

For international working class action against the COVID-19 pandemic!

Statement of the International Committee of the Fourth International
23 June 2020

The global coronavirus pandemic is spiraling out of control. Six months after the first case of COVID-19, new cases are at record highs. As a direct consequence of the actions of governments throughout the world, combining indifference, incompetence and conscious policy, the situation is dire and getting worse.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global catastrophe, whose impact on the history of the twenty-first century will be no less than the impact of World War I on the twentieth century.

The experience of the last five months has made all too clear that the response of the major capitalist governments—with the United States in the lead—has been nothing short of disastrous. The class interests of the corporate financial oligarchies that dictate imperialist-capitalist policies do not allow for a scientifically guided, socially progressive, democratic, egalitarian and humane response to the pandemic. The drive for profit, personal wealth and, therefore, the unbounded exploitation of the working class takes absolute priority over the social interests of the overwhelming majority of the world's population.

As we enter the final week of June, more than 450,000 people have already died, according to official figures, which undercount fatalities. The premature and reckless “return to work”—the abandonment, in effect, of any systematic effort to contain the spread of the coronavirus—has led rapidly, as the *World Socialist Web Site* repeatedly warned, to an explosive upsurge in new infections.

In the United States, the pandemic is sweeping through the country, exacting a terrible toll in human life. The fact that the richest country in the world—home to nearly 300 billionaires with a combined fortune of approximately eight trillion dollars—has recorded the largest number of deaths of any country in the world is a searing and unanswerable exposure of the rotten state of American society and the historic failure of the capitalist system.

Since the beginning of March, more than 2.3 million people have been infected in the US. The death toll has passed 120,000. On June 21, 25,000 new cases were recorded, up 20 percent from two weeks ago. Nearly two dozen states are reporting a rise in cases. In California, new cases are up 48.3 percent over the past two weeks, Texas 114 percent, Florida 168 percent, Arizona 142 percent, and Georgia 47 percent.

At this rate, in the absence of any coordinated plan to stop the spread of the virus, the number of Americans who will have succumbed to the virus by the end of the summer will be in the area of a quarter million. The vast majority of victims will be

workers, with the largest number of victims being drawn from the poorest sections of the working class.

In Western Europe, which claimed that it had stopped the spread of the pandemic and could safely reopen its economy, there are dangerous indications that the infection rate is again on the rise. More than 1,300 workers at a large slaughterhouse in western Germany, mainly immigrant workers from Eastern Europe, tested positive for COVID-19 over the weekend. There have been several outbreaks at meatpacking and other factories, following the end of lockdown measures. Particularly significant is the continued spread in Sweden, held up as a model for “herd immunity,” where new cases are up 22.2 percent over the past two weeks.

Given the massive poverty in countries with a belated capitalist development, historically oppressed by imperialism, the pandemic threatens to overwhelm their limited health care system and fragile social safety nets.

New cases and deaths are rising sharply in South Asia. In India, there are now 440,000 reported cases and 14,000 deaths. On June 21, there were 11,484 new cases, according to *Stat News*, up 32.8 percent from two weeks ago. The number of new deaths has soared 88.5 percent in the same period. In Delhi, the country's capital, new cases have increased by 87.6 percent. Hospitals in the city are overflowing, and people are dying from other conditions because they cannot be treated.

In Pakistan, with 3,590 reported deaths, the number of new cases has increased 63.6 percent over the past two weeks, and the number of deaths has increased by nearly 70 percent. In Bangladesh, the number of new cases has increased by 43.6 percent, and the number of new deaths by 33.3 percent. The total number of cases has risen above 115,000 in Bangladesh, with over 1,500 deaths.

In Africa, it took 98 days from the first reported case to the initial 100,000 cases, but it has taken only 18 days to double from 100,000 to 200,000. There are now more than 100,000 cases in South Africa alone, with the number of new cases increasing by 86 percent over the past two weeks. There are more than 50,000 cases in Egypt, with a rise in new cases of 22.2 percent over the past two weeks.

The pandemic is taking a heavy toll in Latin America. In Brazil, where the country's fascistic president Jair Bolsonaro has rejected any measures to stop the virus, there have been more than 1.1 million reported cases, the second highest number in the world. There were nearly 30,000 new cases reported on June 21, up 30

percent from two weeks ago. More than 51,000 people have died, with the daily death toll surpassing 1,000. In the hardest-hit state, São Paulo, more than 220,000 people have been infected, with the number of new cases up 32.7 percent from two weeks ago.

