

SEP (US) 2022 Congress Resolution

The COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for socialism

Socialist Equality Party (US)
16 August 2022

This resolution was adopted unanimously at the Seventh National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US), held from July 31 to August 5, 2022. Read the full report on the Congress and the other resolutions [here](#).

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is well into its third year and shows no signs of abating. Far from seeking to end the pandemic, since the emergence of the highly infectious and immune-resistant Omicron variant last November nearly every government with the exception of China has abandoned all mitigation measures, a policy spearheaded by the Biden administration in the United States. The homicidal “herd immunity” strategy of deliberately allowing the virus to spread unchecked, pioneered by the Trump administration in 2020, has become the policy of almost every country.

2. The Omicron BA.5 subvariant is now dominant throughout the world, with real rates of transmission near or above the all-time peaks reached last winter during the surge of Omicron BA.1. Billions of people are being infected and reinfected with BA.5. In Portugal, Greece, France, and other countries, COVID-19 deaths have surged once again. For more than a year, the WWS has warned that the policy of mass infection provides the virus with billions of hosts in which it can mutate and evolve into more dangerous strains. The evolution of Omicron and all its subvariants confirms the correctness of this warning. Within days of BA.5 becoming dominant globally, scientists began to raise the alarm that a new Omicron subvariant, BA.2.75, had rapidly spread to many countries.

3. The tragic experience of the last two and a half years has demonstrated that the fight to end the pandemic depends upon and is inseparable from the struggle against capitalism and for socialism. This requires the building of a mass movement of the international working class, grounded in science and a political-historical understanding of the forces responsible for this massive social crime. The Socialist Equality Party (US) and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) must continue to provide leadership in this struggle. Alongside the fight against imperialist war, for social equality and in defense of democratic rights, the fight for global elimination is today one of the central components of the class struggle in each country.

The results of two years of mass infection

4. The COVID-19 pandemic is the worst public health crisis since the 1918 influenza pandemic over a century ago, when the science of virology was still in its infancy. By mid-July 2022, the official death toll since the start of the pandemic stood at over 1 million in the US and nearly 6.4

million globally. Estimates of excess deaths place the number of people killed directly or indirectly by the pandemic at over 1.2 million in the US and 21.5 million internationally. In just two-and-a-half years, total deaths from the pandemic have reached the estimated 20 million military and civilian deaths during the four years of World War I (1914-1918).

5. Beyond the immense tragedy of the millions of preventable deaths during the pandemic, it is also a “mass disabling event” with long-lasting impacts that are impossible to fully quantify. Numerous studies show that roughly 10-30 percent of COVID-19 patients go on to develop Long COVID, which can affect nearly every organ in the body and cause a wide range of symptoms. Some of the most common include extreme fatigue, cognitive dysfunction, chronic pain, loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath, and increased heart rate, all of which have profound consequences on patients’ quality of life.

6. The chances of developing Long COVID are compounded with each reinfection and only slightly reduced by vaccination. In June, the US government officially acknowledged that roughly 20 million American adults were suffering from Long COVID, a figure that will continue to rise with each new wave of infections and reinfections. Extrapolated globally, there are likely over 400 million people worldwide now suffering from Long COVID, for which there remains no viable treatment.

7. Coronavirus infection has also been linked to an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, a range of neurological disorders, kidney disease, diabetes, immune dysregulation and other life-altering or lethal after-effects. The combined impacts of mass death and debilitation have lowered life expectancy in the US by over 2 years since the start of the pandemic. Worldwide, life expectancy has dropped by 1.6 years, the first global decline since the end of World War II. This immense social retrogression, long advocated by eugenicists such as Ezekiel Emanuel, is seen as a positive good by dominant sections of the ruling class for reducing pension obligations and other social welfare spending.

A trigger event in world history

8. The record of the WWS and ICFI on the pandemic is unparalleled and a triumph of the Marxist movement. Since January 2020, we have published over 5,000 articles on the pandemic, continuously alerting the international working class to the mounting global catastrophe and advocating for policies to eliminate SARS-CoV-2 globally. From the beginning, the ICFI insisted that the pandemic was not simply a medical issue, but primarily a political, social and economic crisis arising from the broader world capitalist crisis. The response to the pandemic would be

determined by preexisting social conditions. In the US, decades of unending war, financial parasitism, deindustrialization, the corporatist degeneration of the unions, the evisceration of democratic rights, and the cultivation of far-right politics embodied in the presidency of Donald Trump were the determining forces at the start of 2020.

9. In March 2020, the ICFI first characterized the pandemic as a “trigger event” akin to the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which set into motion the outbreak of World War I and later the Russian Revolution. As with the assassination, the pandemic profoundly exacerbated the already far-advanced crisis of world capitalism and accelerated the processes leading to both war and revolution. Two years later, with the outbreak of the US-NATO war against Russia and the growth of increasingly militant struggles of the international working class, the trigger has been pulled.

10. The 2020 SEP (US) Congress resolution meticulously documents the opening months of the pandemic through July 2020, by which point the CARES Act bailout had been passed and lockdowns lifted as part of the brutal back-to-work campaign. In a prescient warning before the vaccines were even produced, we made clear that there would be no magic bullet to stop the pandemic, writing:

“How long will it be until the pandemic is brought under control?” This is a question being asked by billions of people. The usual response is that the pandemic will continue until an effective vaccine is developed. This fatalistic answer is premised on the assumption that the COVID-19 crisis is almost exclusively a medical problem. What is left out are the social and political dimensions of the fight against the pandemic. As the uprising of the working class was necessary to bring an end to World War I, the class-conscious intervention of the working class, in a struggle against capitalism, is necessary to create the conditions for an effective social response to the disease. Even if a vaccine is developed in the near future, and even if it provides long-term immunity, which is not guaranteed, its distribution will be subject to the profit interests of the corporations and the geostrategic conflicts between the major capitalist powers. Moreover, the pandemic’s containment will not bring the social and economic crisis to a conclusion. As was the case in the aftermath of World War I, the pandemic will leave deep scars and have long-lasting consequences. There will be no return to the conditions, as bad as they already were, that existed before its outbreak. The economic, social, and political crisis will develop on the basis of the conditions created by the pandemic. The scope and intensity of the class struggle will increase, not diminish.

11. As foreseen in that resolution, July-September 2020 witnessed an explosion of opposition to the Trump administration’s homicidal school reopening campaign, with over 100 strikes and protests breaking out across the country. With the assistance of the ICFI, educators, autoworkers, Amazon workers and other sections of the working class stepped forward globally to build rank-and-file committees to fight against the pandemic.

12. A central plank of Biden’s 2020 election campaign was his lying claim that he would “follow the science” and implement policies to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Upon his election, he rejected lockdowns, fired Dr. Michael Osterholm for advocating such measures, and pledged to reopen all schools where remote learning was still in place. After taking office, Biden worked closely with the teachers’ unions to ruthlessly implement this policy. On May 13, 2021, new CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky declared that vaccinated Americans could take off their masks.

This opened the floodgates for the lifting of all mask mandates and set the stage for the disastrous surge of the Delta variant. Two months later, Biden prematurely declared “independence” from the virus just as Delta began to rip through the country. More than 420,000 Americans have died of COVID-19 since that speech.

13. August 2021 marked a significant turning point in the pandemic and the response of the ICFI. The total reopening of schools in the US fueled the already massive Delta surge. In Democratic Party-led districts, a mitigationist approach was adopted, with mask mandates and limited testing programs, whereas Republican Party-led districts let the virus spread unchecked. In both cases, transmission was widespread.

14. On August 20, 2021, the WSWS published a critical statement which clearly explained the scientific and political distinctions between the three strategies towards the pandemic: herd immunity, mitigation and elimination-eradication. The central significance of this statement was its clarification of the reformist character of the mitigationist strategy and the need for workers and scientists to adopt the revolutionary strategy of elimination-eradication, summarized in this passage:

Mitigation is to epidemiology what reformism is to capitalist politics. Just as the reformist harbors the hope that gradual and piecemeal reforms will, over time, lessen and ameliorate the evils of the profit system, the mitigationists nourish the delusion that COVID-19 will eventually evolve into something no more harmful than the common cold. This is a pipe dream totally divorced from the science of the pandemic.

In reality, 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.

