

A reality check on the ongoing spread of the coronavirus pandemic

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The ruling elites in the United States and throughout Europe, Asia and Latin America have abandoned any pretense of stopping the coronavirus pandemic through social distancing and the shutdown of non-essential production. The virus continues, however, to spread rapidly throughout the world.

More than 400,000 men, women and children have lost their lives and at least 7.1 million have been infected, many with debilitating effects that may last for years to come. The lives of countless millions more remain in danger as the number of cases continues to grow.

The situation in the United States is particularly dire. There are now more than two million cases and 112,000 dead across every state and territory, more than any other country in the world. Tens of thousands are newly infected each day and many hundreds die, though the official figures in the US and other countries vastly understate reality.

World Health Organization Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus reported yesterday that new cases saw their biggest daily increase ever on Sunday. "More than six months into the pandemic, this is not the time for any country to take its foot off the pedal," he said. Such counsel, however, is falling on deaf ears.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo chose yesterday to focus not on the grim reality of New York City's 205,000 cases and 22,000 deaths, but on the fact that "our mojo is back" because the city's construction, manufacturing and curbside retail businesses are now reopened. Scant mention was made of the fact that, in New York City alone, a world epicenter of the disease in April, hundreds of transit workers have died.

Twenty-two states in the US are seeing an increase in coronavirus cases. The number of new cases in Florida has increased an average of 46 percent over the past

week. There are sharp increases in Utah, Arkansas and Arizona.

Texas just recorded a record number of COVID-19 hospitalizations. "As Texas moves forward with a new phase of Governor Greg Abbott's plan for reopening businesses," the *Texas Tribune* reported, "the daily number of confirmed coronavirus cases is on a steady, upward trend... The 14-day trend line shows new infections in Texas have risen about 71 percent in the past two weeks."

A de facto policy of "herd immunity" has been adopted by the Trump administration and Democratic and Republican state governors. If brought to fruition, an estimated 1.6 million people in the country will ultimately die. The policy of the ruling class is: Whatever happens, happens.

The deadliness of the pandemic has manifested itself sharply in meatpacking plants across the US. *USA Today* reported that as a result of Trump's executive order in late April forcing slaughterhouses and processing plants to remain open, "the number of coronavirus cases tied to meatpacking plants has more than doubled... topping 20,400 infections across 216 plants in 33 states, the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting found. At least 74 people have died."

Corporations, assured that they will be protected by the government, are flouting basic health and safety measures. The *USA Today* article cited the comments of a federal meat inspector, who said that she visited plants where workers "were not wearing masks and practiced only limited social distancing. Some, she said, had also recently tested positive for COVID-19."

The coronavirus does not respect national boundaries and the global spread will have devastating consequences for every country.

Europe has suffered nearly 2.1 million infections and

more than 179,000 deaths. While the virus has been somewhat suppressed in early epicenters such as Spain, Italy, Germany and France, infections and fatalities have continued to rise in the United Kingdom and Eastern Europe. Russia now has 476,000 cases and 5,900 known deaths and the country has one of the highest rates of new cases and new deaths in the world.

Other epicenters of the pandemic are South Asia and South America. There are now at least 10,000 new cases a day in India and 250 deaths, numbers that are trending upwards. The country has currently recorded 265,000 cases and 7,400 deaths.

The situation is worse in Brazil, which has had between 15,000 and 30,000 new cases each day for the past 14 days, along with 500 to almost 1,500 new deaths daily. Its official case count and death toll, figures that fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro has tried to censor, stand at 694,000 and 37,000, respectively.

Thousands of autoworkers in Mexico's maquiladora plants have been infected and hundreds have died since the plants were reopened in May. Dozens of transit workers in London have died, even as the United Kingdom was ostensibly locked down to halt the spread of the virus. This grim reality is going to become more apparent as governments continue their homicidal drives to reopen their economies.

The policy of the ruling class must be countered through the organized resistance of the working class. In its May 21 statement, the Socialist Equality Party said, "If infection, sickness and death are to be prevented, it is necessary to create a new form of workplace organization that oversees and enforces safe working conditions.

"Therefore, the SEP advises workers to form rank-and-file safety committees in every factory, office and workplace. These committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, should formulate, implement and oversee measures that are necessary to safeguard the health and lives of workers, their families and the broader community."

The development of such organizations, in the US and throughout the world, is an urgent necessity to safeguard workers' lives.

The expansion of the pandemic takes place as an unprecedented social and economic crisis confronts millions of workers. Despite Trump's claims that the economy is roaring back, tens of millions remain out of

work, with no job to return to. The stock market is rocketing back to its pre-pandemic highs due to the trillions of dollars that have been pumped into Wall Street and financial markets, with the support of Democrats and Republicans.

The seething social anger over the response of the ruling class to the pandemic is a central factor underlying the eruption of mass protests throughout the world sparked by the police murder of George Floyd. At the same time, the brutal police response and the attempt by the Trump administration to impose a military dictatorship and violently suppress popular opposition are motivated by an understanding within the ruling class that it confronts far greater social convulsions to come.

The fight to defend democratic rights and oppose dictatorship must be fused with the struggles of workers against inequality and exploitation. The pandemic has exposed the reality and bankruptcy of capitalism, which is a barrier to human progress and the very survival of the human species.

Against the homicidal policy of the capitalist ruling elites, workers must and will insist that "workers' lives matter." But the fight to defend the lives of workers against the coronavirus pandemic is inseparably linked to a struggle of the entire working class against the ruling class and the capitalist profit system.



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