

The working class, the fight against capitalist barbarism and the building of the World Party of Socialist Revolution (Part Two)

**Statement of the WSWs International Editorial Board
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This is the second part of a multi-part series. Part one was published January 3, part three on January 5 and part four was published on January 6.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the normalization of mass death and suffering

1. As the New Year begins, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to exact an immense toll on the lives and health of the global population. At present, the world is enduring yet another wave of mass infection, debilitation and death, fueled by the heavily mutated, highly infectious and immune-resistant JN.1 variant, which rapidly became dominant globally in December. The lies of every capitalist government and the corporate media, epitomized by Joe Biden's declaration in September 2022 that "the pandemic is over," stand exposed as nothing but propaganda.

2. According to the most recent wastewater data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—now the only reliable metric to track the spread of the virus due to the dismantling of all pandemic surveillance systems—on December 23 the US had already reached the second-highest level of viral transmission of the entire pandemic. This was before a record 115 million Americans traveled long distances to visit family members for the holidays, unknowingly spreading the virus to their loved ones.

3. Scientists project that this wave will soon peak at roughly 2 million infections per day, and that nearly one-third of the American population, roughly 100 million people, will likely be infected with COVID-19 over the duration of the wave. In all countries where wastewater data is still tracked, similar near-record or even record levels of transmission have been documented over the past month as JN.1 has become dominant globally.

4. Each lagging indicator—hospitalizations, deaths and suffering from Long COVID—will steadily worsen globally in the weeks and months ahead. Hospitalizations are already surging in the hardest-hit Northeast and Midwest regions of the US, forcing a number of hospital chains to reimplement mask mandates in a desperate effort to stay afloat while slammed with patients. Hospitals in Rome and other parts of Italy, as well as other countries, are inundated with patients suffering from respiratory illnesses. Official COVID-19 deaths in the US have surpassed 1,000 each week for the past three months and will continue to rise. Using the

WHO's conservative estimate that 10 percent of infections lead to Long COVID, at least 10 million more Americans will suffer from this horrible affliction in the months ahead.

5. All facts and data surrounding the present state of the pandemic are concealed from the global population, which has instead been subjected to unending lies, gaslighting and propaganda, now shrouded in a veil of silence. There is a systematic cover-up of the real gravity of the crisis, enforced by the government, the corporations, the media and the trade union bureaucracies. Official policy has devolved into simply ignoring, denying and falsifying the reality of the pandemic, no matter what the consequences, as millions are sickened and thousands die globally every day.

6. The capitalist class has chosen the "forever COVID" policy of abject surrender, giving the virus free rein to infect billions of people each year, debilitating and killing millions, and creating optimal conditions for unchecked viral evolution. Principled scientists continue to warn that there is nothing preventing COVID-19 from becoming far more pathogenic and deadly, and the scrapping of all mitigations only heightens the likelihood that such a variant could evolve.

7. Just as the ruling elites have normalized genocide and nuclear war, they have deliberately normalized ongoing mass death and human suffering through the unhindered spread of COVID-19. The same indifference to human life now permeates the halls of power, above all in the imperialist centers which are spearheading the 21st century descent into capitalist barbarism.

8. The most accurate measure of the true level of death caused by the pandemic is excess deaths above pre-pandemic baselines. In 2020, according to *The Economist's* tracker, there were 5,460,000 deaths attributable to the pandemic. In 2021, the deadliest year of the pandemic, in which the Delta variant killed millions in India alone, there were a staggering 12,540,000 excess deaths. In 2022, there were another 6,900,000 excess deaths. Over the past year, there were over 2,500,000 excess deaths through November 18, the last date that *The Economist* updated its tracker. In total, there are now 27.4 million cumulative excess deaths, four times the official figure of 7 million.

9. The overwhelming majority of these deaths are directly attributable to COVID-19, either during the acute stage of infection or due to the myriad negative impacts the virus can have on the body. As documented in thousands of studies since 2020, a COVID-19 infection elevates one's risk of heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, diabetes, immune dysregulation, various neurological disorders and more.

