

“I left with new enthusiasm and hope”

Enthusiastic response from workers in the UK, US and Canada to WSWs webinar on the pandemic

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On Sunday, October 24, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) co-hosted a webinar titled “How to end the pandemic,” which featured a panel of workers and distinguished scientists who have fought for policies to stop the spread of COVID-19 and save lives. The event drew wide interest and has now been viewed more than 10,000 times, with participants from dozens of countries on every habitable continent.

The central purpose of the event was to provide a comprehensive overview of the science of the pandemic, including how COVID-19 spreads, its impact on humans, and what measures must be taken to cut off the chain of viral transmission and eliminate new cases worldwide. The WSWs spoke with workers who participated in the event and viewed it online, all of whom stated that it had a powerful impact on them.

British parent Lisa Diaz, who in late September initiated a series of global school strikes to protest the unsafe reopening of schools in the United Kingdom and other countries, joined the panel at the webinar. After speaking on the horrific conditions in UK schools, where roughly 20,000 children are being infected with COVID-19 every day, she asked Dr. Deepti Gurdasani what the long-term implications of this policy would be. Dr. Gurdasani gave a detailed presentation on the science of Long COVID and the impacts of the virus on children, denouncing the school reopening policies in the UK as “criminal.”

In a video statement reflecting on the meeting afterwards, which has itself been viewed over 17,000 times, Diaz commented, “Everything [Dr. Gurdasani] said completely and utterly debunked the myth that [COVID-19] is a benign, mild illness and it’s fine for kids to get it. It is clearly not the flu. The long-term implications are terrifying, and...it’s just the tip of the iceberg. We know that it thins the grey cortex

in the brain, we know that it leads to organ damage, and all this is in very mild cases.”

Diaz added, “The scientific struggle is inseparable from the political struggle. Because we’re being ignored, we’ve got to take matters into our own hands, which is why #SchoolStrike2021 evolved. So, I think we’ve got to really just keep up the struggle and say, ‘No, this is completely unacceptable.’ We cannot let this happen to our children, and we’ve just got to keep on fighting.”

David O’Sullivan, a London bus driver and member of the London Rank-and-File Committee, who was victimized for speaking out about the lack of COVID-19 safety measures at his workplace, also joined the panel at the event. He spoke on his experiences during the pandemic and asked aerosol physicist Dr. Jose-Luis Jimenez a question on the airborne transmission of COVID-19 and the implications for bus drivers.

O’Sullivan commented after the event Monday, “The event was truly a unique global event. Scientists generally speak and have lectures, symposiums and conferences, but none of them have had to explain the importance of a scientific outlook to a worldwide working-class audience. This was the central aspect of the webinar, to explain that the war on science is a war on the working class and that the two are related. The event made clear that the pandemic can only be resolved if it is eliminated in every country through struggle by the great mass of the population. This is the significance of the sponsorship of the event by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.”

Jude Jackson, a retired civil servant from England, watched the event and told the WSWs afterwards, “‘How to end the pandemic’ was a superb conference amongst some of the leading voices in epidemiology and serious activists in the fight against the human costs of the killer COVID-19

pandemic. The opening, using videos posted on Twitter by workers, parents and grandparents, was extremely powerful and set the tone and the focus of the webinar. The individual presentations by the scientists had both clarity and, at times, passion, and the contributions as a whole will be a crucial resource for those called into action to change the course of the pandemic and of history.”

Jason, a bus driver from the UK, said, “It was simple to follow the science as a guide to the transmission of COVID-19, as well as the modeling of how the virus spreads. David O’Sullivan was brilliant, as was Donna, the American school teacher. The video testimonials from workers really hit home, in that a global response to eradicate COVID-19 is needed rather than just a few countries doing what they can to eliminate the virus. Shame on those countries who are participating in social murder. I agree 100 percent with the conclusion by David North. Why isn’t this type of programme in the mainstream, as it can help everyday people fight back?”

Jane, an adult social care lawyer in the UK, stated, “It needs to be a world approach, the same as with climate change. What Dr. Gurdasani said about children and Long COVID was very worrying, they’re the next generation. Alberta in Canada managed to almost get rid of the virus with public health measures. Earlier this year, I worked in Saint Helena, a British overseas territory in the South Atlantic. Everyone who came there had to quarantine for 14 days. They used to have tourists from South Africa and cruise ships, but they stopped all that, and there’s no COVID there at all.”

Workers across the United States also shared their thoughts on the webinar with the WSWs. Michael, a parent of two children in San Luis Obispo, California, wrote during the event, “I am taking screenshots. Excellent so far. So well done! I really enjoyed every bit of it. The last speaker really sewed it up. I missed a few spots, so I’ll re-listen later. But I was...blown away. It’s so fulfilling to hear experts who have reached my conclusions independently.”

Steve, a teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area, California, commented, “I did watch the event, almost in its entirety, and I left with new enthusiasm and hope. I thought the Canadians had very viable strategies and experiences we could use and model in the US. And even possibly in the UK, and possibly in New Zealand and Australia. I’m just saying it exists as a mass movement; Dr. Vipond in Alberta has some other really interesting experiences. I wouldn’t say it would be easy to eliminate COVID-19, but we could reference the work they have done as a model we are extending to build in the US and possibly Mexico and other countries.”

Liz, an educator in Hawaii, told the WSWs, “It’s a breath

of fresh air. First off, I love that a parent and school bus driver attended. Also, the experts were varied in their areas and when put together I felt I had a comprehensive understanding of the problem and where we need to go to actually deal with it effectively. Also, I realized that wiping surfaces is a waste of time and resources because the virus is airborne! How many different sprays and pounds of paper towels for nothing?! I am in full support of the elimination strategy!”

Two of the panelists at the event were from Canada, Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz and Dr. Joe Vipond, and many Canadians attended the event as well. A school caretaker from Ontario who participated told the WSWs, “One of the tasks I have as caretaker is to sanitize desks and all touchable surfaces. Dr. Jimenez proved that this is largely a waste of time. I suspected it was prior to watching today’s webinar.”

A teacher from Toronto sent comments during the presentation by Dr. Howard Ehrman, who spoke on the dangers of reopening schools before COVID-19 is eliminated. The teacher commented, “Interesting points coming out in this presentation. The lack of testing is playing out here in Ontario as well. Our fights to get rapid tests in schools (and not only businesses or private schools that are considered businesses) was only recently successful. Trying to go for asymptomatic testing is very difficult and comes at a cost (\$30–\$40 at big business pharmacies). Capacity limits are being lifted tomorrow. Proof of vaccine is being lifted in January (before verification of vaccine readiness for children), and masking is being lifted in March. The unions have been mum thus far about recent announcement from the premier, but we saw how lifting restrictions played out in Alberta.”

The WSWs encourages all of our readers who attended the October 24 webinar or have viewed it afterward to send us your comments on the event, which we will publish throughout the week, and get involved in the fight to end the pandemic today!



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