

May Day 2022: The COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for socialism

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We are publishing here the report delivered by Evan Blake to the 2022 International May Day Online Rally held on May 1. Blake is a writer for the WSWS and the Coordinator of the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

This is the third May Day where we meet under conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The official global death toll is approaching 6,260,000. Due to inadequate testing, reporting and data collection throughout much of the world, experts believe that the real death toll is three times this figure and now stands at 20 million worldwide.

The overwhelming majority of these deaths could have been prevented. The fundamental reason they were not is because world governments acting on behalf of their ruling classes consciously chose to subordinate public health to private profit and refused to coordinate internationally to stop the pandemic.

The pandemic profiteers have amassed trillions of dollars. This year's Oxfam report notes that since the start of the pandemic, a new billionaire has been minted every 26 hours. The world's 10 richest men have doubled their wealth as over 160 million people have been pushed into poverty.

Nothing has revealed more clearly that the capitalist system is at war with its populations.

Over the past year, the global death toll has more than doubled. These millions of deaths are all the more tragic because they took place after life-saving vaccines were first produced.

Private ownership of the pharmaceutical monopolies and the pursuit of vaccine nationalism have created a situation where today only 59 percent of the world population has received an initial vaccine series. Criminally, only 0.6 percent of all people in low income countries and only 1.5 percent of Africans have received a necessary booster shot.

In 2020 and 2021 global life expectancy dropped by a combined nearly two years. These were the first annual declines in this figure since the UN began tracking it in 1950.

On a per capita basis, Peru has been the hardest-hit country in the world. Two hundred thirty thousand Peruvians have died from COVID-19, or 1 out of every 143 people in the country.

In the United States, the center of world capitalism, 1.1 million people have been killed by the virus and life expectancy has declined by over two years.

In Russia, more than 1.2 million people have been killed by COVID, roughly four times the official figure and more than double the per capita death rate experienced in the US.

In India, 5.9 million people have succumbed to the virus, roughly 11 times higher than the official death toll.

The eldest and most vulnerable have been the primary victims of the pandemic, but millions of working-age adults and tens of thousands of children have also perished worldwide.

A study published in February found that by the end of last October over

5.2 million children worldwide had lost a parent or primary caregiver to COVID-19. Every child impacted by these deaths has been deeply traumatized and faces a lifetime without these closest of their loved ones.

The 20 million avoidable deaths are the most tragic result of the pandemic. But hundreds of millions of people worldwide are now debilitated by Long COVID.

Numerous studies show that at least 10 percent of those infected with COVID go on to develop symptoms that linger for three months or more, with most suffering well over a year after their initial infection.

These symptoms can affect nearly every organ in the body, and COVID-19 infection has now been linked to an increased risk of all-cause mortality, as well as heart disease, brain damage, diabetes, kidney disease, a dysregulated immune system and more.

From the earliest stages of the pandemic, the International Committee of the Fourth International not only warned of the potentially catastrophic consequences of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2. We also advanced a strategy to stop the pandemic. In a statement published on February 28, 2020, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained:

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 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.

The statement called for the utilization of all public health measures to stop the pandemic, the conversion of the giant health care companies into public utilities, and the provision of direct financial support to all workers and small business people.

In numerous statements published over the course of 2020, we developed this program and demanded an end to the homicidal "herd immunity" strategy based on the forced reopening of schools and workplaces. This criminal policy, pioneered in Sweden, the US, the UK, Brazil, India, and other countries, led to the vast majority of deaths in the first year of the pandemic.

On August 20, 2021, the WSWS warned:

As long as the virus spreads it will continue to mutate into new, more infectious, lethal and vaccine-resistant variants that threaten all of humanity. Unless it is eradicated on a world scale, the embers of COVID-19 will continue to burn and create the conditions for the virus to flare up anew.

This statement clarified the strategy of elimination-eradication as the only means to stop the pandemic and save lives. We explained, “Eradication entails the universal deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat COVID-19, coordinated on a global scale, to stamp out the virus once and for all.”

In August and October, we held webinars which brought together leading scientists from throughout the world to elaborate this strategy. These events were viewed by thousands of workers from over 100 countries.

The ICFI, its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties and groups, and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees helped organize a series of global school strikes called by British parent Lisa Diaz. We assisted workers throughout the world in forming rank-and-file committees to fight for the elimination strategy.

In late November, the WSWS initiated the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic, to expose the lies and misinformation that have facilitated the murderous pandemic policies throughout the world.