10. Beyond this immense level of preventable death, the pandemic has also produced the greatest scale of debilitation in human history.

Hundreds of millions of people globally now suffer from prolonged symptoms known as Long COVID, which can impact virtually every organ in the body. Multiple studies have shown that one's risk of developing Long COVID is compounded with each reinfection, with a study published in *Statistics Canada* last month finding that the percentage of Canadians who developed Long COVID increased from 14.6 percent after their first COVID-19 infection to 38 percent after their third.

The evolution of the “forever COVID” policy

11. In the first year of the pandemic, three alternative strategies emerged in different countries and different sections of each country's ruling class: elimination, mitigation and “herd immunity.” The latter policy of simply allowing the virus to spread without any public health measures was first implemented in Sweden, Great Britain, Brazil, parts of the US and other countries. This policy quickly assumed the form of a war against the populations and was criminal in the fullest sense of the word.

12. The raw calculus of capitalist profiteering dictated these countries' policy decisions: Better that a million people die than a billion dollars be lost on the stock markets. Once the CARES Act and other bailouts were secured in the global financial capitals in March-April 2020, the attitude of the ruling class immediately turned to ever greater hostility to public health and indifference to mass death and debilitation with Long COVID. Britain's then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson summed up this homicidal outlook when he stated that COVID-19 was “just nature's way of dealing with old people,” as revealed in the recent UK COVID Inquiry.

13. In the US, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman embraced Sweden's reckless policy, coining the phrase, “the cure cannot be worse than the disease,” which soon became Donald Trump's mantra for his back-to-work, anti-lockdown propaganda. In the Introduction to *COVID, Capitalism and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, the WSWS noted:

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.

14. In other countries, more stringent lockdowns were enforced in 2020, alongside mask wearing, as part of a mitigationist strategy. With the rollout of vaccines in 2021, the outlook became widespread that through vaccinations, masking and other limited mitigation measures, the pandemic would gradually be brought to an end. This proved to be a delusional fantasy, which was exploded with the evolution of the more pathogenic Delta variant in May 2021 and especially the highly infectious Omicron variant in November 2021.

15. As Omicron rapidly infected billions and killed millions of people throughout the world, the universal capitalist response to the pandemic morphed into an open undermining and repudiation of all efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. An unrelenting propaganda campaign was initiated to portray Omicron and all of its progeny as “mild,” “endemic” and comparable to the seasonal flu. Throughout 2022, all mask mandates were lifted in schools and other public places, free PCR testing sites were dismantled, and data reporting of cases, hospitalizations and

deaths was gradually eroded.

16. This campaign only deepened in the course of 2023. Last May, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Biden administration and other national health agencies formally ended their COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declarations, codifying into law what had already been their *de facto* abandonment of all official responses to the greatest public health crisis in over a century. As a result, large sections of the global population have become disarmed and unaware of the ongoing dangers of the pandemic.

17. At the same time, the ending of the PHEs facilitated the scrapping of all pandemic surveillance, including the reporting of cases and deaths, as well as testing in hospitals, rendering official statistics totally inaccurate. This policy change also finalized the privatization of all testing, vaccines and treatments. Pfizer and Moderna now charge patients and insurance companies over \$100 for their vaccines, and Pfizer plans to price its life-saving treatment Paxlovid at \$1,390 when government supplies run out, likely in the coming year. Over 13.4 million Americans were disenrolled from Medicaid in 2023, with millions more slated to lose this vital health insurance in 2024. Hospitals throughout the country lifted mask mandates, necessary to protect the most at-risk populations, causing a major spike in hospital-acquired COVID-19 infections and deaths last year. Similar processes have unfolded across Europe, while throughout much of the world updated booster shots and treatments like Paxlovid are not even available for the vast majority of the population.

