

The American oligarchy decides for death

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It is becoming increasingly obvious that the Trump administration has embraced an approach to the pandemic that will—and *that it knows will*—result in the deaths of tens of thousands of people in the coming weeks and months.

On Sunday night, Trump nonchalantly stated that he now expects 100,000 people to die from COVID-19 in the United States, up from his previous estimates of approximately 60,000.

Referring to death numbers like he was negotiating a real estate deal, Trump stated, “I used to say 65 thousand, and now I’m saying 80 or 90. And it goes up and it goes up rapidly. But it’s still going to be, no matter how you look at it, at the very lower end of the plane.” He added separately, “And look, we’re going to lose anywhere from 75, 80 to 100 thousand people.”

That is, an additional 40,000 people, by Trump’s own count, will die—40,000 people with children, spouses, families and loved ones, who would not have died if appropriate measures were taken to contain the virus.

This is, in fact, a vast underestimate. The president’s remarks were followed Monday by the publication by the *New York Times* of an internal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) report that projects that there will be 200,000 new cases *per day* by the end of this month, and by June 1 an expected 3,000 daily deaths.

This would push the death toll into the hundreds of thousands, as the report shows that actual daily deaths have consistently outpaced government projections. At that rate, more than a quarter million people would be dead by the end of the summer, and more than a million within a year.

The CDC figures make clear that the Trump administration’s guidelines, released in mid-April, marked the abandonment of any official effort to contain the pandemic. As the *World Socialist Web Site*

warned on April 17, the White House and the ruling class were seeking to “normalize death on a massive scale, in which outbreaks of COVID-19 are seen as the cost of doing business.”

As the death toll mounts, the Trump administration’s internal calculations are being released in dribs and drabs. At the end of March, when the US death toll had just surpassed 4,000, Trump declared that a total of 100,000 deaths would be “a good job” by his administration. Today, the official death toll has surpassed 70,000 and is still climbing at an average pace of more than 1,750 per day.

However, even this is a significant undercount of deaths that have resulted from COVID-19 infections and the stress that has been put on health systems by the pandemic. Excess deaths, those on top of the average number of weekly deaths, exceed reported deaths by as much as two times in many states. On top of this, Florida and Tennessee, two states that have already moved to reopen, are actively suppressing their official death tolls.

It must be stated again: The White House is deliberately and consciously implementing measures that it knows will lead to tens of thousands additional deaths. There is a sociopathic character to these policies, but they follow a ruthless class logic. The gangster in the White House expresses the demands of the financial oligarchy, which controls the entire political system.

The pandemic gave the ruling elite the pretext to carry out policies that otherwise would have come under extreme scrutiny and been met with popular hostility. Without the crisis caused by COVID-19, it would be difficult to justify a \$10 trillion handout to the rich—unanimously supported by the entire political establishment, Democratic and Republican.

With the bailout secured, it is, as far as the ruling class is concerned, time to get back to the business of

extracting surplus value from the working class, regardless of how many will die.

There are only two concerns that the ruling class has in implementing this policy.

First, there is the problem of how to get workers back to work under unsafe conditions. The response here is economic blackmail and impoverishment. Millions of workers who have been thrown out of work overnight will never see an unemployment payment. With many states now lifting all restrictions on business operations, workers will be forced back to work under the threat of being cut off from all aid if they refuse to do so.

Second is the problem of legal responsibility on the part of companies for the death of their workers. Trump set the agenda last month by using the Defense Production Act to order slaughterhouses, a center of the outbreak with thousands of workers already infected and dozens of workers dead, to remain open and to indemnify the corporations from being sued for any worker deaths.

On Monday, Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell told Fox News Radio that any future bailout package should indemnify all employers. “We have brave health care workers battling the virus, entrepreneurs who will reopen their economy, all of whom deserve, in my view, strong protections from the opportunistic lawsuits... arguing that somehow the decision they made with regard to reopening adversely affected the health of someone else.”

With companies being freed of any responsibility for the lives of their employees, the strategy of the ruling class now is to withhold as much information as possible about the growing number of infections and deaths, and to give the impression that it is safe to return to work and to normal life, even as the coronavirus rampages through communities across the country.

Workers will and must reject the false choice being put forwarded by the ruling elite—starve or risk death from COVID-19. This “choice” is premised on the idea that the capitalist system is inviolable and that the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy will dictate the response to the pandemic.

The development of opposition in the working class requires the formation of independent rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace and factory to ensure safe working conditions and to fight for the

closure of all non-essential production. The organization and operation of workplaces cannot be left in the hands of the capitalists, whose only interest is in producing profits!

The effort of the working class to fight for life over profit, for a scientific and rational response to the pandemic that mobilizes all social resources to combat the coronavirus, will bring workers into an ever more direct and open conflict not only with the Trump administration, but with the corporate and financial oligarchy that is dictating policy—and the capitalist system upon which its wealth and power rests.



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