Global COVID-19 death toll surpasses 5 million: Government policies promote mass death

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One week ago, on October 24, 2021, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) hosted an historic webinar titled, "How to end the pandemic." The event, which has now been viewed by over 10,000 people from over 100 countries on every habitable continent, heard testimony from scientists and workers who have advocated for the global elimination of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The reports at the webinar explained the present state of the pandemic, how the virus spreads in aerosol form, the impact of Long COVID, the role that schools play in viral transmission, and what must be done to eliminate the virus worldwide. The event made clear that the vast majority of all global deaths from COVID-19 have been entirely preventable. Each report is now available in exhibit format on the WSWS.

Introducing the event, WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North condemned the corporate media cover-up of the ongoing global mass death from COVID-19 and posed the question: "Confronted with the reality of this continuing disaster, at what point does it become necessary to start referring to COVID not only as a 'pandemic,' but as a form of 'social holocaust?'"

Over the ensuing five days, it could be said that this point has been reached. On Friday, the official global death toll from COVID-19 surpassed five million people. This figure, horrific in itself, is known to be a vast under-count. A tracker of excess deaths by *The Economist* estimates that the most likely true global death toll now stands at a staggering 16.7 million people, roughly equivalent to the global death toll from World War I. The same tracker estimates that nearly 200,000 people are now dying from COVID-19 every week.

Amid the ongoing wave of mass death, governments worldwide are scrapping all remaining measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, with the grotesque mantra that society must "learn to live with the virus." Two parallel processes are unfolding. Countries that had limited mitigation measures in place are now lifting them all, while countries that had more aggressive measures aimed at eliminating the virus are giving in to mounting pressure to let the virus rip through society.

Countries throughout the Asia-Pacific that had previously eliminated COVID-19 are quickly lifting all restrictions. On Monday, South Korea will officially enter the first phase of a "gradual return to normal life." In Singapore, there is now a seven-day average of 3,707 official daily new cases, only two months after the country was recording less than 50 cases per day. In New Zealand, which abandoned the elimination strategy at the beginning of October, there are now an average of 104 new cases every day and rising. Global finance capital is increasingly pressuring China to abandon its elimination strategy and reopen its borders to resolve the global supply chain crisis, potentially exposing 1.4 billion people to the virus.

Across Europe and North America, new COVID-19 cases remain highly elevated or are surging once again as winter approaches. The United States, United Kingdom, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and Germany now account for roughly half of all official new cases globally.

In Germany, despite the fact that cases are rising exponentially, the government refuses to enact any public health measures. In the US, where daily new cases appear to have reached a trough at roughly 65,000 per day, and another surge is lurking around the corner, international travel restrictions are set to be fully lifted on November 8. Due to the persistently high rates of transmission throughout the US, there have already been 13,799 official "breakthrough" deaths among fully vaccinated individuals, not including Florida and other states that have covered up this data.

At a previous WSWS webinar on August 22, New Zealand epidemiologist Dr. Michael Baker condemned the school reopening policies of the Boris Johnson administration in the UK as a "barbaric experiment." Similar statements were made by multiple scientists at the October 24 webinar. Dr. Deepti Gurdasani referred to the UK policies as "frankly criminal," and Dr. Jose-Luis Jimenez criticized world governments for refusing to acknowledge the aerosolization of the virus because it is less "convenient."

In the US, UK, Turkey and Germany, as well as in Brazil, India, and many other countries, federal and state governments have lifted almost every mitigation measure in order to fully resume capitalist production, no matter the cost in human lives. Following the pseudo-scientific "herd immunity" strategy outlined in the Great Barrington Declaration, these governments have deliberately killed millions of people. In essence, they are pursuing a fascistic policy of social holocaust not seen since the Nazi regime in Germany. Every politician responsible for these policies, as well as those corporate interests dictating their actions and trade union officials facilitating their implementation, should be the subject of criminal prosecution.

The UK, headed by the right-wing Boris Johnson administration, most starkly expresses this global process. On Friday, it was revealed that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) consciously enacted a policy to open schools with no mitigation measures in order to infect masses of children, falsely claiming that "Circulation of COVID in children could periodically boost immunity in adults."

In 2020, the policy pursued by capitalist governments was to infect the elderly. In 2021, the principal target became children, with schools reopened everywhere in order to send parents back to work. In 2022, the stage is now set for the virus to permeate all of society, infecting and reinfecting billions worldwide. Under conditions where only 38.5 percent of the world population is fully vaccinated, these policies threaten to kill millions more globally.

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The criminal policies pursued by capitalist governments worldwide during the pandemic represent the implementation of longstanding aims by sections of the ruling elites who have advocated for lowering the life expectancy of the working class in order to reduce pension obligations and social spending on the elderly. In 2014, Ezekiel Emanuel, one of the leading architects of the Obama administration's Affordable Care Act, called for the rationing of health care based on income while discouraging the use of medical screenings. Emanuel was a member of the Biden administration's White House Coronavirus Task Force until it was dissolved in January.

