

For a Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic

Statement of the World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board
21 November 2021

To listen to this statement in audio format, [click here](#).

The *World Socialist Web Site* is initiating a Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Drawing upon the research of scientists, the knowledge of public health experts and the real-world experience of working people and students, the Inquest will investigate and document the disastrous response of governments, corporations and the media to the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. It will seek to expose the political and economic forces and interests that drove the policies that allowed the uncontrolled transmission of the virus and its development into a catastrophic pandemic that has killed millions worldwide.

The pandemic is an event of historic magnitude. Its impact on the course of the twenty-first century may well prove to be as far-reaching as that of the two world wars on the twentieth century. Therefore, the origins, causes and consequences of the pandemic must be thoroughly investigated and understood. This disaster was neither an "act of God" nor the result of a malevolent conspiracy in a Chinese laboratory. The time has come to decisively refute the lies in which the pandemic narrative has been enshrouded by governments and the corporate media.

This Inquest is necessary to break through the cover-up, falsifications, and misinformation that have been deployed to justify policies responsible for the avoidable deaths of millions since the initial detection of SARS-CoV-2. The Inquest will gather and make available to the public the ample evidence of socially malign and even criminal indifference to human life.

The launching of this Inquest cannot be delayed. As the world enters the third year of the pandemic, the global contagion is not abating. Far from it. The sixth global surge of the pandemic is now well under way, with cases, hospitalizations and deaths once again on the rise as winter approaches in the Northern Hemisphere.

After reaching a trough of 402,548 global average daily new cases on October 17, 2021, the official number of average daily new cases surpassed 500,000 in mid-November, with all of Europe and North America experiencing a significant rise in cases.

While powerful vaccines have been manufactured, only 41 percent of the world population has received two doses of vaccine, including fewer than 7 percent of Africans and 3 percent of people in low-income countries. Just 2.6 percent of the world population has received a necessary third dose of vaccine. Scientists have repeatedly warned that continued mass infection amid the slow rollout of vaccines creates evolutionary pressures that threaten to produce a vaccine-resistant variant.

The official global death toll now stands above five million people, which is known to be a vast undercount. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington estimates that the most likely number of deaths from COVID-19 globally is 12.1 million people, with an average of nearly 13,300 people now dying each day worldwide. The long-term societal impacts, which could include hundreds of millions of people suffering from Long COVID, are not yet fully known.

The number of excess deaths during the pandemic—those from all causes above and beyond what would be expected during normal conditions—is estimated by the *Economist* to be more than 17 million. A recent study published in the *BMJ* (formerly *British Medical Journal*) found that life expectancy dropped significantly in 2020 in countries that allowed the virus to spread, in particular Russia (2.32 years) and the US (2 years).

The pandemic was foreseen

The Inquest will debunk the myth that the pandemic was an unforeseeable and unstoppable disaster. In the decades prior to the initial outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan, China—which experts have overwhelmingly attributed to animal-to-human zoonotic transmission, most likely from a bat at a wet market—there was a mass of scientific literature, books and even films that anticipated such a pandemic.

The 2002–2004 SARS outbreak, the 2003 H5N1 "bird flu" epidemic, the 2009 "swine flu" pandemic, the 2012 MERS outbreak and the 2013–2016 Ebola virus epidemic prompted scientists throughout the world to raise the alarm that a pandemic was imminent.

In July 2005, epidemiologist Dr. Michael Osterholm wrote a detailed essay in the journal *Foreign Affairs* titled, "Preparing for the Next Pandemic." In all essentials, this paper outlined the worst-case scenario that in fact took place globally starting in January 2020.

Warning that a coming pandemic "cannot be avoided," Dr. Osterholm called for each country to develop "a detailed operational blueprint for how to get a population through one to three years of a pandemic," as well as an "initiative to provide vaccine for the entire world." He also warned that if the next pandemic began that night, "Virtually every piece of medical equipment or protective gear would be in short supply within days of the recognition of a pandemic," while noting that global supply chains would be severely disrupted. He concludes the essay by stating, "This is a critical turning point in history. Time is running out to prepare for the next pandemic. We must act now with decisiveness and purpose."

Dozens of similar articles, essays and research papers written over the next 14 years endorsed and added to Dr. Osterholm's prognosis. But these warnings were ignored by almost all governments, and society was left totally unprepared for such an event. The financial resources necessary to counteract the danger were not provided. Instead, trillions of dollars were poured into the financial markets and ever-ballooning military budgets. The unbridled destruction of critical ecosystems left society increasingly vulnerable to zoonotic transmission. Stockpiles of personal protective equipment were not maintained. Research into mRNA vaccines and other technologies was cut off when deemed unprofitable. Hospital systems were left understaffed and underresourced.

The global transmission of SARS-CoV-2 could have been stopped in early 2020

The Inquest will critically investigate and refute the untenable claim that once SARS-CoV-2 began to spread, there was little that could be done to stop it. This assertion is clearly contradicted by the experience in China, a society of 1.4 billion people, where emergency measures were taken that rapidly eliminated the virus. These included the use of masking, social distancing, testing, contact tracing, the closure of nonessential workplaces and the construction of isolation centers and health care facilities.

By March 14, 2020, China had brought daily new cases down to only 25, one month after they reached a peak of 4,602 on February 14. The virus was soon eliminated, with periodic minor outbreaks in which daily new cases only once surpassed 200. To date, there have only been 4,636 deaths from COVID-19 in China, with all but four taking place before April 17, 2020. Similar measures were implemented in New Zealand, Vietnam, Taiwan and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region with great success.

The refutation of the assertion that the virus could not be stopped is not a matter of purely historical interest. Today, alongside the global deployment of vaccines, it is still possible and vital to implement policies directed toward the elimination and eradication of COVID-19.

Elimination vs. “herd immunity”

The Inquest will confront the following critical question: Why were the measures that proved successful in China, New Zealand and other Asia-Pacific countries not implemented in the United States, Brazil, Germany, India and throughout the world? What economic, political, and social interests dictated an entirely different response? The ancient question of criminal law—*cui bono?* i.e., who benefits?—must be raised in the context of the pandemic.

The unavoidable answer, as the Inquest will demonstrate, is that a conscious decision was made to prioritize the performance of financial markets and corporate profits over saving human lives. The facts speak for themselves. While millions of workers died of COVID-19, the wealth of corporate CEOs and major shareholders vastly increased. In the first 19 months of the pandemic, US billionaires alone increased their wealth by \$2.1 trillion, or 70 percent. A disease that ravaged the globe vastly enriched the pandemic profiteers.

Wealthy US senators, privy to an intelligence briefing on SARS-CoV-2 in January 2020, dumped millions of dollars’ worth of stock while staying silent on the dangers of the virus. On March 19, 2020, US President Donald Trump secretly told journalist Bob Woodward that he deliberately misled the public in order to prevent a run on the markets, saying, “I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down, because I don’t want to create a panic.” Numerous such incidents took place in countries throughout the world.

In opposition to the strategy of elimination or “Zero COVID,” governments implemented the socially criminal policy of “herd immunity”—i.e., letting the virus rip through society until the majority of the population is infected. First implemented in Sweden, this policy was enthusiastically touted by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, promoted by the Trump administration and his co-thinkers globally, and consciously articulated in the Great Barrington Declaration. The guiding

anti-elimination mantra of “herd immunity,” coined by Friedman, is that “the cure cannot be worse than the disease”—i.e., public health must be subordinated to corporate profits.

To justify the “herd immunity” policy, basic scientific truths about COVID-19 were suppressed and falsified. Official institutions, including the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, denied the airborne character of the virus for over one year. After finally admitting that aerosols are the dominant mode of transmission, they have made no effort to educate the public, mandate masks or systematically improve ventilation in public spaces, including schools.

Politicians of every stripe, as well as the pro-capitalist labor unions, falsified the effects of COVID-19 on children and the role that schools play in viral transmission. In the United States, the president of the American Federation of Teachers led the criminally reckless campaign, on behalf of the Biden administration, to drive children back into the schools. While feigning concern for the mental health of students, their underlying motive has always been to send parents back to work to ensure the continued flow of profits to corporations.

Encountering widespread resistance, the elites have responded with repressive measures. In Britain, Lisa Diaz—a parent who is leading a popular movement against the unsafe reopening of schools—was threatened with fines and maligned in the press. David O’Sullivan—a London bus driver who warned his co-workers of the danger posed by COVID-19—was fired in retaliation.

In the process of discrediting public health policies, “herd immunity” advocates whipped up right-wing fanatics, rejected lockdowns and pursued a systematic campaign of misinformation centered on opposing masks and vaccines, generating a dangerous level of public confusion.

At the same time, lies were concocted about the origins of SARS-CoV-2, claiming that the virus was engineered in a lab in Wuhan. This conspiracy theory was fabricated by the far right and later picked up by the establishment media, in particular the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. Not only did this distract from the real causes of the pandemic, but it was used to advance a militaristic geopolitical agenda directed against China.

With the rollout of vaccines in the wealthiest countries in 2021, an offshoot of “herd immunity” developed based on the false claims that vaccines and masks alone could bring an end to the pandemic. This found its sharpest expression in the US under the Biden administration, which on May 13, 2021, advised vaccinated people to stop wearing masks and prematurely proclaimed independence from the pandemic on July 4, 2021. Since that date, more than 170,000 Americans have died from COVID-19.

