

SEP (UK) 2022 Congress Resolution

The COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for socialism

16 November 2022

This resolution was adopted at the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), held from October 22 to October 25, 2022. Read the full report on the Congress here.

1. In January 2023 the COVID-19 pandemic will enter its fourth year. Officially over 627 million people have been infected with COVID globally and more than 6.5 million have died. With no mitigations in place, however, billions of people are being infected and reinfected with COVID with no records kept. According to reliable estimates, around 21.5 million have been killed by COVID internationally.

2. In Britain, over 207,000 have died from the disease and hundreds are still dying each week. With the return to schools and universities fuelling a surge in cases, scientists are predicting a larger than ever winter outbreak, combining with flu to produce a “twindemic” that will plunge the National Health Service (NHS) into deeper crisis. On June 1, 2021, the *BMJ* (formerly the *British Medical Journal*) accused the British government of having unleashed “a maelstrom of avoidable harm,” including up to 150,000 people “who died earlier than they might have” due to its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The journal’s editorial of February 4, 2021, wrote, “At the very least, COVID-19 might be classified as ‘social murder.’”

3. The social murder committed by the Johnson government was the outcome of a eugenicist agenda widely supported in ruling circles. The policy of “herd immunity” (the mass infection of the population with a deadly disease) adopted by the government at the pandemic’s outset was linked to a revival and embrace of Malthusianism. Johnson had previously written in support of Thomas Malthus, a capitalist ideologue of the late 18th and early 19th century who argued that the “inevitability” of overpopulation made poverty and early death necessary for the poor.

4. Britain’s Chief Science Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance declared that herd immunity required the infection of “about 60 percent” of the UK’s 66 million population (40 million people). The “herd immunity” strategy was advanced by the government in the face of numerous scientific studies showing that immunity through mass infection of the population was in fact not possible—a fact proven by the continuation of the pandemic involving repeated mutations. 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. Several mutations are competing for dominance in Britain, with the danger that future mutations could be more infectious and deadly than their predecessors.

5. The Socialist Equality Party (UK) endorses the resolution of Congress passed in August 2022 by our sister party in the United States, “The COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for socialism”. It states, “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 defence of democratic rights, the fight for global elimination is today one of the central components of the class struggle in each country.”

6. Britain has spearheaded the homicidal pandemic policy of the capitalist class globally. In decrying lockdowns and insisting the economy remain open to keep profits flowing to the corporations, then UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke for the world’s ruling elite with his crude and sociopathic outburst in October 2020, that there must be “no more f***king lockdowns”. It anticipated the wholesale abandonment of all containment measures the government had been forced to implement at the start of the pandemic due to mass public outrage. It resulted in even more deaths in the second wave of the pandemic, 56,735 fatalities, compared with 44,235 over the same timeframe during the first wave.

7. The last remaining mitigation measures in Britain were torn up in the first months of 2022. In January, Johnson announced in parliament that mask-wearing in secondary schools in England would be ended within 24 hours. In an April 19 letter to health service leaders, NHS England declared that it was “adapting the way that the NHS operates with COVID-19 in general circulation and with the virus likely to remain endemic for some time to come.” After declaring that society had to “learn to live with the virus”, the government proclaimed “Freedom Day” in July 2021. This has been the narrative of Britain’s ruling elite ever since, with Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak declaring during the Conservative leadership campaign that lockdown measures to suppress COVID should never have been introduced and would never be imposed again. “Living with the virus” means dying from the virus.

The results of three years of mass infection

8. The COVID crisis is measured not just in millions of preventable deaths, but in the hundreds of millions of people who have been inflicted with long-lasting symptoms. 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. Infection is linked to an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, neurological disorders, kidney disease, diabetes, immune dysregulation and other life-altering or lethal after-effects. The chances of developing Long COVID are compounded with each reinfection and only slightly reduced by vaccination. There are likely over 400 million people worldwide suffering from Long COVID, for which there remains no viable treatment.

9. The situation in Britain, with a population of under 70 million, is horrific. According to a study published in the *BMJ* in September, “In mid-2022, approximately 70% of the UK adult population had been

infected with SARS-CoV-2. Of these, almost 2 million report covid-19 symptoms persisting for more than four weeks; 807 000 (41% of all people with long covid) for more than a year; and 403 000 (19%) for more than two years. Based on workforce data from the British Medical Association, a full time equivalent general practitioner with an average list size (approximately 2000) has around 65 patients with long covid, 27 of whom will have been unwell for more than a year, and 12 for more than two years.”

10. The most brutal policies were reserved for the disabled and elderly. The UK’s 20,000 care homes, housing over 400,000 elderly and vulnerable people, were transformed into killing fields. Due to the enormous pressure placed on the National Health Service by the pandemic, a March 17, 2020 directive from NHS England instructed that 25,000 elderly patients should be cleared out of hospital beds without being tested for COVID-19. Many were transferred into care homes. According to Office for National Statistics data, by February this year 45,632 care home residents had perished, with COVID listed on their death certificates as a cause of death, accounting for 16.7 percent of all care home resident deaths. During the first wave of the pandemic, hundreds of Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders were authorised illegally and without consent in care homes, and for the mentally and physically disabled. 119 social care providers reported that blanket DNR notices had affected people in their care.