The Inquest has begun gathering testimony from workers, scientists and experts internationally, some of whom are shown here. Work on the Inquest continues, but the initial findings already give a sense of the massive social crime that has been committed worldwide.

We have documented the cover-up of the science of airborne transmission and its corollary in the promotion of unscientific anti-masking policies. We have spoken with experts on the “herd immunity” policies implemented in Sweden, Brazil, the US and the UK, as well as scientists in Australia and other countries who have fought for elimination.

We have documented the real-life experiences of workers in different industries throughout the world, including nurses, autoworkers, musicians, doctors, educators, transit workers and more.

Underscoring how prescient the launching of the Inquest was, only four days later news broke that the highly infectious and vaccine-resistant Omicron variant was spreading rapidly throughout southern Africa.

Contrary to the lies of the politicians and media that Omicron is “mild,” global excess deaths reached roughly 40,000 per day in late January, the second-highest figure on record, and so far 3.3 million people have been killed globally in 2022.

During the Omicron surge, every country that had pursued a “mitigationist” approach fully embraced “herd immunity,” now based on the lie that COVID-19 is becoming “endemic.” In the process, they have systematically dismantled data surveillance and reporting, curtailed testing and scrapped all mitigation measures such as mask mandates.

The world’s ruling classes deliberately chose to abandon the fight against this novel infectious disease. Centuries of progress in human civilization, refracted through medical science and the development of public health, have been repudiated.

While the far-right has deliberately misled the public and denied the efficacy of vaccines, ostensibly liberal parties joined in the savage assault on public health. Even the most basic measures of isolation and quarantine, which date back to the Middle Ages, have been abandoned.

In response to these brutal policies, the class struggle intensified throughout the world. In January, in at least 15 cities across the US and in countries throughout Europe, students, teachers and parents took matters into their own hands and forced the closure of schools to stop viral transmission.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in late February was then seized upon to stop all reporting on the pandemic and divert attention away from the cover-up of data and the ending of all public health measures.

While doing nothing to stop the surge of Omicron BA.1, BA.2, and now further subvariants, the imperialist powers and their media continuously denounce China for maintaining a Zero-COVID policy.

Contrary to the dystopian portrayals of Zero-COVID in the Western

media, there remains immense popular support for this policy within the Chinese working class. The effectiveness of China’s Zero-COVID policy is empirical proof that elimination remains the only viable strategy to stop the pandemic.

The fundamental limitation of Zero-COVID in China arises from the fact that the policy is confined to its national borders. If the public health measures implemented in China were adopted worldwide, and combined with the airborne mitigations pioneered by scientists outside of China, the pandemic could be ended worldwide in a matter of months.

The experience of China and the strategy outlined by the ICFI make clear that the vast majority of the 20 million lives lost over the past two years could have been saved.

The pandemic has revealed the utter indifference of the ruling elites to mass death. They have now plunged mankind into a catastrophic war that threatens to spiral out of control and lead to nuclear war. The brutality of the pandemic has psychologically prepared them to carry out a war that could lead to the very extermination of mankind.

Similarly, for decades the capitalists and their politicians have consciously allowed climate change to worsen year after year, threatening to cause mass extinctions and kill hundreds of millions of people worldwide in the coming decades. A study published Thursday found that climate change will greatly increase the danger of future spillover events that could cause further pandemics in the coming years.

All over the world, thousands of scientists have studied the pandemic, warned of its dangers and fought to change policy in order to save lives. We are deeply gratified by their work. These courageous and selfless efforts have been sabotaged by capitalist governments.

But there is another social force whose objective interests align with the principles of public health: the international working class. It is to this powerful and progressive class that scientists must turn.

In the course of the pandemic, a monumental crime has been committed, the crime of social murder. There will be an accounting for this, and those responsible will be held accountable.

Workers, young people, scientists and progressive layers of the middle class must draw the necessary conclusions from this experience. The pandemic has exposed the economic, political, social and moral bankruptcy of world capitalism, which must be overthrown.

We call upon everyone participating in today’s May Day rally:

Take up the fight for global elimination! Until there is a global mass movement to end the pandemic, there will be wave after wave of mass infections and deaths, potentially for years to come.

Participate in the Global Workers’ Inquest! This must be expanded in every country and every section of the working class. While the ruling elites and the media declare the pandemic over, we must dig deeper and document all the crimes that have taken place and are deepening each day.

Above all, the most critical task is the building of a Trotskyist revolutionary leadership in the working class of every country, fighting to stop the drive to world war and to initiate a global fight against COVID-19 and for world socialist revolution.



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