

COVID-19 ravages southeastern United States

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The southeastern US states have become the focal point of the upsurge in the coronavirus throughout the month of June, in the wake of the decisions by state governments throughout the region to reopen businesses and encourage the population to engage in the type of social interaction that public health authorities have warned is highly dangerous.

This article reviews the course of the pandemic and the criminal negligence of state governments across the nine states from the Texas state line on the west to the Atlantic Ocean. There are seven Republican governors and two Democrats, but both parties serve the business elite and push for “reopening” the economy no matter the cost in lives.

Arkansas is confirmed to have 16,083 cases. March 24 saw the first death in the state, and it required just shy of two months, to May 18, to reach 100 deaths, before doubling in the next month, to over 200 on June 18, reaching 240 deaths now. Nearly 70 percent of the deaths are of people aged 65 and older, mainly from the working class.

Republican Governor Asa Hutchinson denied that his lifting of restrictions and lock-down measures had opened the way to an upsurge, claiming, “We have not seen a correlation between lifting restrictions and the new cases that we have.” Contradicting himself in the next breath, Hutchinson said, “The new cases actually are coming out of some of the essential industries that are open regardless.” Lies!

Lee County, a small Arkansas county with a population of 8,668, has encountered a disaster at the East Arkansas Regional Unit, a Department of Correction prison in Brickeys, Arkansas, with a capacity of 1,492. Some 550 inmates had tested positive for the coronavirus by early June, along with 44 correctional officers and staffers.

In **Louisiana**, 50,239 people have been infected, 3,117 having succumbed to the disease. The Louisiana Department of Health had reported 882 more coronavirus cases and 18 more deaths on Wednesday, following 1,356 additional cases on Tuesday.

Louisiana Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards on Monday had announced that Louisiana would stay in Phase Two of reopening due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases and related hospitalizations. Edwards stated that his Phase Two order would be extended another 28 days, maintaining occupancy limits and various other mild restrictions.

In **Mississippi**, 22,287 people have been confirmed to have been infected, and 978 have perished. Increased hospitalizations are leaving fewer and fewer beds available, exhausting medical supplies, and making it impossible for medical personnel to perform their job duties. Hinds County, which includes the state capital Jackson, has 1,186 confirmed cases and 26 deaths.

Republican Governor Tate Reeves issued executive orders to extend the Safe Return order that will end June 29 at 08:00 CDT. Amendments to the order will include the lifting of a 10 p.m. closing of bars and restaurants that serve alcoholic beverages, allowing gyms and fitness centers to increase occupancy to 50 percent of maximum, and permitting indoor and outdoor arenas to open with social-distancing restrictions, limiting seated capacity at 25 percent.

These incremental steps to open the state, restart the capitalist economy, and expose workers to the coronavirus, completely contradict Reeves’ statement in a tweet, proclaiming, “COVID-19 is real, contagious, and deadly. We cannot avoid taking it seriously.”

Alabama has set a new record for the most coronavirus cases in a single day at 1,129. On top of being rocked by three consecutive days of reporting its highest number of cases, the state has experienced 30,444 confirmed cases, with 841 deaths.

Republican Governor Kay Ivey, having issued a state of emergency 100 days ago due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has largely been silent on the acceleration in numbers of cases and infection rate. On Monday, Madison County, population 372,909, had 711 COVID-19 cases, with health officials in Huntsville, the main city, saying 20 percent of cases require hospitalization.

Statewide, the hospitalization figures trend ever-upward. The Alabama government reported Thursday that 695 patients were hospitalized across the state, and that over the past 14 days, the state has seen nearly 700 new cases a day. Despite this alarming increase, Governor Ivey is moving toward the gradual re-opening of the economy, subjecting workers to the coronavirus by imposing only the mildest of “restrictions.”

In **Tennessee**, with 932 new confirmed cases, the current tally is 35,553 infected and 531 deaths, including 14 new deaths recorded Thursday. Republican Gov. Bill Lee claimed that the increase of coronavirus cases as the result of lifting restrictions is “manageable.” The five most populous counties, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Madison, Shelby, and Sullivan, may only continue adhering to individual, county-specific reopening plans in consultation with the state.

The state’s health secretary, Lisa Piercy, declared, “I don’t know that anyone has the appetite for massive shutdowns again,” ignoring the reality of mass opposition to the homicidal back-to-work policy. In a statement May 15, Governor Lee declared, “Our state continues to see downward trends in case growth and meets the White House criteria for a phased reopening. This progress has been hard-won, and we can build upon it by reopening while also maintaining common-sense safety measures like mask-wearing and good hygiene.” In practice, such measures have been largely abandoned.

In **Georgia**, where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is headquartered, there have been 2,745 deaths, with a ghastly 71,095 confirmed cases. The rate at which these cases are rising is nearly 1,100 a day. A total of 10,457 patients have been hospitalized.

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site’s* coverage of this global crisis.

Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed an executive order June 11 relaxing many restrictions put in place since April, including no limits on capacity of volume at restaurants along with the green light for conventions and venues to resume hosting live performances.

Florida has had the highest percentage rise in infections, up a prodigious 350 percent since the start of the month, highest of all the 50 states, forcing Apple to re-close all of their retail stores in the state. Florida has

109,000 confirmed cases, reaching a daily increase of more than 5,000 per day. Infections amongst those between the ages of 18 and 44 are too rising at alarming rates.

Republican Governor Ron DeSantis cynically stated in a June 17 press conference, “I think that we’ve started to see you know some erosion in the social distancing from probably some of the younger population.” Notwithstanding the inordinate amount of evidence to the contrary, he said nothing of the deplorable working conditions of factory, meat-packing, and autoworkers.

South Carolina has contracted an additional 1,284 cases, bringing the total to 25,701, resulting in 659 total deaths. The auto industry, which reopened on May 18, has been witness to new outbreaks, evidenced by BMW in Spartanburg having acknowledged 14 confirmed cases.

Republican Gov. Henry McMaster issued Executive Order 2020-40 promoting capitalist economic development at the expense of workers’ lives: “the State must remain flexible to account for the evolving nature of the ongoing emergency, while simultaneously continuing to focus on facilitating and encouraging economic recovery.”

In **North Carolina**, which is reporting its highest-ever levels of new COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations. Confirmed cases number 57,183, with 1,332 deaths

Democratic Governor Roy Cooper said re-imposing restrictions would be a last resort. “We want to avoid going backwards if we possibly can.” Cooper announced on Wednesday the state will remain in Phase Two for another three weeks, extending Phase Two from June 26 to July 17, while making face coverings mandatory in public, effective June 26.

Meanwhile, eight workers at Daimler truck manufacturing, located in Cleveland, North Carolina, have been reported to have the virus.



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