

COVID-safe IYSSE event draws enthusiastic support from workers and scientists

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28 April 2023

On Tuesday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at San Diego State University in California hosted a public lecture given by *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board Chairman David North. The event was highly successful, drawing a capacity audience of over 120 students, many of whom stayed after the two-hour event for further political discussion.

While the meeting centered on explaining the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and its historical background, a significant element of the lecture and response to it was the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In opening his remarks, North stated:

This is actually the first public meeting that I am giving since February 2020, which was the onset of the pandemic. At that time, we were first becoming aware of the fact that this virus was circulating. We wrote our first article on this on January 24, 2020. We then had a series of discussions internally in our party and tried to assess how serious this could be, and it became clear based on emerging scientific evidence that this could turn into a global catastrophe...

We began campaigning immediately for measures to be taken to stop the spread, before it assumed uncontrollable dimensions. We were right. It became very clear within a matter of weeks that the ruling class had no intention of taking those measures, which were necessary to stop the pandemic at a time when appropriate measures would have saved not just thousands but, as we have now seen, millions of lives.

North then explained the measures that were taken by the IYSSE to hold the meeting safely, which have been implemented at each of the IYSSE's international series of antiwar meetings this spring. Every mitigation measure available was put in place to minimize any potential airborne transmission of COVID-19, including antigen testing by event organizers, the encouragement of masking, the installation of Far-UVC devices and Corsi-Rosenthal boxes with HEPA

filters, carbon dioxide monitoring and the improvement of ventilation by opening doors and windows.

On Wednesday morning, North tweeted a thread that featured an image of the audience almost universally wearing masks, which was greeted with enthusiasm by workers and scientists globally. The tweet has gone viral, being viewed over 125,000 times, liked over 800 times and shared over 230 times as of this writing.

Many scientists, anti-COVID advocates and workers shared their own tweets of the photo, some of which also went viral. These included Dr. Andrew Wang, a doctoral research associate in health policy and health services research at Northwestern University, who wrote, "Usually I point out only one or two masks. The opposite is true today with most masked. Encouraged by this."

Prominent anti-COVID advocate Jess tweeted, "N95's, Far Uv. Wanting to hold meetings safely. They made it clear, they made it accessible. That's the way forward."

The decision of students to wear masks at the event was entirely voluntary, with only three out of 120 choosing not to do so. All other COVID-19 mitigation measures were also readily accepted. A significant factor behind this was the fact that a substantial number of students who attended the meeting regularly read the WSWs and were more aware of the ongoing dangers of the pandemic.

This aspect of the meeting verifies the analysis of the WSWs that, when educated and provided with a political perspective, workers and youth will choose to protect themselves and others. It demonstrates that the disastrous outcome of the pandemic has been entirely bound up with the refusal of world governments and corporations to implement policies necessary to slow and ultimately stop viral transmission.

The claim that masses of people would never accept comprehensive public health policies and an elimination strategy has always been and remains a lie. It is not mass hostility to masking but rather the relentless propaganda designed to misinform the population that underlies the abandonment of masking by billions of people globally over the past year.

Tuesday's IYSSE event was entirely unique since the beginning of the pandemic for any country outside of East Asia,

where masking was already common before the pandemic. No other large public event has involved such a comprehensive scientific effort to prevent COVID-19 infections. In fact, over the past year it became increasingly common to see photographs taken at scientific conferences, even ones involving virologists and epidemiologists who should clearly know better, in which virtually the entire audience was maskless.

The IYSSE meeting took place in the midst of the Biden administration's efforts to drive the final nail in the coffin of any official response to the pandemic. On April 1, expanded access to Medicaid due to the pandemic was cut off, initiating a process whereby upwards of 20 million Americans could lose access to health care. This was followed by Biden officially ending the COVID-19 national emergency declaration on April 10. On May 11, the public health emergency declaration will expire, privatizing the distribution of COVID-19 testing, treatments and even vaccines.

This same process is unfolding internationally, based on a massive propaganda campaign falsely claiming that COVID-19 is now no more harmful than the flu or even the common cold. This is despite the fact that the latest global wave of infections is underway, with the Omicron XBB.1.16 "Arcturus" variant now sweeping through India and quickly becoming dominant throughout the world.

Every day, there continue to be over 10,000 excess deaths attributable to the pandemic globally. At least 65 million people continue to suffer from Long COVID, with their ranks swelling with each new wave of infections.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is the only political party in the world which has resisted the capitalist propaganda campaign to declare the pandemic over, stressing the ongoing dangers of the pandemic and, in particular, the immense global impacts of Long COVID.

After commenting on Long COVID and other aftereffects of COVID-19 infection, North concluded his introduction to Tuesday's meeting by noting:

We're saying this not to frighten people. There's no point being frightened by reality. But we have to understand that a critical element of political work today is educating the working class, educating young people and mobilizing masses of people to fight for the measures which are necessary to protect public health. This is the responsibility of the socialist movement, of the workers' movement.

Over the next 90 minutes, North provided a comprehensive analysis of the war in Ukraine, which threatens to escalate massively in the coming weeks as the NATO-backed Ukrainian military prepares a "spring offensive" that will only deepen the

fratricidal bloodbath. He explained the historical origins of the conflict, based on the theoretical-political insights into the nature of the imperialist epoch provided by the great Marxist revolutionaries, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky.

Refuting the myth of the "unprovoked war," North reviewed the antecedent 30 years of uninterrupted imperialist plunder carried out by the United States following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which set the stage for the eruption of the war in Ukraine. Returning later to the theme of the pandemic, he noted that a significant factor underlying the reckless military policies pursued by the imperialist powers is their experience sacrificing over 22 million lives during the pandemic.

North concluded his lecture by stressing the great insight of Lenin that the same contradictions of the capitalist system which lead to imperialist war also create the conditions for world socialist revolution.

Tuesday's meeting in San Diego marked the high point to date of the IYSSE's international antiwar campaign initiated last November. In a sense, it was the correlate to a similarly powerful meeting of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) held in Detroit last month, which brought together representatives of rank-and-file committees from across the US.

After three years of the COVID-19 pandemic and one year of the war in Ukraine, these two initiatives of the ICFI are acquiring growing influence and support within the working class and at universities throughout the world.

In conjunction with the ICFI and the WSWS, the IWA-RFC and IYSSE are hosting an International Online May Day Rally this Sunday, April 30. This rally will mark the next stage in the development of a global mass movement to stop the war in Ukraine, put an end to the pandemic and rebuild global society on socialist foundations. We urge workers and youth internationally to register below for this rally and build for it as widely as possible at your workplaces, schools, neighborhoods and across social media.



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