15. This warning was fully vindicated just three months later, with the emergence of the highly infectious and vaccine-resistant Omicron variant. Within official politics, all mitigationist pretenses were dropped as ostensibly “liberal” governments embraced the herd immunity strategy.

16. On August 22 and October 25, 2021, the WSWS and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) hosted two powerful webinars on the pandemic, with some of the leading scientists and workers fighting for the global elimination of SARS-CoV-2, which were viewed by many thousands of people from over 100 countries throughout the world. Throughout this time period, the IWA-RFC expanded in a wide range of industries internationally and helped organize a series of global school strikes initiated by British parent Lisa Diaz. Attempts were made to separate the ICFI from scientists, including through attacks on our position on the #MeToo campaign, but since then we have only deepened our connections with the most principled scientists.

17. The party’s fight against the pandemic at this critical juncture culminated in the initiation of the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic on November 21, 2021, just four days before news broke of the Omicron variant. The WSWS statement announcing the Inquest notes:

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.

18. The Inquest has already made significant inroads. It has received testimony from scientists and anti-COVID activists on the topics of the Zero-COVID strategy in China, airborne transmission, masking policies, Long COVID, the role of schools in viral transmission, the impact of COVID-19 on children, and more. Experts have testified on the criminal policies of governments and corporations in the US, Canada, Brazil, UK, Sweden, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and India. We have interviewed workers in a range of industries, including autoworkers, educators, health care workers, musicians and more. The investigation is deepening and will presents its initial findings later this year.

19. The response of the Biden administration to the Omicron variant has been horrific. Every public health measure previously in place in the US—testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine guidelines, mask mandates, data tracking, and more—has been largely or entirely dismantled. In January-February 2022, as students and educators in over a dozen major cities across the US mounted a wave of resistance against the reopening of schools during the Omicron surge, the Biden administration provoked the Russian invasion of Ukraine. With media attention diverted entirely to the war, the bipartisan campaign to lift all mitigation measures escalated. The pandemic was artificially proclaimed “endemic” and no more harmful than the common cold. Even the official passage of the 1 million death milestone could not evoke a single speech or policy proposal from Biden, who merely issued a perfunctory written statement ordering flags at half-staff at government buildings.

20. Nothing will be done by the White House or any state government to stop the spread of Omicron BA.5, which is deepening the already catastrophic surge of the BA.2 and BA.2.12.1 subvariants that began in late March. With projections of over 100 million cases this fall and funding completely dried up, the Biden administration is continuing its vaccine-only approach through the procurement of 100 million bivalent vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer, which will likely provide limited protection to just one-third of the population against whatever variant is dominant this fall.

21. The continuously disastrous response to the pandemic, first under Trump and now under Biden, is a manifestation of the putrefaction of American capitalism. The fact that the United States, the wealthiest and most technologically developed country in the world, could not respond to the pandemic in a rational, scientific manner, is a massive exposure and unanswerable indictment of the capitalist system. Over the course of the pandemic, America’s billionaires have amassed over \$1.7 trillion, increasing their collective wealth by a staggering 58 percent. The money-printing operation initiated by the CARES Act intersected with the breakdown of global supply chains to foster the inflationary crisis that has spiraled out of control since the start of the war in Ukraine, massively eroding workers’ living standards. The famous dictum of Marx has taken on new meaning during the pandemic:

Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance,

brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.

22. The only revolutionary socialist response to the pandemic has come from the ICFI. Our consistent and deepening fight for global elimination distinguishes our movement from all other political parties and organizations. Every pseudo-left tendency in the world stands deeply discredited by their response or non-response to the pandemic. On a world scale, they have either remained silent, given support to the homicidal “herd immunity” policies implemented by various world governments, or occasionally postured as opposed to these policies while subordinating workers to capitalist political parties. Their positions on the pandemic are an expression of the broader shift to the right in capitalist politics, to which these petty-bourgeois parties and organizations are oriented.

