

For a globally coordinated emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic!

International Committee of the Fourth International
28 February 2020

The International Committee of the Fourth International calls for a globally coordinated emergency response to the spreading coronavirus pandemic. The working class must demand that governments make available the resources required to contain the spread of the disease, treat and care for those who are infected, and secure the livelihoods of the hundreds of millions of people who will be affected by the economic fallout.

The danger cannot be overstated. The number of reported cases is approaching 100,000 worldwide, with nearly 3,000 deaths. The majority of those infected are in China, but the virus is spreading throughout the world. Infected individuals have been identified in 47 countries, including hundreds of cases in Italy (14 reported deaths); Iran (26 deaths); and South Korea (13 deaths).

On Thursday, both Germany and the United States reported their first cases of the virus with no obvious source of transmission, indicating that it has begun to spread to people who have not traveled to centers of the disease. The number of infected in Iran, meanwhile, is far higher than reported. The country's deputy health minister has gone into quarantine after testing positive.

World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Thursday that it would be a "fatal mistake" for any country to believe it will not be hit. WHO advisor Ira Longini has said that without aggressive measures to contain the virus, it could ultimately infect two-thirds of the world, which would mean hundreds of millions of deaths.

The economic damage from the virus could exceed the scale of the 2008 financial crisis. The recession sparked by the 2008 crisis led to a fall in global GDP by 0.5 percent and destroyed the jobs of tens of millions of people.

The response of ruling elites and the governments they control to the crisis combines incompetence with a criminal level of indifference. Nowhere is this more

evident than in the United States.

President Trump, concerned above all about the impact of the coronavirus on the fortunes of the corporate and financial elite, has sought to downplay the danger and grossly overstate the level of preparedness. "Whatever happens," he said on Wednesday, "we're totally prepared."

In fact, the US government is completely unprepared for a major outbreak. There is no system in place to even systematically test for the virus. The individual in California who has been identified as the first reported case of unknown origin in the US was not given a test for days after symptoms were first expressed.

There is a severe shortage of the most basic health equipment, including respirator masks needed by health care workers. The government only has about 30 million on hand, while it is estimated that 300 million may be required.

The Trump administration has appointed Vice President Mike Pence, whose inaction and reactionary religious ideology contributed to an HIV outbreak in the state of Indiana when he was governor, as the government's point person for the coronavirus response. The main purpose of this appointment is to muzzle any officials whose warnings contradict the response of the administration.

The working class must demand and fight for comprehensive and urgent emergency measures. The crisis demands:

1. A global mobilization

The response to the coronavirus cannot be coordinated on a nation by nation level. The virus does not respect borders or visa and immigration restrictions. The global networks of transportation and economic integration have turned the virus into a global problem.

The solution must be global. Scientists from all over the world must be allowed to share their research and technology, unencumbered by the "national interests" and

geopolitical conflicts that serve only to delay the development of effective countermeasures to contain, cure and ultimately eradicate the coronavirus. All trade war measures and economic sanctions, such as those imposed on Iran, must be immediately lifted. No human being should be denied urgently needed medical treatment on account of their national or ethnic origins.

Urgent attention must be directed to the millions of people who are being housed in immigrant and refugee camps set up by the major capitalist powers in Europe and the United States. These camps will be major danger areas for the spread of the virus. All those currently in such camps must be given secure housing and access to health care.

Where quarantines must be implemented for those traveling or infected, it must be done in a way that respects democratic rights and preserves personal dignity.

2. A massive allocation of resources for health care and treatment

Hundreds of billions of dollars must be immediately allocated to ensure universal access to the highest-quality medical care for all those infected with the virus. An international team of health care experts and scientists must be assembled to coordinate care wherever there are outbreaks.

The political establishment in the United States is engaged in a “debate” over whether \$2 billion is adequate (the position of the White House) or \$8 billion is required (the position of the Democrats). Both these figures represent a drop in the bucket compared to the scale of the global crisis.

The Trump administration has spent five times more on its reactionary wall on the US-Mexico border (\$11 billion) than it proposes to allocate to the coronavirus. Some \$3 billion is spent *every day* on financing the US war machine.

The provisioning of health care and treatment cannot be regulated by the insurance, pharmaceutical and health care companies. Treatment, including any future vaccine, must be available to everyone, free of charge, on an equal basis.

The giant health care companies must be turned into public utilities, democratically controlled to meet the urgent social need presented by the coronavirus and other health emergencies.

3. Direct financial support and income compensation for all those impacted by the economic consequences

Millions of workers face reductions in hours or the loss of their jobs due to the immediate impact of the

coronavirus and its broader economic consequences. They must be compensated in full for their losses.

Governments and the capitalist elites will argue that there is no money to finance such an emergency response. This is a lie! The amount spent by the capitalist governments on military expenditures runs into the trillions of dollars. The annual military budget of the United States alone is more than one trillion dollars. Moreover, the major capitalist governments, led by the US Federal Reserve, have allocated virtually unlimited sums of money to drive up the market value of equities. Within weeks of the 2008 crash, the US government doubled the national debt overnight to provide liquidity for the stock market and bail out corrupt investors.

Moreover, staggering sums of money are controlled by an infinitesimal percentage of the world’s population. The wealth of the world’s 500 richest people stands at nearly \$6 trillion, following an increase of \$1.2 trillion last year alone. The working class must demand that governments impose emergency taxes on the fortunes of the oligarchs to the extent required by the emergency.

In demanding that capitalist governments implement these emergency measures, the international working class does not abandon its fundamental aim: the ending of the capitalist system. Rather, the fight for emergency action will raise the consciousness of the working class, develop its understanding of the need for international class solidarity, and increase its political self-confidence.

The present crisis demonstrates again that capitalism is an outmoded economic system and barrier to human progress. The danger posed by this pandemic and the catastrophic implications of global warming prove that the capitalist system must give way to world socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact