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COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic

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This is the introduction to Volume 1 of "COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic." *This volume is available to purchase as an e-pub or printed book at Mehring Books.*

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This book—compiled from the World Socialist Web Site's coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic as it spread across the globe—is a social and political chronology of a historically critical event whose impact on the twenty-first century will prove to be as profound as that of World War I on the twentieth century. The comparison of the pandemic to the First World War is justified not only on the basis of the scale of human losses. In a manner no less profound than the cataclysm that erupted in the summer of 1914, the outbreak of the pandemic in the opening months of 2020 triggered a world crisis that exposed the political, social, and moral bankruptcy of capitalist society.

Confronted with a public health emergency of unprecedented magnitude, virtually every government in the world refused to implement policies that were required to prevent mass infection, debilitating illness, and death. Economic interests—specifically, those of the financial and corporate elite—determined the response to the pandemic. Saving profits was prioritized over saving lives. Humanity is grappling with the consequences of the socially criminal response of governments to the pandemic.

Despite vast advances in mankind's scientific understanding and technology over the past century, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has proven to be the most devastating infectious disease since the 1918 influenza pandemic, which killed between twenty-five and fifty million people in the span of just two years. Government policies have been characterized by a staggering indifference to human life. In October 2020, the former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson blurted out, "No more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" More recently, US President Joseph Biden declared in a television interview that the pandemic was over. On September 18, 2022, the day his statement was broadcast to a nationwide audience, there were, according to the *New York Times*, 61,712 official new infections and 464 deaths from COVID-19 in the United States.

Since the start of the pandemic, over six-hundred million people have officially tested positive for COVID-19 and over 6.5 million have died from the disease worldwide, both of which are known to be significant undercounts. Studies indicate that well over half the world's population has already been infected with SARS-CoV-2, while estimates of excess deaths attributable to the pandemic place the real global death toll at over twenty million people. Worldwide, hundreds of millions more have been impacted by Long COVID, a myriad range of symptoms that can affect nearly every organ in the body for unknown duration. Of this large portion of humanity suffering lingering symptoms from their infection, tens of millions have been disabled by the virus, unable to work and often largely confined to their homes.

For the first time since World War II, global life expectancy declined by nearly two years in 2020 and 2021. National declines in the first two years of the pandemic were highest in five countries in Latin America—Peru (5.6 years), Guatemala (4.8), Paraguay (4.7), Bolivia (4.1), and Mexico (4.0)—and three in Europe, including Russia (4.3), Bulgaria (4.1), and North Macedonia (4.1). In the United States, the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, life expectancy dropped by nearly three years during this time. Experts anticipate massive long-term health ramifications from the pandemic, as COVID-19 infection substantially increases one's risk of heart attack, stroke, dementia, kidney disease, and more.

As we approach the beginning of the fourth year of the pandemic, it continues to exact a horrific toll each day, as nearly every world government outside China has abandoned all mitigation measures to slow the spread of the virus and has instead adopted a policy of "forever COVID." Provided with billions of hosts, the coronavirus continues to evolve into new variants, threatening to further erode the efficacy of existing vaccines and treatments and cause recurring waves of mass infection, debilitation, and death.

Past struggles against polio, malaria, measles, smallpox, and other infectious diseases have been justly celebrated as milestones in the progressive impact of science on civilization. There will be no celebration of the official response to COVID-19. Its history will be a record of lies and crimes by governments, the corporate media, and official institutions that have subordinated the health of society to the profit interests of a tiny corporate-financial oligarchy.

In the coming years, historians of the COVID-19 pandemic will subject to scathing criticism the lack of preparation, despite numerous advance warnings. They will expose the social and economic interests that determined policy, and explain why governmental institutions were compromised to the point that they completely abandoned public health. The historians will examine how the fascistic "herd immunity" policy was developed, and the role of the media and trade unions in enforcing this policy. They will also call attention to the global fight by workers and scientists to stop the pandemic. In probing these topics, this book and the archives of the World Socialist Web Site will be recognized as an indispensable and authoritative guide, which provided the most incisive contemporary analysis of the pandemic.

The analyses of events as they were unfolding were extraordinarily prescient. The great advantage of the editors and writers of the World Socialist Web Site—published by the International Committee of the Fourth International—was that they were guided by a perspective deeply informed by history and a Marxist-Trotskyist understanding of the conflict

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between private economic interests and the welfare of the public in modern capitalist society. On this foundation, the WSWS identified the pandemic not simply as a medical event or a biological phenomenon, but primarily as a social and political crisis of global dimensions.

