

“This is really a global problem and needs a global solution”

Ohio and Pennsylvania educators speak on October 24 webinar, “How to end the pandemic”

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Educators, retirees and parents from Ohio and Pennsylvania, who are members of the Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, met last week and discussed the October 24 webinar, “How to end the pandemic,” which was hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The discussion began with members’ overall reactions to the webinar and the present state of the crisis, then went into some of the specifics of the various lectures. To protect the identity of the participants, everyone is given a pseudonym for this article.

Harry, a retired educator from Philadelphia, said that the speakers at the webinar proved that COVID-19 “can be eliminated, and the reason it is not is because it is being deliberately allowed to spread. This is being done to the people.”

Alex, a parent of school-age children from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, said, “I thought the meeting was really good. I liked the testimonials in the beginning. It shows that we workers want answers. The current strike wave spreading across the US is the first in a long time, and it shows that workers are standing up and that the unions are working to isolate and betray these struggles. The pandemic has enraged the working class.”

Alex, a retiree from Cleveland, Ohio, and a grandfather of school-age children, referred to the opening remarks by WSWS International Editorial Board Chairperson David North, who moderated the webinar: “David North’s point—the intersection of scientist/physician interests with working-class interests—matters hugely. Lisa Diaz and David O’Sullivan illustrated very well that ongoing dialogue of experts with our IWA-RFC is essential to raise our COVID science awareness, to build momentum on our committees, and to prepare us for political struggle.”

Samuel, a Philadelphia teacher, explained the impact of the pandemic at his school, stating, “We went virtual for a few days last week. Came back on Monday, nothing changed, more students quarantined. One class I have half the students are listed in quarantine. I don’t get any information as to why, who was infected; they are just listed with a ‘Q’ next to their names on the attendance list. Now I see a new designation, ‘COV.’ I guess that stands for COVID-19, but we haven’t been told anything. Several

of my students are listed that way. I should be in quarantine.”

Samuel referred to the work presented by Dr. Jose-Luis Jimenez, professor of chemistry at the University of Colorado, Boulder and an expert in aerosol physics. His report stressed that the aerosolized character of SARS-CoV-2 has been downplayed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) because this would lead to “inconvenient” conclusions about safety measures.

He noted, “The administration says that we are not infected if we stay six feet away and wear masks. This is nonsense since this is an airborne disease. As was discussed at the webinar, this is an aerosol, and if a student is sick in the back of the room, it is everywhere. Also, we are always getting closer to the students, we have to help them with their computers, how to log on, etc. I’m not 29 anymore. It is very stressful having to worry about getting infected every minute of every day. Everyone is overwhelmed.”

Brian, a high school math teacher, said that he came away with a better understanding of the global character of the pandemic and the response that is needed. He stated, “This is a global war, not just a local battle. We have a very tiny few people who have made an obscene amount of money controlling this pandemic. They don’t want a solution.”

He added, “The conversations are focused on the local, not the global. I am part of this. Most of us act on the pandemic in a local way. I mean we get vaccinated, we wear masks, and encourage others to do the same. We should be doing those things. I don’t want to die, and I don’t want people around me to die.”

“What I took out of the webinar is that this is really a global problem and needs a global solution. We have to deal with it globally. This problem is more akin to climate change. You can change your light bulbs, but unless the entire world acts, the problem is going to get worse.”

Everyone at the meeting agreed with the points raised by Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist and Senior Fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, about the private control of vaccine production and distribution.

Brian noted that most people do not have access to the vaccine globally, stating, “Most of the world is not getting vaccinated. We

are not going to stop this unless we vaccinate the world. We have had four variants in just the past 18 months. As long as this virus has a pool to spread in, it is going to mutate. That is just evolution, and these mutations may become more infectious and more lethal.

"It is like a mathematical thing. With more infectious variants, you are going to get surges even with the vaccines. The boosters have value, but we are seeing higher and higher rates of vaccinated people getting sick, not at the rate of unvaccinated, but this is creating selective pressure for the vaccine to mutate.

"Climate change, COVID, militarization, these are symptoms of the disease. Like the symptoms of cancer, these alert you to the disease, and the disease is the system which is killing us, and we have to kill the system."

Samuel responded to the points Brian and Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding made about the control of the vaccine, stating, "We have spoken about vaccine apartheid before. Israel has vaccinated most of its population but leaves the Palestinians unvaccinated. This is murder.

"A friend of mine's mother-in-law lives in Venezuela and has cancer. They have to send her \$1,000 a month so she can buy her medicine. His sister-in-law has to travel all over Caracas to try and find the medicine. It is being blocked by the United States. The US is blocking medical supplies to Venezuela, Cuba and other countries they don't like."

Alex, the retiree living in Cleveland who attended the webinar, pointed out, "Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding was 100 percent on with 'break the patent/crack the vaccine.' With millions of lives at stake, vaccine control must be wrenched from the profit-controlled system. That millions or even billions are made hostages awaiting a vaccine-priced ransom payment makes clear capitalism's criminality."

Speaking on the danger of the pandemic and the research presented by Dr. Małgorzata Gasperowicz, a developmental biologist and researcher at the University of Calgary in Canada, Samuel added, "We can't vaccinate our way out of the pandemic. The Delta variant is too contagious, and already Delta-plus is spreading. We don't have the proper testing to see how the virus is spreading. Our case numbers are still worse than last fall. Maybe they have fallen a bit, but that is the same shape as last fall. Then as everyone moves inside, we have the winter surge. As they said, we still don't know a lot about this virus. We are going to see this ramp up."

Brian agreed, commenting, "We have the science; we know what we have to do. What Dr. Gasperowicz said, 'vaccines alone won't solve the problem.' We are in a tough spot; the science is clear but it is a battle. The scientists on the panel should be at the National Institute of Health. We have got to get rid of the 'herd immunity' bunch."

Speaking on the report of Dr. Deepti Gurdasani, a public health researcher at the Queen Mary University in London, on the effects of Long COVID, Samuel said, "They want people to think this is just like a severe cold, but there are a lot of long-term effects."

Speaking on the role of rank-and-file committees, everyone supported the remarks made by British parent Lisa Diaz, who has been organizing school strikes to protest the forced reopening of schools; Donna, a teacher from Tennessee and member of the

Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Committee, who spoke on the conditions in their schools; and David O'Sullivan, a bus driver from London, who was fired for fighting for safe working conditions.

Samuel pointed out that the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) does not even acknowledge the teachers who have died from COVID-19. He said, "If you look at their website, their Facebook or Twitter, they don't say anything about them. That is because then they would have to say what they would do, and they won't do anything."

Alex pointed out, "The world has many Bolsonaros. All await justice. The enormity of their crimes demand prosecution of all officials, corporations, media and other entities that promoted/implemented these policies as a committee previously published.

"No just or lawful system implements policies of social murder by coercing reopening in a pandemic or utilizing vaccine control for profit. Public officials who say, 'you must live with COVID' must hear, 'your resignation has been accepted.'

"David North said that at some point, it needs be asked whether this is a pandemic or a social holocaust. As a first step toward an answer, I believe that as much as the numbers of victims do matter, greater weight must lie with the particular combination of conditions and policies which apply, including the means of ending the pandemic; the availability of human, social and medical resources; the breadth of their effective application to stop pandemic; and the reasons for which they may be withheld, together with the resulting death and misery."

In summing up the lessons of the past 18 months, Brian said, "I voted for Biden, and I really campaigned hard for the two senators from Georgia. I was donating money, making phone calls and sending postcards. Now they won't even tax the billionaires. We have to have a Plan B, we can't just keep appealing to liberals, to the billionaires who are in power.

"The worse the pandemic, the more they profited. They are the ones who control the COVID response. They don't want the pandemic to end, they want the pandemic to continue. We can't make the case to the powers that be since they are the ones benefiting from this disorder. We have got to replace the system."

Every member wanted to express their enormous thanks for all the panelists and would like to hear each of them again. They thanked the WSWS for bringing this material together and continuing to share the work of these experts.



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