In Mexico, the number of reported cases stands at more than 180,000, with 21,825 deaths. New cases are up more than 100 percent from two weeks ago, and new deaths are up a staggering 155 percent. In Chile, new cases are up 66.7 percent, and in Ecuador they are up more than 20 percent from two weeks ago.

The global catastrophe that is unfolding is the direct outcome of policies adopted by the ruling class. When it was first proposed, the program of “herd immunity” was broadly considered to be inhumane and reckless. It was universally condemned by scientists and epidemiologists. But it has now been adopted by governments throughout the world. As one commentator acknowledged, the policy toward the COVID-19 pandemic is now “let it rip.”

From the beginning, the response of the Trump administration and other world governments was dictated not by public health and safety, but by the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy. After trillions were poured into Wall Street beginning in late March, a campaign was immediately launched to end all restrictions on the spread of the coronavirus.

The aim of the ruling class is to exploit the situation to slash wages, increase exploitation, impose massive austerity measures to pay for the bailout of the rich, and carry out a fundamental restructuring of class relations on a world scale. The chasm between the interests of the financial oligarchy and the vast majority of the population finds grotesque expression in the continued rise in stock and equity markets during the pandemic—the contemporary equivalent of war profiteering.

The implementation of the necessary measures to stop the coronavirus depends on the intervention of the international working class. All the actions required to stop the virus—the shutdown of nonessential production, quarantining, mass testing and contact tracing—run up against the profit interests of the ruling class. Ensuring support for all those impacted by these measures requires a massive redirection of social resources.

Moreover, an effective fight against the pandemic requires the systematic coordination of economic, scientific, industrial and information resources. This essential international collaboration is impossible under capitalism, which is rooted in the nation-state system. The ruling class of every country is preoccupied, above all, with its own national interests.

Pharmaceutical companies compete against each other, protecting their “business secrets” rather than sharing information that might, through collective effort, facilitate the development of effective treatment techniques and, eventually, an anti-COVID-19 vaccine.

The Trump administration’s withdrawal from the World Health Organization is a glaring example of the destructive character of national imperialist politics. But still more dangerous is the cynical efforts, in pursuit of geopolitical advantage, to blame China for the pandemic and thereby legitimize the preparations of the United States for war against its principal rival.

What must be done to stop the pandemic and save millions of lives?

Control over the response to the pandemic must be taken out of the hands of the capitalist class. Mass action by the working class, coordinated on an international scale, is necessary to bring the pandemic under control and save millions of lives that are now at risk. The fight against the pandemic is not only, or even primarily, a medical issue. It is, above all, a matter of social and political struggle.

The potential for the development of such a movement arises out of the logic of the crisis itself.

Opposition is mounting in the working class throughout the world. Anger is growing over the absence of any systematic plan to bring the pandemic under control, the disastrously inadequate state of health care facilities, the unsafe working conditions that place countless lives at risk, the refusal of capitalist governments to provide necessary levels of social support for the millions who have lost their jobs, the rampant social inequality, the relentless growth of militarism, and the escalating attacks on basic democratic rights.

The ruling class is aware that a political radicalization of the working class is underway. Trump’s rants against “left-wing extremists” and his attempt to deploy the military against protesters must be taken as a warning.

The growing social anger, which has found initial expression in the eruption of protests against the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota and other incidents of police brutality, must be developed into a global class-conscious movement of the working class against capitalism and for socialism.

When the apologists for the ruling class insist, “Don’t let the cure be worse than the disease,” workers must reply that the underlying social disease is capitalism, the pandemic is a symptom of this disease, and the cure is socialism.

The massive sums accumulated by the wealthy must be seized and redirected to fund emergency measures to stop the pandemic and provide full income to those impacted. The gigantic banks and corporations must be placed under the democratic control of the working class, run on the basis of a rational and scientific plan. The enormous resources squandered on war and destruction must be diverted to finance health care, education and other social needs.

The International Committee of the Fourth International is convinced that a powerful revolutionary movement of the working class is now underway. The task of the ICFI is to assist this movement by providing the essential tactical, strategic and programmatic direction. But this is an immense task that requires the building of sections of the Fourth International in every country. We appeal to the working class, students, and all those who recognize the need for the socialist reorganization of the world to secure the future of humanity, to join us in this struggle.



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