

As US deaths exceed 40,000, Trump escalates reckless back-to-work campaign

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On Sunday, the death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic crossed 40,000 in the United States, with nearly 20,000 deaths in the past week alone.

The pandemic has exposed the complete dysfunctionality of American society and its incapacity to provide the most basic necessities—medical care, protective equipment and even food—to its citizens.

The government did nothing to prepare for the pandemic, Trump downplayed the disease as a “hoax,” and the media ignored it for months. While thousands of heroic healthcare workers, forced to work in unsafe conditions, fell ill and died, banks and corporations received the largest bailouts in human history.

Images of mass graves in New York City and of bodies piled up in refrigerated trailers and stuffed into spare rooms at Sinai Grace Hospital in Detroit will never leave the consciousness of the health care workers who witnessed them or the working class as a whole.

All over the country, hundreds of thousands of people are grieving the loss of their friends and loved ones. With millions laid off, countless households are just days away from total penury, turning to overstretched food pantries.

Despite Trump’s narrative that the pandemic has been contained, the disease is spreading to new parts of the country, with every state reporting at least one death, as the disease rampages through nursing homes and prisons.

In the midst of this disaster, the Trump administration is single-mindedly focused on re-opening American businesses, despite the lack of measures necessary to contain the pandemic. The Trump administration’s overriding concern is to ensure that the pandemic does not interfere with the enrichment of Wall Street and the major corporations.

The White House has made clear it is calling for businesses to reopen under conditions in which the infrastructure to test all suspected cases, quarantine those infected, and trace their contacts does not exist.

This is despite the warning by the World Health Organization and leading epidemiologists that it is utterly irresponsible to reopen businesses under these conditions, which would only fuel a resurgence of the pandemic.

Trump’s demand for a return to work has been supported by substantial sections of the media. On Sunday, NBC’s evening news program led not with the massive death toll, but with far-right protests, some with just dozens of participants, demanding the reopening of businesses. The media ignored the role of far-right groups in calling the demonstrations, occupying state capitols bearing assault rifles and flying Confederate flags and swastikas.

While the broadcast news downplayed the numerous strikes, sick-outs, and protests by workers taking place around the country and the world against a return to work under unsafe conditions, they have framed the tiny right-wing protests as the legitimate expression of the popular will.

Trump’s proposal that businesses in substantial portions of the United States reopen by May 1, initially presented as an absurd pipe dream, has now become the baseline. Even Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced that her state, facing the highest COVID-19 case fatality rate in the country, would reopen businesses by the start of next month.

“Lockdown showdown” was the theme of ABC News’ Sunday talk show, which presented the prospect of reopening businesses as a conflict between those who, like Trump, advocate a “big bang” and those, like Utah Governor Gary Herbert, who say the process

should be “more like a dial.”

Trump and dominant sections of the media frame the question of reopening the country as a choice between losing lives and mass impoverishment. But this dichotomy is false. It assumes the prerogatives of the capitalist system as given, in which the state extends unlimited resources to the financial and corporate elite, but cannot ensure the economic livelihoods of workers during a pandemic.

The demand for a premature return to work was accompanied with a massive intensification of US efforts to scapegoat China for the pandemic. As with the demand to reopen businesses, Trump has set the tone for the Democrats and the media. On Tuesday, Trump announced that the White House would end US funding for the World Health Organization in a statement falsely blaming China for the pandemic.

The next day, the Associated Press published an article entitled, “China didn’t warn public of likely pandemic for 6 key days,” bolstering Trump’s false claims that China is responsible for the pandemic. This narrative—referring to the week between January 14 and January 20—is contradicted by even the most cursory analysis of US media reports at the time, which makes clear that the progress of the disease was being widely and accurately reported in the international press by the first week of January.

The Democrats and their associated media outlets are seeking to beat Trump at his own game. In a front-page article on Sunday, the *New York Times* painted Trump as too eager to appease China. “Eager to continue trade talks, uneasy about further rattling the markets and hungry to protect his relationship with President Xi Jinping at a moment when the United States is relying on China’s manufacturers for lifesaving medical supplies, Mr. Trump has repeatedly muddled Republican efforts to fault China.”

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden took up this theme, accusing Trump in a new campaign ad of leaving “America vulnerable and exposed to this pandemic” by putting “his trust in China’s leaders instead.”

On Tuesday, The *Washington Post* published an article seeking to legitimize, without evidence, a right-wing conspiracy theory, pushed for months by Trump’s fascist former campaign manager Stephen Bannon, that COVID-19 was created in a Chinese laboratory.

The *Post* fished the claims out of Bannon’s private sewer and laundered it for use on the Sunday talk-shows, where it was a major topic of discussion.

The class struggle never rests, and imperialism never relaxes its predatory aims. This is especially true in a crisis. While workers are making these sacrifices, the US government provided a \$6 trillion bailout to Wall Street and major corporations. The policy of quantitative easing and ultra-low interest rates, in effect for over a decade before the pandemic, was intensified in response to it.

If the ruling class has its way, the society that emerges from the crisis will be characterized by an intensification of all the tendencies that prevailed before the pandemic—more inequality, more exploitation, more poverty and more war.

While the ruling class’s assertion of its interests in the crisis is more immediate and direct, that of the working class will be more powerful. All over the world, from Italy to California, workers are refusing to labor in unsafe conditions and fighting to oppose a premature return to work. The efforts of the oligarchs to utilize the crisis to expand their wealth at the expense of thousands upon thousands of lives will produce immense social unrest.

The pandemic has made clear the bankruptcy of the capitalist system. In their struggle against the Trump administration’s back-to-work campaign, workers must take up the fight for the socialist transformation of society.



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