The WSWS has noted that three strategies towards the pandemic have emerged: “herd immunity,” vaccinations with limited mitigation measures and the global elimination of SARS-CoV-2. The first two strategies are based on the subordination of public health to private profits, while only the last represents a path forward towards ending the pandemic and saving lives.

The same financial interests responsible for the disastrous “herd immunity” policies have exerted enormous pressure on countries throughout the Asia-Pacific to abandon the elimination strategy and allow mass infections to take place. The government of New Zealand, which had successfully suppressed the virus for nearly 18 months, finally succumbed to international pressure. In October it abandoned the Zero COVID policy developed by scientists. The result of this retreat has been a dramatic increase in COVID infections. Pressure is also being exerted on China to retreat from its commitment to COVID elimination.

These global machinations, aimed at forcing countries to accept mass infection in the interest of corporate profits, will also be investigated by the Inquest.

The scope and aims of the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic

One cannot speak of the deaths of millions of people without posing the question of criminal culpability. While Donald Trump overtly lied to the public and Boris Johnson blurted out, "Let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" the actions of Joe Biden, Justin Trudeau, Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron and dozens of other world leaders resulted in comparable levels of needless suffering and death. Narendra Modi vowed to "save" the Indian people "from lockdown," not the virus, in April 2021, as the country was ravaged by the Delta variant. As a result, authoritative studies show that COVID-19 has killed at least 3 million and more likely 5 million Indians.

Sections of the US political establishment and media, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, have called for a "9/11-style commission" to investigate the pandemic. Such an "investigation" would only deepen the cover-up that has taken place. Not a single government will tolerate any serious investigation because they themselves are implicated in this massive social crime.

The Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic does not seek nor require the sanction of governments. The *World Socialist Web Site* is well equipped to initiate the Inquest. It recognized from the earliest public reports of SARS-CoV-2 the danger of a global pandemic. Since January 24, 2020, when it first reported on the initial coronavirus outbreak, the WSWS has posted more than 4,000 articles on this subject. It has demanded since early 2020 the implementation of a globally coordinated plan to stop the pandemic. It has denounced government policies responsible for mass death.

In a statement published on February 28, 2020, the WSWS stressed the need for global action to stop the pandemic, writing:

The response to the coronavirus cannot be coordinated on a nation-by-nation level. The virus does not respect borders or visa and immigration restrictions. The global networks of transportation and economic integration have turned the virus into a global problem.

The solution must be global. Scientists from all over the world must be allowed to share their research and technology, unencumbered by the "national interests" and geopolitical conflicts that serve only to delay the development of effective countermeasures to contain, cure and ultimately eradicate the coronavirus.

On March 6, 2020, the WSWS stated: "The indifference of the Trump administration to the health of the population is not better, and perhaps worse, than the attitude of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt to the slaves. The media has spent far more time bemoaning the fall in share values on Wall Street than the loss of human life."

Opposing these policies, the WSWS posted a statement on March 17, 2020, which declared: "The essential principle that must guide the response to the crisis is that the needs of working people must take absolute and unconditional priority over all considerations of corporate profit and private wealth."

The WSWS has not only reported on the impact of the pandemic. It has sought to impart to workers and young people a scientific understanding of the pandemic and what must be done to stop it. Toward this end, the WSWS cosponsored in conjunction with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees two global webinars, on August 22 and October 24, 2021, featuring leading scientists who have fought for a

policy of global elimination.

The October 24 webinar proposed the following as the basis for the fight to end the pandemic:

- 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.

Building upon these principles and the work of the last two years, the *World Socialist Web Site* will conduct the Inquest on a global scale. It will interview and gather information from scientists and public health specialists from all over the world. The Inquest will examine a wide range of critical issues relating to the outbreak, spread and management of the pandemic in all parts of the world.

It will reach out to workers and students for real-life information to document the impact of the pandemic on the lives of ordinary people.

The WSWS—which is the publication of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties—will provide organizational scaffolding and impulse for the Inquest. But this immense project requires the active collaboration of specialists in many fields active in the fight against the pandemic.

In seeking to develop this collaboration in the practical work of the Inquest, the WSWS does not require agreement of all participants with the socialist program that it advocates. There will be differences among those involved in the Inquest on the best forms of political, social and economic organization of future society. But this collaboration will require among its participants an unyielding commitment to scientific truth, the elimination and eradication of COVID-19, and the safeguarding of life, culture and the future of humanity.

We appeal to all those who wish to assist in the work of the Inquest to fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact