

“Back to work” campaign in the US has led to surge in COVID-19

Andre Damon
27 June 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is raging disastrously out of control in the United States. On Friday, the country recorded by far its highest-ever number of COVID-19 infections, at over 47,000. The average number of new cases daily has surged 60 percent, from its low of 21,000 in the first week of June to over 34,000 this week.

The resurgence of the pandemic was the entirely foreseeable outcome of the homicidal campaign by the Trump administration, with the support of the Democrats and the media, to force workers back into factories and workplaces that have become hotbeds of the disease.

For months, the entire political establishment has waged a campaign to claim that the protection of human lives must be “balanced” against the economy, and that the “cure can’t be worse than the disease.” It has become clear that the outcome of this campaign will be death on a massive and unprecedented scale.

Just two months ago, Trump declared that the United States would see approximately 60,000 deaths from the pandemic. But already, more than twice that number have died—127,640 people, with some scientists predicting 200,000-300,000 deaths by the end of the summer, potentially eclipsing the death toll of the Second World War.

The US now has one-quarter of the world’s cases—and one-quarter of the world’s deaths—even though it only has 4 percent of the world’s population.

Across the country, more than half of all states are facing surges of the pandemic. One hundred percent of beds at Houston’s Texas Medical Center are now occupied, while the entire state of Alabama is at 82 percent capacity.

In the face of this disaster, the White House held its first Coronavirus Task Force briefing since April 27, when the US death toll was just 57,000.

At the briefing, Vice President Mike Pence absurdly bragged about the government’s response. “We have made truly remarkable progress in moving our nation forward,” he said. “We’ve all seen the encouraging news as we open up... The reality is we’re in a much better place.”

Meanwhile, the Trump administration continues to cripple

the federal response to the disease. The White House is planning to end federal support for COVID-19 testing sites throughout the country at the end of this month. Dr. Anthony Fauci said this week that the White House told the National Institutes of Health to cut off funding for a long-standing coronavirus research project involving collaboration between US and Chinese scientists.

In the six weeks since the resumption of nonessential production by the Detroit automakers, the Trump administration and major corporations have made every effort to downplay and ignore the disease as it spread through factories, food processing plants and logistics facilities.

GM, Ford, Chrysler and Tesla have refused to inform workers when employees at their factories have gotten sick. And the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), despite having received thousands of complaints, has issued only one citation related to the pandemic.

Despite the claims by the media and politicians that the reopening of businesses would involve stringent safety measures, the back-to-work campaign has been accompanied by the effective abandonment of broader measures to contain the disease.

Workers have reported inadequate social distancing and protective equipment. Even as tens of thousands of meatpacking workers have contracted COVID-19 and hundreds have died, the Trump administration has forced meatpacking plants to remain in operation.

Unlike many other developed countries, the United States has no national contact tracing program, which is vital for any successful effort to contain the pandemic. “It’s not going well. I have to tell you, it’s not going well,” Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNBC Friday when asked about contact tracing in the United States.

Earlier this week, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Director Dr. Robert Redfield said that only about 27,000 people are employed as contact tracers in the US, one-third the amount he estimated was necessary. Former CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden has warned that the US needs 10

times more contact tracers than it presently has.

In the face of the resurgence of the pandemic, the political establishment has made clear that there will be no return to lockdowns. The US “can’t shut down the economy again,” Treasury Secretary Mnuchin said earlier this month, echoing the declaration by President Donald Trump that “whether it’s an ember or a flame... we’re not closing our country.”

On Thursday, the *Wall Street Journal* summed up the overall attitude of the ruling class toward the pandemic, declaring, “[T]he inevitable truth is that Americans will have to learn to cope with the virus.” That is, the population will have to accommodate itself to death on a massive scale.

The media has played a central role in promoting the back-to-work campaign. On March 22, *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman published an op-ed titled “A Plan to Get America Back to Work,” claiming that the “cure” of closing businesses to prevent the spread of COVID-19 was “worse than the disease,” and arguing that the time had come to allow non-essential workers back on the job.

Friedman’s column appeared the same day as the first procedural vote on what would become the CARES Act, which set the stage for a \$6 trillion bailout of major corporations and Wall Street.

Friedman’s phrase summed up the sentiment within the US ruling class: With the bailout secured, it was time for workers to get back on the job and generate returns for shareholders. “We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem itself,” Trump declared just two days later, demanding that US corporations resume business within just two weeks.

Now, with the pandemic surging, the White House has made clear there will be no extension of the critical \$600 per week in emergency federal unemployment aid to laid-off workers, seeking to economically blackmail workers into returning to work.

The resurgence of the pandemic was entirely predictable. On April 24, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the “back-to-work” campaign would lead to a “surge in coronavirus deaths,” stating:

The American ruling class is attempting to rapidly resume production and send workers back to work. If this policy is carried out, countless thousands more people will get gravely sick or die.

The WSWS stressed that the White House’s push to reopen businesses marked the systematic abandonment of any effort to contain the disease. We wrote on April 18:

The Trump administration’s cynical announcement of a set of fraudulent “guidelines” that will serve to legitimize a rapid reopening of businesses and a forced return to work, in unsafe conditions, brings to an end any public pretense of a systematic and coordinated effort within the United States to prioritize health and to protect human life in combatting the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The massive surge of coronavirus cases makes clear the urgent necessity of taking the response to the pandemic out of the hands of the Trump administration. The fight against the pandemic is the fight against the government and the corporations. It is a fight against capitalism and for socialism.

This demands mass action by the working class, including the formation of rank-and-file committees to ensure safety procedures and an end to production at unsafe facilities.

Such a movement has already emerged in Detroit. At the Fiat Chrysler Jefferson Avenue Assembly Plant, workers shut down production with a wildcat strike Thursday and Friday, while a thousand nurses at HCA Healthcare in Riverside, California have gone on strike to demand safe working conditions.

We urge all workers and young people seeking to oppose the ruling class’s homicidal back-to-work campaign to join the Socialist Equality Party in waging this fight.



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