18. The universal adoption of “forever COVID” has necessitated a revival of eugenicist conceptions within all sections of the ruling class. In order to justify perpetual waves of mass infection, debilitation and death, the elderly and most vulnerable had to be deemed worthless by official society.

19. The most explicit formulations of this fascistic ideology were voiced by the top two public health officials in the US under the Biden administration, Drs. Rochelle Walensky and Anthony Fauci. On January 7, 2022, just weeks after the emergence of the Omicron variant and under conditions of soaring COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, Walensky stated in an interview with ABC that it was “encouraging news” that the “overwhelming number of deaths” occur in “people who are unwell to begin with.” Nearly two years later, on August 28, 2023, Fauci told the BBC that “the vulnerable will fall by the wayside, they'll get infected, they'll get hospitalized and some will die.”

20. The attacks on science reached their highest point during the fourth year of the pandemic, which saw a marked escalation of the campaign to discourage and oppose masking, based on the universal adoption of the absolutely false claim that “the pandemic is over.” This systematic disinformation campaign, emanating from all governments and corporate media outlets globally, has no basis whatsoever in science.

21. In the end, powerful financial and economic interests have willfully promoted abandoning mitigations as part of a deliberate effort to lower life expectancy. This eugenicist policy was enforced by leading public health authorities in the Biden administration. Biden himself, who was elected in part due to his campaign promise to “follow the science” and stop the pandemic, has overseen the deaths of over 700,000 Americans from COVID-19, a death toll he admitted he “stopped thinking about” by January 2023.

22. The fight against the pandemic has been undermined by an unrelenting assault on the scientific community, including physical threats against the lives of scientists like Peter Hotez, a campaign to which the Democratic Party has adapted itself. At the same time, public education is in a state of free fall after decades of budget cuts, which are now being compounded as all additional pandemic funding dries up. Every progressive development since the Enlightenment, including all the core principles of public health, are being clawed back by a ruling class tobogganing towards fascism and nuclear war.

The fight for global elimination in 2024

23. The third strategy towards the pandemic, elimination, was proven to be possible from the very beginning through the experience in China and other countries, which demonstrated that there was an alternative to the policy and program of mass death. Through the correct application of public health methods, developed over centuries and well known to experts in the field, the transmission of COVID-19 could be stopped and lives saved.

24. After its initial mishandling of the pandemic provoked growing opposition in the population, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) quickly changed course in January 2020 and imposed necessary lockdowns, combined with mass testing, rigorous contact tracing and the safe isolation of all infected patients, with the aim of cutting off all chains of viral transmission. After 76 days, the population emerged from lockdowns and returned to relatively normal pre-pandemic conditions. The threat of the virus entering through China's borders was closely monitored and each outbreak snuffed out. New Zealand, Vietnam, Australia and other countries followed China's model and were similarly able to maintain Zero-COVID for extensive periods of time.

25. During the first year of the pandemic, while millions died internationally, only 4,634 lives were lost in the initial outbreak in China, followed by only four deaths over the next year. However, the long-term viability of this elimination strategy depended upon its international application. The same fundamental contradiction in the economic strategy of China, the whole development of the country on nationalist foundations, manifested itself tragically in the course of the pandemic.

26. For the next two and a half years, the imperialist powers weaponized the pandemic against China, as part of their longstanding preparations for war. The central axes of this anti-China propaganda were the "Wuhan Lab Lie"—a conspiracy theory concocted by Trump's fascist adviser Steve Bannon in January 2020 to deflect all blame for the pandemic onto China—and unending agitation against the life-saving Zero-COVID policy. This culminated in explicit threats from Apple, Nike and other major Western corporations to move their production facilities out of China in the fall of 2022 in response to temporary lockdowns that prevented the spread of the Omicron variant. In effect, imperialism extorted the lives and health of the Chinese population in return for guaranteed cheap labor.