Monkeypox, climate change and future pandemics

23. Flowing from their disastrous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO and national health agencies have once again mounted no effective response to the unprecedented global monkeypox outbreak, which has rapidly infected over 20,000 people in over 70 non-endemic countries, effectively developing into an undeclared parallel pandemic. There is a profound danger that monkeypox will spread massively in the coming months, with models showing that without a more significant intervention there will be over 1 million cases globally by the end of September. Patients can be infectious for up to four weeks and should remain in isolation for that long, but world capitalism has already made clear during the COVID-19 pandemic that it will not tolerate even five days’ isolation.

24. The catastrophic impacts of climate change, which scientists have warned about since the 1970s, are also deepening each year. The 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, the most dire to date, notes that climate change has already caused “[w]idespread, pervasive impacts to ecosystems, people, settlements, and infrastructure,” as well as “substantial damages, and increasingly irreversible losses, in terrestrial, freshwater and coastal and open ocean marine ecosystems.” The report notes that an estimated 3.3 to 3.6 billion people “live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change.” By 2050, over 1 billion people currently living in low-lying areas of coastal cities will face growing threats from floods. By the end of the 21st century, 50 to 75 percent of the world’s population could experience “life-threatening climatic conditions” due to unbearable heat and humidity.

25. As with the pandemic, the disastrous impacts of climate change and the refusal of world governments to address this existential crisis have radicalized masses of workers and young people internationally. In September 2019, over 4 million people participated in a global climate strike at more than 5,800 locations in 161 countries across every continent.

26. A recent major study modeling the impact that climate change will have on zoonotic spillover events found that the coming decades will see approximately 300,000 “first encounters” between species not previously in contact. Cross-species dispersal of viruses will occur on the order of 15,000 times, with over 4,000 of these among mammals alone. The study does not project how many viruses will ultimately cause disease in humans, but the potential is significant. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic makes clear that the policy of the ruling class is to let any future pandemic run rampant.

The tasks of the Socialist Equality Party in the fight against the pandemic

27. The essential tasks of the SEP (US) regarding the pandemic have become clear over the past year. The two alternatives posed before mankind are either unending mass infection, debilitation and death, or the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and implementation of a policy of global elimination, to end all human-to-human transmission of SARS-CoV-2. The strategy of elimination requires the universal deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat the virus, including mass vaccination, testing, isolation and contact tracing, along with the temporary shutdown of schools and non-essential production, with full income to workers and support for small businesses. The experience in China, where popular support for the Zero-COVID elimination strategy has allowed the authorities to repeatedly suppress outbreaks, demonstrates in practice both that elimination is possible and that it must be expanded worldwide.

28. The revolutionary socialist response to the COVID-19 pandemic, other infectious diseases, and climate change, can only be developed through the building of a mass movement of the international working class fighting for world socialism. A life free from infectious diseases and the catastrophic impacts of climate change is a social right that must be secured globally. Therefore, the SEP (US) must play the leading role in advancing the following campaigns:

- **a) The fight for global elimination.** The fight to end the pandemic requires the organization and coordination of the struggles of the working class on a world scale, which will only develop through the building of the IWA-RFC. A central aim of the SEP (US) in fostering the growth of the IWA-RFC must be to popularize the strategy of global elimination. The party must also develop our correspondence and collaboration with the most principled scientists and anti-COVID activists who agree with and are fighting for the strategy of global elimination.

- **b) The expansion of the Global Workers' Inquest.** The Inquest is a powerful mechanism to politically educate workers on what has taken place during the pandemic and who is responsible for this monumental social crime. The SEP (US) must deepen the investigation, with an emphasis on bringing forward the experiences of workers in every industry.

- **c) The fight for socialist public health and the internationalization of the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries.** During the pandemic, there has been a qualitative deepening of the decades-long assault on public health and the health care industry. The health care and pharmaceutical industries must be placed under public and global control, to ensure the equitable distribution of treatment and life-saving resources. Access, research and treatment must be globalized, as these are universal rights in a modern society. Only through the building of a world socialist society can public health and health care—among the most critical fields of human activity—be developed. Under socialism, there will be a profound expansion of life expectancy and quality of life for every person on the planet.

- **d) The fight to end climate change.** Without a socialist revolution, climate change will continue to worsen each year, threatening billions of lives and the habitability of the planet. A scientifically-planned socialist economy, democratically controlled by the working class, could swiftly end and reverse climate change.



To contact the WSWS and the
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