As pandemic surges, White House presses ahead with back-to-work campaign

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It is now indisputable that the campaign by the White House and major corporations to prematurely reopen businesses has led to a surge in COVID-19 infections throughout the United States.

Between June 6 and 9, there was a 36 percent increase in the average number of new cases in the US, according to a leaked report by the Centers for Disease Control. At 27,221, yesterday saw the highest number of new cases since May 21. Globally, new cases surged to a new record, at more than 140,000.

Twenty-one states have reported an increase in new cases this week, including sharp increases in Arizona, Florida, Texas, Utah, North Carolina, and California. Already, Arizona's hospitals are nearly at capacity.

At the present daily death rates, which have hovered around 1,000 per day, there will be over 200,000 coronavirus deaths in the country by the end of the summer.

However, the increase in cases will inevitably bring with it an increase in deaths. Just as the White House's belated response to the pandemic led, according to one study, to the loss of over 50,000 lives, the premature return to work and the abandonment of all efforts to contain the disease will lead to tens or hundreds of thousands of additional deaths.

Despite the disastrous surge throughout the country and internationally, the White House, governors and business executives are insisting that there will be no return to emergency measures to contain the disease.

The US "can't shut down the economy again," Treasury Secretary Mnuchin said Thursday, echoing the declaration by President Donald Trump last month that "whether it's an ember or a flame … we're not closing our country."

Arizona Governor Doug Ducey, a Republican, declared a second emergency lockdown was "not under discussion." California Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, pledged to continue with the reopening of the economy, even though we "anticipate an increase in the total number of positive cases."

Texas last week reported three consecutive days of record numbers of patients hospitalized with COVID-19. On Friday, restaurants were given permission to expand their dining rooms to nearly full capacity. Governor Greg Abbott made clear he had no intention of putting business restrictions back in place.

Florida's Department of Health on Friday reported a record high of 1,902 new cases of coronavirus. Despite these numbers, Governor Ron DeSantis unveiled a plan to restart public schools at "full capacity" in the fall.

These statements are echoed in the press. In an editorial Friday, the *Wall Street Journal* bluntly declared, "More infections are inevitable as states reopen," but that "there is no alternative to opening."

Denying the obvious, National Economic Council (NEC) Director Larry Kudlow insisted on Friday, "There is no emergency. There is no second wave." Coming from the man that declared in February that the United States had "contained" the pandemic "pretty close to airtight," such statements are meaningless.

The declarations by Kudlow and Mnuchin have only one aim: to reassure Wall Street that, no matter what, there will be no disruption of the back-to-work campaign, and workers will be forced to work or face being fired.

From the beginning of the pandemic, every action taken by the ruling class has been dictated by the interests of Wall Street. After taking no measures to safeguard the lives of the population, the Trump administration, with the backing of the entire political establishment, engineered the largest government bailout of the rich in history.

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Trillions have been turned over to the corporations and banks, and the Federal Reserve has made clear that the money spigot will remain open indefinitely.

The infusion of cash into the stock market requires the ever-greater extraction of surplus value from the working class. Once the bailout was secured, all measures to contain the spread of the pandemic, from lockdowns to mandatory social distancing measures at workplaces, were simply abandoned as encumbrances on profit-making.

The campaign to force a resumption of production has led workplaces, such as meatpacking facilities, food processing centers, and other manufacturing facilities, to emerge as centers of transmission, putting workers on a collision course with companies determined to resume production.

But opposition by workers to these unsafe conditions is rapidly growing throughout the country. Hundreds of meatpacking workers in Logan, Utah demonstrated Wednesday afternoon to demand the closure of their facility, where more than 20 percent of the total workforce tested positive. Philadelphia sanitation workers protested in front of City Hall Tuesday morning to demand protective equipment, access to regular testing for COVID-19 and hazard pay bonuses.

The impact of the return-to-work campaign will intersect with the enormous social crisis produced by mass unemployment and austerity, as the ruling class seeks to use the crisis to restructure class relations and increase exploitation.

The policy of the ruling class must be countered through the organized resistance of the working class. This requires the formation of independent rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace to oversee and enforces measures that are necessary to safeguard workers' health and lives.

The development of such organizations must be connected to the mobilization of the entire working class against the Trump administration. As the WSWS wrote on May 22, "The fight against the pandemic must be waged not only on the medical front, but on the political front as well. The struggle against COVID-19 is inseparable from the broadest possible fight against the criminal policies of the Trump administration and its supine enablers in the Democratic Party."

The consequences of these criminal policies are now emerging throughout the country.

Over the past two weeks, hundreds of thousands of people have marched to protest the brutal police murder of one man: George Floyd. The Trump administration is responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands and will be responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands more. As with the fight against police violence, the fight against the pandemic is at the same time a fight of the entire working class against the financial oligarchy and the capitalist profit system.

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