This is the first of three volumes that cover the years 2020, 2021, and 2022. Each volume provides an annual chronology, charting both the objective development of the pandemic and the perspective elaborated by the WSWS. A major challenge the editors faced in compiling these volumes was the matter of selection. Since January 2020, the WSWS has published over 5,500 articles on the pandemic, with the articles selected for these volumes representing less than 10 percent of this total. Emphasis was placed on the most critical statements, which elucidate key turning points in the pandemic and explain their social and political significance. In introducing this book, it is necessary to review some of these key developments and how the pandemic has unfolded.

2020: Initial outbreak and the two dominant strategies towards the pandemic—elimination and "herd immunity"

In the decades preceding the spillover of SARS-CoV-2 at a wet market in Wuhan, China, there was a series of global outbreaks of new infectious diseases, including the SARS outbreak (2002-2004), the H5N1 "bird flu" epidemic (2003), the H1N1 "swine flu" pandemic (2009), the MERS outbreak (2012), the Ebola virus epidemic (2014-2016), the Zika outbreak (2015-2016), and more. Scientists, who continuously warned of the dangers of a devastating pandemic, were treated as Cassandras, and nothing was done. Instead, scientific research and pandemic preparedness were severely underfunded, based on the lie that there was no money, even while global stock markets soared and military budgets ballooned. The well-known factors that would lead to new spillover events—climate change, unplanned urbanization, and ecological destruction—were allowed to worsen year after year.

When the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 began in late 2019, world capitalism was completely unprepared. In the opening months of 2020, all of the key issues and basic problems that have defined the pandemic were first raised. The two fundamental strategies that have since dominated governments' responses to the pandemic—elimination and "herd immunity"—emerged during this time. The central problem involved in public health and the control of infectious diseases, i.e., stopping viral transmission, was dealt with in two diametrically opposed manners.

Within China, after initially bungling the response and faced with growing opposition within the working class, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) implemented the first successful elimination program to contain the coronavirus. It utilized every public health measure at its disposal, including mass testing, rigorous contact tracing, the safe isolation of infected patients, and quarantining of exposed people, all of which had been developed by mankind over centuries. It also initiated the first mass lockdowns in history in Hubei province on January 23, 2020. After seventy-six days filled with enormous stress and self-sacrifice among workers, doctors, and scientists, Chinese society had stamped out viral transmission in the most populous country on Earth, protecting 1.4 billion people from SARS-CoV-2.

This became the model followed by New Zealand, Vietnam, and other countries in the region and internationally, many of which maintained elimination for over a year, until finally succumbing to the pressures of global finance capital. The total death toll from COVID-19 in China since April 17, 2020, just after the end of the Wuhan lockdown, now stands at just 594, by far the lowest death toll of any major country in the world and just 0.013 percent of the per capita death toll in the United States during the same time. Nearly all of these deaths in China took place from April to May 2022, the result of a major outbreak of the Omicron BA.2 subvariant in Shanghai that was again successfully suppressed.

Outside of China, a very different response unfolded in early 2020. Nearly every other government viewed the coronavirus not through the prism of science and public health, but that of global finance and corporate profits. As is always the case, this took the crassest form in the United States, where President Donald Trump encouraged Americans to inject themselves with disinfectant and ultraviolet light to supposedly ward off infection.

On February 7, 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping personally informed Trump, and presumably many other world leaders, that SARS-CoV-2 is airborne and has a much higher fatality rate than the flu. Concealing these truths, Trump whipped up anti-Chinese xenophobia by branding SARS-CoV-2 the "China virus." In January 2020, his fascist adviser Steve Bannon first promulgated the "Wuhan Lab Lie," which was later promoted by the corporate media and utilized by governments to deflect blame onto China for their own disastrous mishandling of the pandemic.

As the virus spread, a veil of silence was imposed by the corporate media and political establishment through the end of February 2020, covering up the growing dangers facing society. In March 2020, as hospitals and morgues filled up throughout the world and workers mounted wildcat strikes to halt production, governments were forced to belatedly implement partial lockdowns, causing a plunge in global stock markets. By the end of March, the CARES Act and other financial bailouts were crafted and rapidly approved internationally, funneling trillions of dollars into the financial markets. The aim was to provide immediate resources to restore the stock market. Once this objective had been achieved, the fight to stop viral transmission was subordinated to a ruthless back-to-work drive.

The new mantra for the back-to-work campaign, coined by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman and immediately picked up by Trump, was that "the cure cannot be worse than the disease." In essence, this phrase expressed the class interests of the financial oligarchy, which after less than two weeks would no longer tolerate lockdowns or other essential public health measures that slowed viral transmission but deprived the corporations of the workforce they required for the exploitation of labor and the generation of profits.

In promoting the reopening of businesses before the virus was contained, Trump, Friedman, and the *Times* hailed the Swedish government's refusal to implement lockdowns, based on the distortion of the scientific concept of "herd immunity." While historically this term had always referred to the level of *vaccine-induced* population immunity necessary to stop the spread of a given disease, beginning in March 2020, Sweden's chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell encouraged the deliberate infection of the majority of the population to create a mythical "herd immunity" while supposedly "shielding" the elderly and infirm. Tegnell and his adviser Johan Giesecke exported this pseudoscience globally and it became codified in the infamous Great Barrington Declaration, which the WSWS characterized as a "manifesto of death."

Over the course of 2020, the official COVID-19 death toll in Sweden reached 9,706, a per capita rate over ten times higher than neighboring Norway and among the highest in the world. From March 2020 on, Sweden's homicidal "herd immunity" strategy was adopted by the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, India, and other countries, based on eugenicist conceptions akin to "survival of the fittest."

Throughout the world, numerous scientists opposed these policies and advocated for measures necessary to stop the pandemic. Since April 2020, aerosol scientists in particular have waged a heroic struggle, urging governments to publicize the fact that SARS-CoV-2 is an airborne virus that can be dramatically curtailed through the use of high-quality masks and improved ventilation. Yet to this day, nearly every government and

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even the World Health Organization (WHO) have refused to educate society on airborne transmission, keeping the global population largely ignorant of this most essential feature of the virus and how it spreads.

The public health methods used in China, New Zealand, and other countries were never seriously adopted throughout much of the world. Each of these techniques, which mankind has accumulated through centuries of struggle against past plagues and which could be deployed in a highly advanced manner using modern technology, were instead withheld from the beginning. What transformed the pandemic into a catastrophe was that the resources of governments were mobilized, not to stop viral transmission, but to limit and even sabotage such a necessary response.

The concluding months of 2020 saw the approval of anti-COVID vaccines and the escalation of the "herd immunity" policy, in what the WSWS termed a "winter of death." In the final three months of the year, nearly 850,000 people officially died from COVID-19 worldwide, while estimates of excess deaths place the real total at roughly 2.5 million.

2021: The roll-out of vaccines, the mitigationist strategy and viral evolution

As the pandemic entered its second year, new problems emerged. The rollout of life-saving vaccines was done in a haphazard manner subordinated to corporate profits, producing vast inequities in global vaccination rates between wealthy and poorer countries. Furthermore, the mass vaccination efforts not only encountered a vile, anti-scientific campaign of misinformation which stymied uptake in many countries, but also produced a more subtle problem.

The vaccines were increasingly seen by governments not as an auxiliary but as a substitute that rendered unnecessary a comprehensive public health program. This became the basis for a third, mitigationist strategy towards the pandemic, which encouraged vaccinations alongside an amorphous mixture of other public health measures, while accepting that a certain unspecified level of viral transmission would remain. Mitigation amounted to an attempt to negotiate with the virus, while ignoring the objective laws of viral evolution. Ostensibly liberal governments cultivated illusions that the vaccines would serve as "magic bullets" and provide lasting protection against infection, thinking pragmatically that they could now proceed as if everything was fine.

Most notoriously, on May 13, 2021, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky told vaccinated Americans that they could take off their masks. This led to the wholesale scrapping of mask mandates across the US, which never returned to the same levels as before, a process replicated by many other governments. Two months later, on July 4, 2021, US President Joe Biden absurdly declared "independence" from COVID-19, just weeks before the more infectious and virulent Delta variant ripped through the country and killed over 200,000 Americans.

During this time, the Delta variant was spreading rapidly in India and soon worldwide. From late March to mid-May 2021, over two million people were killed in India alone, as the fascistic Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government headed by Narendra Modi enforced the "herd immunity" policy of mass death. This remains the worst surge to have happened anywhere in the world during the pandemic. Scientists warned that new variants such as Delta could cause "breakthrough" infections among vaccinated people, and that vaccines alone would not stop viral transmission, but these warnings were once again ignored.

The mitigationist strategy was expressed most sharply in the full reopening of schools, which by early 2021 had been definitively proven to be centers of viral transmission. Extraordinary claims were made that if schools required masks, opened windows, improved ventilation, or some combination thereof, they would be safe havens from infection. In reality, reopening schools before the pandemic was contained proved disastrous throughout the world, including in districts with more stringent mitigation measures, with thousands of children and an untold number of educators killed by COVID-19 internationally over the past two years.

Over the course of 2021, the WSWS intensified its fight for a scientific strategy to eliminate SARS-CoV-2 globally. On August 20, 2021, it published a major statement which provided a clear political assessment of the mitigationist strategy, stressing:

> 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.

Over the past year, this perspective has been entirely vindicated. In advancing the strategy of global elimination, the WSWS collaborated with a broad layer of scientists who had advocated for this policy. This collaboration led to two public webinars hosted by the WSWS, on August 22 and October 24, 2021, which provided a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the coronavirus globally.

While many scientists, workers, and anti-COVID activists advocated for comprehensive mitigation measures, their appeals to the capitalist politicians fell on deaf ears. It became increasingly clear that workers and scientists determined to stop the pandemic would have to take matters into their own hands. This found its most advanced expression in a series of powerful school strikes initiated by British parent Lisa Diaz and supported by the WSWS, the first of which took place on October 1, 2021.

While these strikes involved the most scientifically informed and politically conscious sections of the working class, it was clear that the great majority of workers remained cut off from both a scientific and political understanding of the pandemic. To educate the working class and counter the self-serving lies of governments and the media, the WSWS launched the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic on November 20, 2021. In the statement announcing the Inquest, we wrote:

> 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 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…
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> While powerful vaccines have been manufactured, only 41 percent of the world's population has received two doses of

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> 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.

Only four days after this statement was published, on November 24, 2021, news broke that the Omicron variant was spreading rapidly in South Africa. Within weeks, this highly-infectious and immune-resistant variant had spread to every corner of the globe, infecting millions of people each day.

2022: The collapse of the mitigationist strategy and the pursuit of "forever COVID"

The response of capitalist governments to the Omicron variant was coldblooded and catastrophic. Far from acknowledging the disastrous consequences of their policies and mounting a comprehensive strategy to stop the pandemic, governments throughout the world seized on this most infectious variant to scrap whatever limited mitigation measures were still in place and embrace the "herd immunity" strategy identified with the far right. In doing so, they worked with the corporate media to pursue a relentless propaganda campaign based on the lies that Omicron was "mild" and that mass infection with this variant would even be a positive good.

On January 17, 2022, a day when over 800,000 Americans were officially infected with COVID-19 and 1,397 died from the disease, Dr. Anthony Fauci stated, "It is an open question as to whether or not Omicron is going to be the live virus vaccination that everyone is hoping for." This pragmatic and unscientific conception, repeated by official scientists throughout the world, was essentially a warmed-over version of the "herd immunity" strategy, based on the lie that "natural infection" would provide long-lasting immunity and attenuate the dangers of the virus, causing it to become "endemic." This outlook was used to justify the lifting of all mask mandates and recommendations, the erosion and ultimate scrapping of isolation and quarantine guidelines, the end of free testing, and the universal rejection of lockdowns and social distancing.

Implementing this false and reactionary policy required the systematic manipulation of data on the pandemic, to cover up the real scale of death and debilitation caused by the virus. Throughout the world, data collection and reporting systems were curtailed, most often switching from daily to weekly reports. In the United States, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) scaled down the most comprehensive system to collect data from hospitals, including daily death reports, a development which only the WSWS reported upon. Just prior to Biden's March 1, 2022 State of the Union speech, the CDC introduced its distorted "Community Levels" map to provide a pastel-tinted veneer to the ongoing mass infection of the American population.

The results of this universal adoption of "herd immunity" have been horrendous. In the nearly ten months since Omicron first emerged, more than three billion people have been infected with COVID-19 globally, including hundreds of millions of reinfections or breakthrough infections among vaccinated people. Officially, 1,055,050 people have died from COVID-19 worldwide so far this year, while the excess deaths tracker of *The Economist* (the source used in graphs noting official and excess deaths at the start of each chapter in this book[1]) estimates that in reality 4.4 million people have already died directly or indirectly from the pandemic in 2022.

The unhindered spread of the virus has spawned numerous Omicron subvariants, including Omicron BA.2, BA.2.12.1, BA.4, and BA.5, each producing further waves of infections and deaths throughout much of the world. Scientists are warning that it is only a matter of time before new, more devastating variants evolve that could further undermine existing vaccines, and treatments such as Paxlovid.

The propaganda campaign has had a profound impact on mass consciousness, disarming hundreds of millions of people throughout the world by encouraging them to stop wearing masks and abandon their vigilance against the ongoing threat of COVID-19. The mantra guiding this policy, repeated ad nauseam by politicians globally, is that society must "learn to live with the virus." In effect, this cheap slogan aims to normalize perpetual mass death and debilitation. In an unprecedented manner, mass death from an infectious disease is now treated with complete indifference by the powers-that-be.

While attempting to cultivate a fatalistic and indifferent attitude in the population, the ruling elites and their pliant media continue to promote the "Wuhan Lab Lie," as well as endless lies about the elimination strategy in China, above all the myth that it entails "endless lockdowns." In reality, the example of China, where the elimination strategy has found mass popular support in the working class, is powerful proof of the viability of this strategy and shows the potential to eliminate SARS-CoV-2 worldwide in a matter of months through the global deployment of every available public health measure.

Coinciding with the brutal enforcement of a "forever COVID" policy, this year has also seen the unprecedented global spread of monkeypox, an excruciatingly painful disease closely related to smallpox. As of this writing, there have been over 60,000 confirmed monkeypox cases in over one hundred countries, with twenty-three confirmed deaths. In addition, polio and other infectious diseases, eliminated throughout much of the world in the twentieth century, have reemerged in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other advanced capitalist countries.

Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, unlimited resources have been funneled into military budgets, alongside massive cuts to all social programs. In Germany, the government seized on the war to pass a €100 billion remilitarization budget, the largest since the fall of Hitler's Third Reich, while cutting the health budget from €64 billion to €22 billion, close to pre-pandemic levels.

The lessons that must be learned

Contrary to the lies of capitalist politicians and the media, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. The future course that the pandemic will take remains to be seen. However, after three years, it should be readily apparent that neither the pandemic, nor any of the other dangers confronting humanity, will be resolved under the auspices of world capitalism.

The COVID-19 pandemic is only the first plague of the twenty-first century. Climate change and the unplanned nature of capitalist development are creating the conditions for ever more infectious diseases to spill over from destabilized animal populations into urban centers, and to then rapidly spread worldwide via international travel and commerce. If any conclusion can be drawn from the experience of the past three years, it is that the resolution of these crises is dependent, not on the discovery of a miraculous medical cure or technology, but on a social and political movement against the root cause of the crisis, the anarchic capitalist profit system. The pandemic, climate change, and the destruction of public health are only symptoms of a more profound disease, the capitalist

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system itself, which subordinates all human needs to the profit interests of a money-mad ruling class.

The title of this book, *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War*, is justified. The pandemic has revealed the reality of a global class war, in which the most urgent needs of mankind are subordinated to the drive for corporate profits and the accumulation of obscene levels of personal wealth. The disastrous consequences cannot be explained as solely the unintended by-product of incorrect policies. The policies implemented by governments bear the criminal mark of what is defined in law as "malice aforethought." The response of capitalist governments to the pandemic has served the interests of their super-rich patrons.

Lowering life expectancy in order to reduce pension obligations and social spending has been a longstanding aim of sections of the ruling class, and this effect of the pandemic is not simply an unforeseen coincidence. According to Forbes, by May 4, 2022, the day that the official COVID-19 death toll in the US surpassed one million, the wealth of America's 727 billionaires had increased by $1.71 trillion since the start of the pandemic. The grotesque accumulation of wealth by those described by the WSWS as "pandemic profiteers" amid mass death and suffering can be seen throughout much of the world.

In the course of April-May 2020, the WSWS first characterized the pandemic as a "trigger event" in world history, akin to the June 28, 1914, assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which triggered the outbreak of World War I. Over two years later, it is clear that the pandemic profoundly accelerated the destabilization of world capitalism. As with the trench warfare of World War I, during the pandemic, the ruling elites have subjected mankind to wave after wave of mass infections and deaths. These policies have produced unprecedented labor shortages, a spiraling global economic crisis with massive inflation, and an escalation of geopolitical tensions that triggered the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the antechamber to World War III. The criminal pandemic policies of nearly every government have exposed the brutality of capitalism, radicalizing masses of workers in every industry throughout the world. The class struggle has steadily intensified over the past two years and has now reached a fever pitch. The pandemic and the looming threat of world war will only be stopped through the global revolutionary struggles of the working class.

At the 2021 WSWS International May Day Online Rally, we announced the founding of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), whose central aim was to unify workers globally in opposition to the pandemic policies of the corporations, governments, and unions, and to fight for their own independent interests. Since its founding, the IWA-RFC has expanded to become the organizing center of the increasingly militant struggles of the international working class, whose working conditions and living standards have dramatically declined during the pandemic. The IWA-RFC must be developed systematically in every country.

As can be seen in the extensive list of authors from throughout the world, this book is a collective global effort. In addition, there are numerous scientists and experts that the WSWS has consulted with during the pandemic, and to whom we are immensely grateful. In our work with scientists, we have not imposed a political litmus test. Our only requirement was a commitment to scientific truth. We set ourselves the goal to analyze the pandemic as carefully as possible, and not to impose conclusions on facts, but to draw the conclusions out of the facts. We had an immense advantage, as socialists educated in the Marxist-Trotskyist tradition, in that our response has been informed by history, science, and a profound awareness of the class dynamics at play in society. The work of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which finds powerful expression in the leadership that it has given to the fight against the pandemic, represents the intellectual-political interaction of a commitment to scientific truth, irreconcilable opposition to social inequality and exploitation, and unshakable confidence in the ability of the international working class to put an end to a failed capitalist system and reconstruct the world on a socialist basis.

Nearly sixty-five years ago, in 1958, the brilliant scholar and socialist George Rosen published his monumental *A History of Public Health.* His work traced the development of man's struggle against disease from its origins in the ancient world. At the conclusion of his work, Rosen wrote:

> We are now in a position to look back and to see clearly the road that has been traversed in dealing with the health problems of the community. The manner in which these have been handled has always been connected with the way of life of the community and the scientific and technical knowledge available to it. Today, the community is in a better position than ever to control its environment and so to preserve health and avert disease. More and more, man can consciously plan and organize his campaign for better health because available knowledge and resources make it possible for him in many instances to act with a clear understanding of what he is doing.[2]

George Rosen, were he still alive, would be deeply shocked by the socially retrogressive response of contemporary governments to the COVID-19 pandemic. He would have condemned their policies as a repudiation of the knowledge painfully acquired by scientists, physicians, and public health workers over many generations and even centuries. But the struggle is not over.

The World Socialist Web Site will continue to provide leadership in the fight against the pandemic. In presenting this and subsequent volumes to the public, our aim is to develop a global mass movement, based on the working class and drawing support from all progressive sections of humanity, that will put an end not only to the pandemic but to all the manifestations of social suffering produced by an obsolete capitalist system. Within the context of this objective, the words with which George Rosen concluded his *History* are singularly appropriate:

> Furthermore, the horizon of health workers today can no longer be limited to the local or even the national community but must extend to the international community. Today, we are all members one of another; and so each in our own community, we must strive toward a goal of freedom from disease, want, and fear. We must strive to enhance and hand on the noble legacy that has come down to us. And may the outcome be a happy one![3]

The Economist and Solstad, S. (corresponding author), 2021. The pandemic's true death toll. Available at: https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/coronavirus-excess-deaths-estimates [Accessed 7 September 2022]. First published in the article 'Counting the dead', The Economist, issue 20, 2021.

George Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 470-71

Ibid, p. 471

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[1] The Economist and Solstad, S. (corresponding author), 2021. The pandemic's true death toll. Available at: https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/coronavirus-excess-deaths-estimates [Accessed 7 September 2022]. First published in the article 'Counting the dead', The Economist, issue 20, 2021.

[2] George Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (Baltimore: The Johns

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Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 470-71
[3] Ibid, p. 471

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