. China, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Australia, where elimination strategies have been pursued for much or all of the pandemic, have succeeded in limiting deaths to between three and five individuals per million. This compares to nearly 2,000 per million in the United States, which has led to a drop in life expectancy at birth by one and a half years.

Asked by David North whether the recent change in the policy of the New Zealand government to “transition” from its previous approach, under immense economic and political pressure, is very likely to lead to a sharp rise in cases and deaths, Baker stated, “It is, very much so.”

Dr. Jose-Luis Jimenez, professor of chemistry at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and an expert in aerosol physics, delivered a presentation on “The modes of transmission of SARS-CoV-2.” Dr. Jimenez presented slides that showed how SARS-CoV-2—the virus that causes Covid-19—is transported within minute aerosol particles from one person to another. They are emitted whenever people speak or even in the process of respiration. This accounts for the extremely infectious character of the disease, particularly in poorly ventilated indoor locations, such as schools.

Jimenez sharply criticized the World Health Organization (WHO) for refusing to acknowledge the aerosolization of the virus for more than a year after the start of the pandemic, calling it “one of the biggest errors in the entire history of public health.” He said that one of the reasons for the resistance in recognizing aerosolization is that it is less “convenient” for governments. It transfers responsibility from individuals to personally guard against less infectious modes of droplet infection to governments and businesses that do not implement adequate safety measures on a societal level.

Dr. Deepti Gurdasani, a public health researcher at the Queen Mary University in London, delivered a report on Long COVID, which she called “the hidden pandemic after the pandemic.” The report reviewed the alarming data showing that Long COVID symptoms lasting 12-15 weeks or more can affect between two and 14 percent of all people who contract COVID-19. She explained that infected individuals are at higher risk of cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, lung disease, and brain

degeneration in regions associated with sense, emotional processing and memory.

Governments, she said, do not want to talk about Long COVID because “if they accept that it is real and problematic, they would have to do a lot more to prevent transmission.”

Replying to a question from Lisa Diaz, a UK parent who has played the leading role in mobilizing opposition to the unsafe reopening of schools, Dr. Gurdasani called the policy of the UK government “frankly criminal.” One in 12 secondary school children and one in 30 primary school children have been infected with COVID-19 in the UK, she said. “In all respects, our government has completely failed to protect children, and the impact of that has been not just mass infection of children but very high rates of Long COVID.”

Dr. Zayar, a medical doctor in Pakistan who worked with the WHO from 2009 to 2014 on the polio eradication initiative, reviewed the catastrophic impact of the pandemic throughout South Asia. “There are millions of more deaths on the subcontinent that are not reported,” he said, noting that the governments in India and Pakistan have sought to cover up their failure to protect the population. “Their first priority... was to open the economy, [even at] the height of the pandemic.”

Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist, health economist and Senior Fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, delivered a powerful indictment of the private control of vaccine production and distribution and the broader policy of governments in response to the pandemic. “The moral backbone of public health has been completely broken by politics,” he said.

The days of petitions and op-eds in newspapers are over, Feigl-Ding said, because “we clearly know that the political powers that want to reopen, let it spread, let it rip, mass infection, ‘live with the virus’—clearly they do not care about all the scientific rationale whatsoever.”

In response to a question from David North about where he saw the pandemic going in the next three to six months without a dramatic change in policy, Feigl-Ding responded: “On a world scale, we will still be counting bodies in six months’ time. We are going to have a very bad winter in the Northern hemisphere.” Other scientists on the panel agreed with this prognosis.

Dr. Howard Ehrman—a retired family medicine physician, assistant professor at the University of Illinois Chicago College of Medicine and School of Public Health until 2020, and longtime social activist—delivered a scathing denunciation of the reopening of schools promoted by the Biden administration. There have been one million new cases among children in the last five weeks, he noted, and 588 children have died from the pandemic since it began, along with thousands of teachers and staff.

Dr. Ehrman criticized those in the media “who have done everything under Trump and Biden to make parents, teachers, staff, feel guilty, threaten them, and now begin to punish them for keeping their kids at home.”

In addition to the scientists, several workers on the panel discussed the impact that the pandemic has already had on workers, parents and the population as a whole. Lisa Diaz spoke on the catastrophic conditions produced by the reopening of schools in the UK, which she called a “scorched earth policy.”

David O’Sullivan, a London bus driver fired for defending his colleagues’ right to a safe workplace, spoke about the impact on bus drivers of the “herd immunity” policy of the Johnson administration, describing it as “a war on the working class and a war on science. The two go hand in hand.”

Donna, a teacher in the US and member of the Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Committee, said that she and other teachers “felt abandoned by our leaders, our administrators, and worst of all, our unions.” Workers and scientists, she said, “must join forces against the profit interests of our governments and business leaders if we are to end

the pandemic.”

In concluding the meeting, North explained: “The case for elimination, a path that ultimately leads to the eradication of the virus, is so overwhelming from a scientific standpoint, that it is hard to understand that it could possibly be argued against.”

There are definite social interests, however, that have determined policy from the beginning and are working actively against science—the profit interests of the ruling class. “We can’t get around the fact,” North said, “that we live in a society which hails the mindless, ridiculous, useless, extravagance of a ruling elite that can’t think of any better way to use its money than to blast itself into space.”

It is for this reason that the scientific information presented at the webinar has been completely excluded from the capitalist media. Outside of the WSWS forum, there has, since the start of the pandemic, been no systematic effort to educate the population in the science of Long COVID, aerosolization, the role of schools in the transmission of the virus, or any of the critical information that workers must know.

There is also a social force whose interests intersect with scientific truth: the working class, the great mass of the population.

North noted that since the last webinar held in August, there has been a significant growth of class struggle in the US and throughout the world. “The initiative taken by Lisa Diaz, the efforts made by workers in rank-and-file committees to take control of their own struggles and also take control of the fight against unsafe conditions in their factories and their schools, are an indication of a profound change.”

Paraphrasing Marx’s famous statement from his Theses on Feuerbach, North concluded: “The scientists have explained the pandemic. They have shown how it is transmitted, and how that transmission can be stopped. But the challenge of the working class is to end it.”

The wealth of information presented in the October 24 webinar must be studied by every worker in every country. The scientific information and perspective presented at this webinar must be brought into the working class. The fight against the pandemic and the ruling class’s policy of mass death must be fused with the growing struggles of workers throughout the world against exploitation, inequality, dictatorship, war and the capitalist system.



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