11. As a result of the pandemic, life expectancy worldwide has dropped by 1.6 years, the first global decline since the end of World War II. The combined impacts of mass death and debilitation lowered life expectancy in the UK, according to Public Health England, by 1.3 years for males and 0.9 years for females. This social retrogression, long advocated by a significant group of eugenicists among Britain’s ruling elite, is seen as a positive good for reducing pension obligations and other social welfare spending. These considerations were summed up by *Telegraph* columnist Jeremy Warner who wrote at the pandemic’s outset, “Not to put too fine a point on it, from an entirely disinterested economic perspective, the Covid-19 might even prove mildly beneficial in the long term by disproportionately culling elderly dependents.”

A trigger event in world history

12. The Socialist Equality Party in Britain notes with pride the record of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the ICFI on the pandemic, which is unparalleled and a triumph of the Marxist movement. The resolution of the Socialist Equality Party in the US notes:

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 COVID-19 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 pre-existing 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.

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.

13. The SEP (UK) 2020 Congress resolution noted the warning by *Financial Times* Europe Editor Tony Barber that the pandemic would function as the trigger event for revolution, as predicted by the ICFI:

It is in the nature of cataclysmic events, such as the pandemic, to accelerate and refashion historical developments that would have happened anyway. The first world war intensified turmoil in Russia, leading to the revolutions of 1917, and drove forward the emergence of the US as the 20th century’s leading global power... The pandemic and its economic fallout, unless brought under a measure of control, is sure to have similar large-scale consequences.

Labour Party and the unions join Johnson government in a de facto coalition

14. The October 2020 SEP (UK) Congress resolution documented the opening months of the pandemic, during which the Johnson government organised its £410 billion bailout of the banks and corporations and ended the March 23 first lockdown after just three months—in furtherance of a brutal back-to-work campaign to make the working class pay for the vast sums handed over to the corporations. These crimes were carried out with the collusion of the Labour Party and the trade unions. The pandemic broke out while Labour was still under the “left” leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn immediately pledged to work with Johnson, declaring in a parliamentary debate on the pandemic on March 25, 2020, “The immediate task of the Opposition is to support the public health efforts that are being made, while being constructively critical where necessary to ensure that there is an improved official response.” Sir Keir Starmer, on becoming party leader in April 2020, only deepened Corbyn’s “constructive” partnership with the Tories proclaiming, “Our willingness to come together like this as a nation has been lying dormant for too long.”

15. The trade unions have played decisive role in backing the Tories, seizing on the COVID emergency to bolster their corporatist collusion with the government and the employers. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) and its constituent unions closed down all actions by the working class, including wildcat strikes by postal workers over coronavirus safety and official strikes by 50,000 lecturers, drivers on the London Underground and numerous strike threats by rail workers and others, while facing off demands by hundreds of thousands of parents for the closure of schools.

16. The unions signed off on the government’s gigantic bailout of the corporations and banks, which was formulated in numerous meetings. These included then Chancellor Sunak hosting in the Treasury—even before the first lockdown was in place—a March 19, 2020 business groups and unions “roundtable” attended by TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady and Confederation of British Industry (CBI) head Carolyn Fairbairn. Once the bailout was in place and strikes suppressed, the de facto Conservative/Labour/TUC coalition moved rapidly to organise the end of the first lockdown and force millions back into unsafe workplaces. As early as April 3, 2020, just 10 days after the first lockdown was put in place, the TUC issued a joint statement with the CBI and the Health and Safety Executive which insisted, “Firms that can safely stay open and support livelihoods should not be forced to close by misunderstandings about the government guidance.”

17. The extent of corporatist collusion during the pandemic was unprecedented. The Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) joined the government's Rail Industry Coronavirus Joint Forum with the aim of ensuring "close co-operation and collaboration between the trade unions and employers." O'Grady published an open letter in the *Times* proposing "a big generous offer to government: bring us into the room, give us an equal voice, listen to our ideas... In return we will roll up our sleeves and get stuck into the job of rebuilding our country so that it works for everyone. Just as we did after the Second World War." The government responded by organising seven "sector-by-sector meetings" chaired by business secretary Alok Sharma with trade union and business leaders, out of which the TUC produced a policy document declaring that it "does not take a position on the science of how to manage a pandemic or the speed or nature of any return to work."

18. The Corbynites played a central role in keeping all opposition to the government's pandemic policies within the safe channels of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. Their misnamed and now dormant Zero COVID UK campaign existed solely to provide an apology for the refusal of Labour and the unions to do anything to genuinely prevent the virus from ripping through workplaces and schools. Leading Corbynite Diane Abbott even declared, "It's always been the case that some people that support our organisation don't necessarily believe in absolutely Zero COVID." This allowed Zero COVID UK to act as a platform for numerous Labourites and trade union bureaucrats to posture as concerned critics of the Tories, even as they actively sabotaged opposition among educators and parents to the shared policy of the Tories and Labour.