The dividing lines between the strategies towards the pandemic, elaborated by the WSWS on August 20, have become very clear. The capitalist class in every country is either pursuing "herd immunity," a euphemism for killing millions, or so-called mitigation, which amounts to palliative care or putting the world population in hospice. Both of these policies accept the fatalistic premise that SARS-CoV-2 is already or will inevitably become endemic, with the unstated assumption that millions will needlessly die and suffer long-term health consequences year after year.

In irreconcilable opposition to these policies of mass death and social misery, the working class is increasingly advancing a policy for the global elimination of SARS-CoV-2 to save lives. This entails the nationalization of the pharmaceutical monopolies in order to rapidly vaccinate the world population; mass testing, contact tracing, quarantining of exposed people, and the safe isolation of infected patients to identify and cut off the chain of transmission; the temporary closure of schools and nonessential workplaces combined with financial and social supports for all affected workers and small business people; strict travel restrictions and border management; universal masking, improved ventilation and all other measures necessary to minimize infections in essential workplaces.

All of these measures are anathema to capitalist world governments that serve the financial oligarchy. Given the unprecedented growth of corporate debt and financialization, the shutdown of nonessential workplaces for even the minimal time necessary to bring cases down to zero—estimated by Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz to be only six to nine weeks—is unacceptable and would induce a collapse of the stock market.

On November 3-4, the World Health Network is hosting its second "Global Summit to End Pandemics." The event will feature a series of sessions led by scientists, covering various aspects of the pandemic. Some will advocate mitigations, while some will advocate for global elimination, as outlined in a statement published by the group in the *Lancet* last week.

The fundamental fallacy of the group's statement, which will surely inform many of the presentations, is that the policies necessary to eliminate SARS-CoV-2 worldwide can be implemented by pressuring capitalist politicians and corporations to change their ways. While advocating for "solidarity and collective action at the individual, local, national, and international levels," the group's statement fails to delineate the fundamental class division in society between the working class and the capitalist class. The idea that the pandemic can be halted without a direct assault on the financial interests of the ruling class, without the expropriation of the vast wealth hoarded by this tiny minority, is delusional.

One of the essential points made at the WSWS' October 24 webinar was that scientists cannot fight the pandemic alone. Without the support of the working class, the activity of scientists will be confined to the halls of academia and their journals with limited circulation. The reality is that the strategy of global elimination will be implemented only through the mass mobilization of the industrial strength of the working class of all genders, races, ethnicities and nationalities.

In his introduction to the October 24 webinar, David North stressed the five following points:

• The target of SARS-CoV-2—the virus that causes COVID-19—is not individuals, but entire societies. The virus' mode of transmission is directed toward achieving mass infection. SARS-CoV-2 has evolved biologically to strike billions, and, in so doing, kill millions.

• Therefore, the only effective strategy is one based on a globally coordinated campaign aimed at the elimination of the virus on every continent, in every region, and in every country. There is no effective national solution to this pandemic. Humanity—people of all races, ethnicities, and nationalities—must confront and overcome this challenge through a vast collective and truly selfless global effort.

• The policies pursued by virtually all governments since the outbreak of the pandemic must be repudiated. The subordination of that which should be the unquestioned priority of social policy—the protection of human life—to the interests of corporate profit and private wealth accumulation cannot be allowed to continue.

• The initiative to bring about a decisive turn to a strategy directed toward global elimination must come from a socially conscious movement of millions of people.

• This global movement must draw upon scientific research. The persecution of scientists, many of whom labor under threats to their livelihoods and even their lives, must be ended. The global elimination of the virus requires the closest working alliance between the working class—the great mass of society—and the scientific community.

These must become the guiding principles for the development of a mass movement rooted in the working class to stop the pandemic. The scientists and workers who took part in the October 24 webinar presented an overwhelming case for the global elimination of COVID-19, and their reports have an immense and lasting value. The scientific truths elaborated at this event must be assimilated by broad sections of the working class, the youth and the most progressive sections of the middle class.

All those who have committed the crime of social holocaust must be exposed in order to educate the working class on the social interests that have driven pandemic policies worldwide. Fundamentally, the fight to stop the pandemic must be taken into the schools and workplaces of every country through a globally-coordinated campaign uniting masses of workers worldwide. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees was founded for this purpose, and will serve as the central nexus to coordinate the global struggles of the working class to end the pandemic and save millions of lives.

The development of a coordinated network of working class organizations throughout the world must be connected to the building of a socialist political leadership in the working class, the International Committee of the Fourth International, to connect the fight against the pandemic with the fight against exploitation, inequality, war, dictatorship and the capitalist system.

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