

Memorial Day in America: 100,000 COVID-19 deaths surpass combined US combat fatalities in Korea and Vietnam

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Today is Memorial Day, an official holiday to commemorate the soldiers killed in America's wars abroad. On this Memorial Day, the consequences of the Trump administration's indifference to the death of American workers and subordination of human life to corporate profits is summed up in the tragic milestone of more than 100,000 deaths from COVID-19.

It is an extraordinary fact that the 100,000 people officially lost to the virus in barely two months already surpasses the combined US combat death toll in the three-year Korean War (33,686) and the 11-year US war in Vietnam (58,220). It is also nearly twice the number of American soldiers killed in World War I (53,402).

This staggering loss of human life, however, is only the beginning. The Trump administration is marking the holiday by promoting activities in defiance of all social distancing rules, which will cause a sharp increase in infections and deaths.

On Friday, Trump demanded that governors remove all restrictions on church services. He is promoting one quack "miracle" cure or unproven virus program after another, including boasting that he himself is taking hydroxychloroquine. On Saturday he had himself filmed playing golf, without a mask, as is the case with all his public appearances. On Sunday, Trump tweeted, "Cases, numbers and deaths are going down all over the country!"

The last is a flat out lie. Nationally new cases continue at more than 20,000 a day, and new deaths at more than 1,000. In hot spots such as Montgomery, Alabama, hospitals are overwhelmed. Patients showing up at Montgomery hospitals are being shipped to Birmingham.

Over the weekend, the horrifying results played out across the country. With the support of much of the media, people are being misled and encouraged to engage in very dangerous activity. There were scenes of packed beaches and boardwalks, with hundreds and thousands of people mingling without masks or any other form of protection.

Hundreds of party-goers crowded together in a pool at the Lake of Ozarks in Missouri, a state where nearly 12,000 have tested positive and more than 680 have died. In the same state, which has reopened businesses including gyms and beauty salons, two stylists at a Great Clips hair salon tested positive for COVID-19. The two worked for days while carrying and spreading the virus, exposing a total of 140 customers and staff.

Churches in many states took their lead from Trump and held in-person services. This follows a May 10 Mother's Day service at a church in Butte County, California that exposed 160 people to the virus.

One of the recent hot spots is Arkansas, where the number of new cases rose by 147 on Sunday, marking a new spike in the disease. Its Republican governor, Asa Hutchinson, has ordered the reopening of casinos, theaters, arenas, pools and water parks. Speaking on the "Fox News Sunday" program, he mentioned in passing a high school swim party in his state that has resulted in new infections. He dismissed the deadly consequences of his policies by saying, "We have to manage the risk, grow our economy."

At the same time, workers are being blackmailed into returning to work by being told they will be cut off of jobless benefits if they refuse. New cases are occurring in reopened auto plants, and last week the eighth Amazon worker thus far succumbed to COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the companies are doing nothing to prevent infections and are concealing from their employees cases of infection within the workforce.

Given the long gestation period before symptoms, the consequences will be seen in two weeks' time. Last week, Imperial College London released a study concluding that, based on the present course of reopening in the United States, "deaths over the next two-month period could exceed current cumulative deaths by greater than two-fold."

That means the next two months in the US could see an additional 200,000 deaths on top of the 100,000 that have already occurred.

Such a death toll will accelerate the enormous economic, social and political crisis in the United States and throughout the world. The Bank of International Settlements, one of the leading institutions of finance capital, warned in a report released on Friday ("Dealing with Covid-19: understanding the policy choices") that the surge in deaths will have immense economic consequences, due to its impact on gross domestic product. It wrote of the "trade offs" involved in restarting production and the "costs and benefits of containment policies."

Whatever conclusions they draw, within the ruling class and the media there is an acceptance of the basic framework--that workers' lives must be balanced against the "economy." However, the "economy" is an abstraction, which cloaks definite class interests.

The "economy" that is being reopened over the bodies of workers and retirees is exclusively the economy of the corporations and the rich. What is being pursued is the ruthless class policy of a capitalist elite that faced a mounting crisis and looming collapse of its stock market bubble before the pandemic hit. It welcomed the deadly virus as a cover to carry out a new multitrillion-dollar transfer of wealth from the working class to the Wall Street swindlers and speculators.

Within this context, Trump has the benefit of articulating most ruthlessly the demands of the financial oligarchy. But it is not just a question of Trump and his administration. The Democrats, whatever their criticisms over tactics, fully support the bailout of Wall Street and are implementing the back-to-work campaign in states controlled by Democratic governors throughout the country.

The ruling class in the US—and the same can be said of the ruling classes of Europe, South America and most of Asia—is guilty of criminality on a massive scale. The level of death and suffering is the result of a conspiracy against the people.

The broad mass of the working class opposes a premature return to work. A recent poll by ABC News and Ipsos showed that Americans, by a 30-point margin, are resistant to reopening the country. And this is despite the loss of nearly 40 million jobs and increasingly desperate conditions, without any serious relief from the government. Nearly two-thirds said they opposed opening the country now because it would result in a higher death toll.

The struggle against the coronavirus pandemic is a struggle against the capitalist ruling class and its economy. The fight to implement the urgent and necessary measures to stop the spread of the pandemic is inextricably connected to the fight to overturn capitalism, in the United States and internationally, and to establish socialism, in which the preservation of human life and the needs of society as a whole take precedence over the mad drive for profit and the accumulation of wealth.



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