27. Finally capitulating to these pressures, the Chinese government made the absolutely brutal and reactionary decision to rapidly drop all Zero-COVID measures between November and December of 2022. For the Chinese population, the results have been nothing short of catastrophic. Multiple scientific studies estimate that 1-2 million Chinese people were killed by COVID-19 last winter as a result of this policy change. Since then, China has been integrated into the global "forever COVID" policy. After multiple waves of infection and death in the past year, over 100 million Chinese people out of the country's 1.4 billion population are likely now suffering from Long COVID.

28. The longstanding success with Zero-COVID in China proved the viability of an elimination strategy towards COVID-19, even in less developed and densely-populated countries. At the same time, its ultimate demise reaffirmed the unviability of any nationally-based program in the epoch of imperialism. What proved to be unviable was the national framework, not the policy itself. Elimination remains both viable and necessary, but can now be attained only through the building of a mass movement fighting for the following principles:

- **The fight against the pandemic is a political and revolutionary question which requires a socialist solution.**

The organization of public health must be on the basis of social need, not corporate profit.

- **The profit motive must be entirely removed from all healthcare, pharmaceutical and insurance companies.**

29. The only way that the pandemic can be stopped is through a globally-coordinated elimination strategy, in which the entire world's population acts in solidarity and with a collective determination to enforce a broad-based public health program. This strategy must center around mass testing, contact tracing, the safe isolation and treatment of all infected patients, the universal use of high-quality masks, and the renovation of all public buildings to provide clean indoor air through HEPA filters and the safe implementation of Far-UVC devices.

30. After four years of the pandemic, it is abundantly clear that such a global strategy will never arise under world capitalism, which subordinates all public health spending to the insatiable profit interests of a money-mad financial oligarchy. The very idea that an illness should be eliminated or eradicated, a central concept in public health, has been abandoned. Only through world socialist revolution will it be possible to end the pandemic, as well as stop the further descent into capitalist barbarism and World War III.

31. All that has been said about the pandemic applies with even greater force to the growing existential threat of climate change, the impact of which is felt ever more acutely by broad swathes of the globe. The past year witnessed near-daily breaking of temperature records and numerous extreme weather events throughout the world. Massive wildfires, heat waves and air pollution have become pervasive on every continent, while the global melting of the ice caps and glaciers is only accelerating. Multiple studies have shown that the destabilization of Earth's ecosystems through climate change and unplanned urbanization is pushing thousands of species out of their native habitats, thereby increasing the likelihood of spillover events and future pandemics.

32. The development of science and the marshaling of society's resources to address these pressing social needs can only be realized under a world socialist society. No less than the struggle against war, the struggle against the pandemic and climate change requires the building of an international socialist movement. The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only genuine socialist movement in the world fighting for these policies.

33. It is striking that there is no coverage even remotely equal to the *World Socialist Web Site* on the topic of the pandemic. The sole systematic, unified campaign against the pandemic has been conducted by the ICFI, its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties, and the WSWWS throughout the world. The various middle-class pseudo-left tendencies have either ignored the pandemic or openly embraced "forever COVID." The trade union bureaucracies have continuously served the interests of the ruling class. In the face of immense concerns raised by rank-and-file workers in every industry—above all among healthcare workers and educators forced to work without protection in the most dangerous conditions—the union bureaucrats function as task masters, sacrificing workers to mass infection, debilitation and death.

34. The fight against the pandemic is a fully revolutionary question. The ICFI is the sole political organization which understood this from the beginning, fought for this, and carried out a systematic campaign of education and clarification within the working class. Over 6,000 articles on the pandemic have been published on the WSWWS. Apart from specialized scientific journals and newsletters, no other news publication in the world, either of the bourgeois or pseudo-left press, continues to cover conscientiously and systematically the development of the pandemic.

35. The fight against the pandemic must be placed at the center of the struggles of the working class in the coming year, which will not be confined simply to contract issues. Profound social issues remain at the

heart of this battle, including the most basic rights to life and health, and the centuries-long struggle for public health. Only the ICFI, which expresses the historical interests of the working class, has fought and will continue to fight for these principles on a world scale.



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