19. The Socialist Equality Party, alongside our sister parties internationally, fought for an end to the criminal back-to-work drive and school reopenings, the repudiation of the corporate bailouts, and the establishment of workers' ownership and democratic control of the major banks and corporations. We insisted that governments provide a living income to all those impacted by the pandemic, to fund containment measures and expand healthcare and social protections. These demands were based, as the SEP (UK) Congress resolution stated, on the "fundamental premise that the response to the pandemic must be determined by what workers and society as a whole need, not what the capitalist system and the financial oligarchs are prepared to give."

20. The criminal response of the ruling class to the pandemic was epitomised by its policy of keeping schools open almost continually throughout the pandemic. This resulted in the deaths of 570 educators and school staff, and 211 children. By February this year more than 4.6 million children had been infected in Britain, with over 3 million child cases occurring since the end of all COVID safety measures on July 19, 2021. This policy met with the most determined opposition from educators and parents and could only be implemented thanks to the backing extended to the Tories by Labour and the education unions. Starmer infamously stated in August 2020, "I don't just want all children back at school next month, I expect them back at school. No ifs, no buts, no equivocation." The National Education Union declared that there could be no "education disruption". By January 2021, with millions of parents refusing to send children into COVID infested schools, and teachers withdrawing their labour citing Section 44 of the workplace Employment Rights Act, the government was forced to impose another lockdown. But once again, the government could rely on the unions to reopen schools prematurely from March 2021.

21. The Labour Party and the unions are seeking to ensure that those guilty of heinous crimes are shielded, through their backing of the Conservative government's UK Covid-19 Inquiry. As with all the "independent" public inquiries organised by the ruling elite—including the ongoing Grenfell fire inquiry—it can never bring justice. It is being held under the Blair Labour government's Inquiries Act 2005, which ensures that no matter what evidence is presented, those guilty will be shielded

from civil or criminal liability. Relatives are forbidden from giving evidence at the public hearings that will begin in 2023. They can only submit "pen portraits" to be read by others.

The programme of the International Committee of the Fourth International

22. The International Committee of the Fourth International bases its policies on the recognition that the international working class is the only social force that can successfully oppose the ruling class's policy of mass infection, illness and death and implement a scientific programme to end the pandemic globally in the interests of humanity. The record of the ICFI is detailed in the SEP (US) Congress resolution.

23. On August 20, 2021, the WSWS published a critical statement clearly explaining the scientific and political distinctions between the three strategies towards the pandemic: herd immunity, mitigation and elimination-eradication. Its central significance was the 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 harbours 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.

24. On August 22 and October 24, 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 COVID-19, which were viewed by many thousands of people from over 100 countries throughout the world. Throughout this 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.

25. With COVID ripping through schools, and #SchoolStrike2021—the main hashtag for the event trending online—parents, educators and students held their first school strike on October 1. Summarising the significance of the global event, *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board Chairman David North stated:

October 1, 2021 is a date that will live in history. The thousands of workers who have responded to Lisa Diaz's call to action and joined today's Global Online Picket Line are acting on behalf of countless millions across the globe.

While governments and the rich are concerned only with the impact of the pandemic on the stock markets and corporate profits, the working class is concerned with the cost to human life. COVID-19 cannot be lived with. It must be eradicated.

Today's action is a great step forward in the fight against the pandemic. But it is the beginning, not the end, of the struggle. We must build on today's achievement, and increase our efforts to mobilize the working class on a global scale in action.

26. The intersection of the ICFI's struggle with growing sections of the working class prompted attempts 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. The ICFI initiated the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic on November 21, 2021. This was just four days before news broke of the Omicron variant. Announcing the Inquest, a WSWs statement noted:

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.

27. The Inquest has received vital testimony and will present its initial findings later this year. Among those testifying are scientists and anti-COVID activists on topics including the Zero-COVID strategy in China, airborne transmission, masking policies, Long COVID, the role of schools in viral transmission, and the impact of COVID-19 on children. Experts have testified on the criminal policies of governments and corporations in the US, Canada, Brazil, Sweden, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and India. Workers from a range of industries, including autoworkers, educators, health care workers and musicians, have testified about their experiences. In Britain, the inquiry has taken testimony from several parents, including Sarah Paxman, who are being persecuted by the authorities for refusing to send their children into schools which have no mitigation measures in place. This particularly perverse policy of the British bourgeoisie has only been opposed by the Educators Rank-and-File Committee, initiated by the SEP.

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

28. 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 COVID-19. The strategy of elimination, fought for only by the ICFI, requires the universal deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat the virus. This includes mass vaccination available to all, universal 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. In China, the deployment of a Zero-COVID elimination strategy, backed by popular support, has allowed the authorities to repeatedly suppress outbreaks. It demonstrates in practice that elimination is possible and that it must be expanded worldwide.

29. The revolutionary socialist response to the COVID-19 pandemic, other infectious diseases, and climate change, will be successful to the extent that it is bound up with the building of a mass movement of the international working class fighting for world socialism. The SEP pledges to fight for the following demands:

a) The fight for global elimination. The fight to end the pandemic requires the organisation 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 (UK) 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 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 internationalisation 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 globalised, 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.



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